

John 21 / COB / 06.07.15

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Good morning! Today we will finish our study in the gospel of John. I think I counted forty-five sermons in this series!

- † When we share the gospel message, the goal is for people to believe in Jesus. In the biblical books which we call gospels, the goal is for people to believe in Jesus.
 - John wrote over twenty pages of his eye witness account so that we could come to believe the truth about Jesus, so that we could come to know Jesus personally by faith.
 - “Believe” is the key verb in this gospel. You become a disciple of Jesus by believing in him as your savior.

- † Once you believe, there is another important verb: “Follow.” You experientially live as a disciple of Jesus, in relationship with Jesus, by following him. Today we will explore what that meant for Peter and John, and what it means for us. Are we following Jesus? If not, do we really believe?
 - Let’s pray and then we will finish the gospel of John...

[Slide 2: 21.1-3] John 21.1-3 NET: After this [after what we have read about Jesus appearing to his disciples in the locked room in Jerusalem] Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias [also known as the Sea of Galilee]. Now this is how he did so. Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael (who was from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of his were together. Simon Peter told them, “I am going fishing.” “We will go with you,” they replied. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

- † Over the years, some commentators have said the disciples abandoned their mission, walked away from following Jesus, or at least succumbed to doubt and confusion.
 - But the gospel of Matthew shows us that Jesus told some female disciples to instruct the apostles to go on to Galilee, where Jesus would meet up with them. We saw last time that they did not go immediately, instead they were locked in a room in Jerusalem, fearing for their lives; *that* was when they were in sin and struggling with doubt. Once they saw the resurrected Jesus, they did go to Galilee, to wait for Jesus and further instructions.
 - It sounds like they went to Peter’s house, which was in Capernaum, where Jesus had based his Galilean ministry. There is a house in the ruins of Capernaum near the shore, which tradition says was Peter’s; we cannot be sure, but the tradition is an old one, with indicators dating back into the third century. What you see in the picture is the protective covering over the ruins; the house itself was not that big, Peter did not have a mansion! But this gives you an idea how close the house was to the shore.
 - While there, the apostles needed to eat, so it is not surprising that these fellows, many of whom were fishermen by trade, chose to go out and catch some fish while they waited for Jesus to show up. Too bad for them, they had a frustrating night, catching nothing.

[Slide 3: 21.4-6] John 21.4-6: When it was already very early morning, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, “Children, you don't have any fish, do you?” They replied, “No.” He told them, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they threw the net, and were not able to pull it in because of the large number of fish.

- † This could be one of those times the disciples could not recognize the resurrected Jesus until he chose to reveal his identity, or maybe it just was not light enough yet to recognize someone about a football field away. If the boat was rocking, that could have made it more difficult.
 - Don't worry about why Jesus chose the right side of the boat instead of the left. Jesus knew where the fish were at that moment, so he had them cast their net there, and they caught so many fish they struggled to pull the net back into the boat.

[Slide 4: 21.7-8] John 21.7-8: Then the disciple whom Jesus loved [that is, the author of our gospel, John] said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” So Simon Peter, when he heard that it was the Lord, tucked in his outer garment (for he had nothing on underneath it), and plunged into the sea. Meanwhile the other disciples came with the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from land, only about a hundred yards [the length of a football field].

- † The NET Bible gets interpretive here. The Greek text says Peter tied his outer garment around himself, since he was *stripped*. I would think he was stripped to his loin cloth for the hard work of fishing, rather than being naked underneath his robe.
 - Either way, I am not sure about how you do things in Pennsylvania, but in Florida we take our clothes *off* before jumping in the water, not put them on. But in Florida, there is no modesty in dress. Would you answer your door in just your underwear? If you saw your pastor or your boss from work outside, would you rush out to greet them in just your underwear?
 - Peter might have been embarrassed to meet Jesus in his underwear; and the water might have been shallow enough that he could wade in most of the way, rather than swim. In any case, he tied his robe around himself and impulsively jumped into the water to come to shore, while the others brought the boat in, dragging along the net of fish. It sounds like they all arrived on the shore about the same time.

[Slide 5: 21.9-14] John 21.9-14: When they got out on the beach, they saw a charcoal fire ready with a fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said, “Bring some of the fish you have just now caught.” So Simon Peter went aboard and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three, but although there were so many, the net was not torn. “Come, have breakfast,” Jesus said. But none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

- † People have speculated about the symbolism of the disciples catching exactly 153 fish. You might remember I was looking forward to researching this; but I found all the speculation to be farfetched.
 - I reckon the apostles counted the fish because they were astounded at the bountiful haul and wanted to know exactly how many fish were there. I think John tells us the number just to impress us about Jesus' provision, and maybe Peter's strength.

- † There is something more interesting than the number of fish they caught. When they got to shore, they saw Jesus had a fire and was ready to offer them something to eat, even while they prepared some of their own fish for cooking. So again we see Jesus providing for their practical needs.
 - But the Greek implies there was “a fish” on the fire. So I wonder whether Jesus fed these seven men with one fish and one loaf of bread, as a reminder of his miraculous feedings of thousands of people with a few fish and loaves, so they would be reassured that he was the same Jesus they had known for so long.
- † They apparently needed reassurance. This was the third time the resurrected Jesus had appeared to the apostles as a group, so they knew it really was him. But they were still so overwhelmed by the shocking events of the past several days, still so uneasy, confused, insecure, that they longed to ask him, “Jesus, is it really you? how can this be? who are you that you can come back from the dead?”

[Slide 6: 21.15-17] John 21.15-17: Then when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, *do* you love me more than these do?” He replied, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus told him, “Feed my lambs.” Jesus said a second time, “Simon, son of John, *do* you love me?” He replied, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus told him, “Shepherd my sheep.” Jesus said a third time, “Simon, son of John, *do* you love me?” Peter was distressed that Jesus asked him a third time, “*Do* you love me?” and said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus replied, “Feed my sheep.”

- † **[Slide 7: synonyms]** If you have heard sermons about this passage, you might have heard there are different words for love used here. That doesn’t matter. It’s just the way John writes. In these three verses, John used different words for loving, knowing, shepherding, and sheep, but to him they were synonyms, and that is how he always wrote. I put more about that in the devotion.
- † **[Slide 8: question]** Worrying about John’s diction can make us miss the point. The real question here is what exactly Jesus was asking. The NET interprets as they translate here, but in the Greek text, Jesus says, “*do* you love me more than *these*?”
 - Was Jesus asking whether Peter loved Jesus more than he loved his fishing gear? That would be silly! Was Jesus asking whether Peter loved Jesus more than he loved the other disciples, his friends? That might be relevant, but why single out Peter for this question?
 - Or was Jesus asking whether Peter loved Jesus more than the others loved Jesus? That’s how the NET interprets the question, and I think they are correct. The night before Jesus went to the cross, when they were all having supper together, Peter boasted that his devotion to Jesus was unbounded and greater than anyone else’s. Yet that very night, he ended up publically disowning Jesus three times.
 - So now Jesus asks him, “Do you love me more than these others do?”
- † Peter is not boastful now; he’s been humbled to the point of embarrassment. He doesn’t compare his love to that of the others, he doesn’t really answer the question directly. He just appeals to Jesus’ knowledge that he does love Jesus.
 - Jesus accepted Peter’s answer and gave Peter a commission to tend Jesus’ sheep.
 - But then Jesus repeated the question twice more. As Peter had denied Jesus three times, Jesus called for this confession of love three times so he could give Peter his commission three times.

- Jesus wanted to reaffirm Peter about their relationship, to ensure Peter knew that he was forgiven; and he wanted to reestablish Peter's credibility among the other apostles.

[Slide 9: 21.17c-19] John 21.17c-19: Jesus replied, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the solemn truth, when you were young, you tied your clothes around you and went wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will tie you up and bring you where you do not want to go." (Now Jesus said this to indicate clearly by what kind of death Peter was going to glorify God.) After he said this, Jesus told Peter, "Follow me."

- † This is the full commission Jesus gave to Peter. Not only would Peter bring glory to God by tending Christ's sheep in the early church, he would bring glory to God by following Jesus, even to a martyr's death, crucified by the Romans.
 - Peter, who once was so weak inside that he denied knowing Jesus three times in one night, would never deny Jesus again. He boldly would preach the gospel, bringing thousands to saving faith in Jesus. He would teach believers, helping to establish the doctrine of the early church and to write some of the New Testament. He would pastorally encourage people in their faith and minister to them from Jerusalem to Rome.
 - And even when threatened with torture and death, he would not waiver. By the time John wrote this gospel, Peter had been martyred, about thirty years after this conversation.
 - **[Slide 10: follow]** Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me." It was an invitation to take a walk down the beach, it was an indication Peter would be crucified, but it also was an invitation to continue the journey that had begun when they first met and Jesus said the same words to Peter: "Follow me."
 - To follow Jesus meant to follow his example, to follow his teachings, and to follow him as your master, by following him into the gospel mission, into the church ministry, and into sacrificial loving of others in God's name.
 - Jesus gives the same command to believers today. If you have become a disciple by believing in him, and thus you have received his grace, forgiveness, and salvation, then he commands you to follow him, to follow his example, to follow his teachings, to follow him as your master, to follow him into the gospel mission, to follow him into church ministry, and to follow him by sacrificially loving others in God's name. This is how we experientially *be* his disciples.
 - This is an obligation, but it is not only an obligation, it is a privilege! And it is a privilege that Jesus extends to every believer. Like Peter, you have screwed up, you have made messes out of your life, you should feel the same humble embarrassment as Peter; if you would be embarrassed to greet Jesus dressed in your underwear, how do you feel about greeting him stripped inside? But like Peter, you also should be reaffirmed and encouraged that Jesus forgives you, that you can enjoy intimacy with him, and you can be empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit to carry on with following Jesus and being his ambassador to others.

[Slide 11: 21.20-22] John 21.20-22: Peter turned around and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. (This was the disciple who had leaned back against Jesus' chest at the meal and asked, "Lord, who is the one who is going to betray you?") So when Peter saw him, he asked Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus replied, "If I want him to live until I come back [i.e. not be crucified like Peter], what concern is that of yours? You follow me!"

- † This reminds me of when I was a kid and my parents would tell me to do something. I would want to know, what about my sister? Does she have to do it too? Never mind, my parents would say, don't worry about her, you do what you are told! Well it's not fair, why does she get to watch tv? why do I have to do the dishes? why does John get to live on Patmos and I have to be crucified?
- Actually, Peter likely was not acting with jealousy like siblings do, but he was curious about what Jesus had in store for John, his friend. Jesus in effect told him it was none of his business!
 - We might take away something from this. It was ok if Peter was crucified and John was not. They both were called to follow Jesus and pursue his gospel mission and church ministry, but they were created uniquely by God and they each had a unique path chosen for them by Christ.
 - The same is true for us. There are some universals in our calling – we all are called to reflect God's character, to represent God here, to multiply his image through the mission of sharing the gospel, but how we do those things might be unique for each of us. And no matter what Christ has in store for someone else, you need to focus on what he has for you, and follow him!

[Slide 12: 21.23-24] John 21.23-24: So the saying circulated among the brothers and sisters that this disciple was not going to die. But Jesus did not say to him [Peter] that he [John] was not going to die, but rather, "If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours?" This [i.e. this fellow, John] is the disciple who testifies about these things and has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

- † Two weeks ago, I mentioned LeeAnn used to let a blindfolded man chop a watermelon off her tummy with a sword. Now if that impressed you, you would have repeated it to others, and they to others, but along the way, accuracy might suffer a little. In some circles, we might find people saying LeeAnn's abs were so cut that she could slice a watermelon just by leaning over it.
- That would be amusing, but in John's situation it was dangerous. If people thought Jesus had promised to return before John died, what would happen to their faith when John died?
 - This happens often: People have a delusion or deception and then when their expectations are not met, they suffer a crisis of confidence or faith. That's one reason it is so important to understand what the Bible says. You don't want to miss out on any of God's promises, but you also don't want to be naming and claiming promises God did not make or did not make to you.
 - If you think God promises that believers will not suffer, that he will protect you from every bad thing, that if you try hard you will always succeed... when tragedy hits, you might lose faith in God or the Bible, but the real problem was that you never understood them in the first place.
 - John sets the record straight here. He was not destined to be crucified, but he also was not destined to witness the return of Christ during his lifetime.

[Slide 13: 21.25] John 21.25: There are many other things that Jesus did. If every one of them were written down, I suppose the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

- † In 20.30-31 John said he chose a select few scenes from the life of Jesus to help his readers come to know who Jesus is and what he accomplished in his crucifixion and resurrection. Here John closes by mentioning again that he has written only a partial record.

- † Jesus cannot be contained in a book, nor even in the world. John revealed Jesus as the divine Son of God, through whom God the Father created the universe, and who came as the Messiah-savior who would take our penalty for sin so we could be saved into a relationship with God the Father.
 - Jesus is bigger than we know, greater than we can know, yet we can know him, we can be in a relationship with him; it starts with believing what John has shared in this eye witness account.
 - If you want to know more about Jesus or know Jesus more, come talk with me.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 14: follow]** Throughout the New Testament, you see a pattern in people: if they really believe in Jesus as the Son of God, as the Messiah-savior, then they really follow him; if not, then at some point they turn away.
 - Sometimes this happens when Jesus raises the bar on discipleship; that will happen for us whenever we read scripture; we will find that our apathy and lazy approach to Christianity is not acceptable to Jesus, and then we find out whether our faith is real enough for us to change and follow him or we will turn away. Other times this happens when the world brings too much pressure, whether it is temptation, deception, or threat, and so people decide to walk in the ways of the world instead of following Jesus.
- † The author of this gospel, the apostle John, also wrote a letter to reassure believers that they were saved, but the assessment tools he provides in that letter also can help us determine whether our faith is genuine.
 - If we really believe, we should find ourselves increasingly sure of our faith, increasingly seeking to learn from the apostolic teachings in scripture, increasingly being guided by the Holy Spirit and thus increasingly obedient to Christ and his commands, and increasingly willing to sacrificially love others. If these things are not growing in you, there is something wrong.
- † You become a disciple of Jesus by believing in him as your savior. When you come to faith, you experience a new spiritual birth and the Holy Spirit comes to indwell you.
 - As a result of this, you desire to follow Jesus, to follow his example, to follow his teachings, to follow him as your master [as your king], by following him into the gospel mission [you will want to do this!], by following him into church ministry [if you are not working with me to minister to people in this church, you need to start thinking of that as a goal], and following him into sacrificially loving others in God's name. This is how we experientially *be* his disciples, following him.
- † Let's pray . . .