

**The Gospel of John**  
**Week Thirty**  
**John 21:1-25**

**Day One**

<sup>1</sup> Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.

v. 1 – The scene in the gospel suddenly shifted from Jerusalem to north in Galilee, the home area for many of the disciples. After their encounters with Jesus, they still did not know what to do, so they sought out familiar settings and activities. This is interesting since they had received a general idea from Jesus of what they would be doing – going to the nations. **Were they simply waiting for further instructions? Were they still afraid and decided to leave Jerusalem? Or were they there simply because Jesus had told them to meet Him there?** I would prefer the latter explanation (see Matthew 28:10), although John made no effort to explain their presence. Wherever they would have gone, however, Jesus was sure to follow them.

v. 2 – There were seven of the men by the shore of the lake. They were at least together, maintaining their group identity. It is amazing that Jesus chose to invest so much into so few. What an interesting strategy! Jesus was going to send them into the world to preach the good news and He did not have a school or make a broad recruiting effort. Instead He spent most of His time with twelve handpicked men, one of whom betrayed Him and was no longer part of the team.

Many times, I believe that only grandiose efforts are worthy of my time or appropriate for the purposes of God. God doesn't seem to share my view and often starts with little things and magnifies and multiplies them by His Spirit and presence.

v. 3 – Peter had an idea, which I think was a common occurrence for Peter. He was always initiating things as a leader among the men. Peter suggested fishing and the men said it was a good idea and accompanied him. So off they went into a fishing boat, only to fish all night and capture nothing. This is reminiscent of another scene in another gospel:

<sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down<sup>[a]</sup> the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they

had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break (Luke 5:4-6).

I have never been very effective at staying up all night, although I have had to do it at times when traveling on “red-eye” flights. These men willingly stayed up all night to fish. They must have loved fishing or been bored; that is my only take on losing sleep to catch some fish.

vs. 4&5 – Jesus was on the shore watching, but the men did not realize it was Jesus. He called out to them and asked if they had any fish. Mary did not recognize Jesus’ voice when He spoke at the tomb and the men did not recognize His voice when He called out to them. **Has that ever happened to you? Do you think that Jesus has spoken to you but you did not recognize His voice?**

### Day Two

<sup>6</sup> He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. <sup>7</sup> Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

v. 6 – Jesus instructed the men, who still did not know that it was Jesus, to cast their nets off the right side of the boat. Jesus knows where the fish are! He knows how to lead you to success in what He has for you to do. All you must do is listen to His voice and obey. When the disciples obeyed, they had more fish than they could bring in. In the long-run, God’s ways are effective. I urge you to follow His lead and trust Him for the results. His way is much better than yours. The men fished all night and caught nothing, yet with one word from Jesus, they had an abundant harvest.

v. 7 – This incident triggered something in the disciples, just like the folded face clothe at the tomb. They recognized that Jesus instigated this fishing incident like He had once before in Luke 5. John wrote that the disciple whom Jesus loved was the one who recognized Him. That indicates that the loved anonymous disciple was among the seven in the boat. We know it wasn’t Peter or Thomas, so I am guessing at this point that it was John, the writer of the gospel, who chose to stay anonymous as so not to appear to be bragging (of course, he revealed his identity at the end of the gospel).

As soon as Peter realized it was Jesus, he got dressed and jumped into the water and swam to shore. Peter was aggressive and passionate in all that he did. He was the first one inside the tomb and then the first one to shore. This is why he was a good leader, but why he also lacked staying power. He burned hot and intense, just not for long. It is of note, however, that God uses all our personalities in His service and purpose. You don’t

ever have to be someone you are not, you can be the fullest best expression of who God intended you to be.

v. 8 – The men rowed the boat in with the fish, while Peter swam to shore. Someone had to tend the large catch of fish, which would be worth something at market. Peter was not concerned with that, but rather desperately wanted to see Jesus. The men were about a U.S. football field away when Jesus called out to them. That is a long way for someone's voice to carry. Yet Jesus got His message to the men, and He can get His message to you as well. **What is the Lord saying to you? What are you hearing now? What is the theme of the things happening that would contain a lesson from the Lord for you?**

vs. 9&10 – Jesus had prepared a fire and had some bread. He was making breakfast for the men, which as far as we know was their first meal together since the Last Supper. Jesus had something more in mind, however, than just a meal. He had to talk to Peter and this was the setting He chose. It is interesting that Jesus already had some fish on the fire, but ordered the men to bring some more.

### Day Three

<sup>11</sup> Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

v. 11 – Peter got back into the boat to help bring the catch ashore. Even though the net was full of large fish, the net did not break. When God does something, He takes care of all the details. The men had to exert some effort to cast the net, pull it in and then bring it shore. That is what they could do, but there is no way they could control the number of fish, their size or the condition of the nets. That is what God did for them.

I had a professor who said that maturity is the ability to understand the difference between what only God can do and what you can do. Immaturity, he continued, is trying to do what only God can do and waiting to do what you are supposed to do. **What are you waiting on God to do that you are to do? Where are you trying to do for yourself what only God can do?**

**Where do you need to trust the Lord for the condition of your nets? Where are you over-planning or not doing something *for fear* that something else may go wrong?** God wants you to work and organize, but be careful not to try and do His work.

**Do you find it interesting that they counted the fish?** There were 153 in the net. God wants us to keep track of the harvest so we can give a testimony, perhaps, about God and His work in our lives.

v. 12 – Jesus asked them to come and have breakfast, but there seems to have been some hesitancy to acknowledge that it was Jesus They knew it was Him, but were hesitant to ask. **Why would they hesitate? Were they sure it was Him? Was there any doubt? I don't understand this at all, do you?**

v. 13 – Jesus was breaking bread with them when He ate the Last Supper. He also did this with the men on the Emmaus road in Luke 24. Each time Jesus broke bread, He had something to teach or reveal to the men. There was something spiritual about mealtime with Jesus. This is the nature of fellowship. Jesus' presence is not only to reveal His love, but also His will and purpose.

v. 14 – John informed us that this was only the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, the first two being back in Jerusalem. When He did, Jesus had a purpose for appearing. Many people pray for God to be with them, but it seems that God is “with” someone in a direct way when He has something for them to do or something He wants to say.

There are six instances in Acts where the Lord or His angel appeared to Paul and in each instance, He appeared to encourage and direct Paul in his purpose. **If you are praying for the Lord to be with you, what are you doing that warrants such a presence?**

#### Day Four

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." <sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

v. 15 – Jesus revealed His purpose for this encounter and it was to restore Peter after Peter's betrayal during Jesus' imprisonment (at least that is the heading of the online Bible service that I use). There are consequences to all decisions, especially the sinful ones. While it is obvious that Jesus forgave Peter for Peter's denial, there was still conscious, specific action that had to be taken for Peter to be reinstated to the place He was before the betrayal.

Leadership has its responsibilities and Jesus had put Peter in a special place. Peter had forfeited his place when He betrayed Jesus, but now, in God's grace, He was being reminded of His place and responsibilities. Forgiveness does not guarantee that all the ramifications of your sin are cared for. At times, restitution must be a separate process from forgiveness.

v. 16 – I will not get into all the nuances of the Greek words used in this dialogue. Let's just look at the lessons one can learn from this whether or not he or she knows Greek! Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him more than the others. Peter said that it was true that He did. Yet this greater love brought duties and responsibilities, for Jesus directed Peter to feed the sheep of His pasture. Jesus assigns men and women who will tend His flock. That is not a position for which one can apply. It is an assignment but must be carried out through one's love for God.

Jesus was not trying to rub Peter's face in his betrayal, so to speak, but He was asking him to face the full implications of what he had done. Peter had not only sinned, he had also forfeited his place that Jesus had assigned. Therefore there had to be a specific, definite encounter where Peter would acknowledge what he did and accept responsibility. **Are you trying to move on from a mistake for which there are consequences with which you must deal?** Sometimes saying, "I'm sorry," isn't enough.

v. 17 – Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times because Peter had denied Jesus three times. **Do you see how the reinstatement process was determined by the nature of the sin?** Jesus already knew the answers, so the questions were not for His benefit, but rather for Peter's. **Can you see God's grace here?** Jesus was trying to deal with this betrayal once and for all, so that it would not hang over their relationship or Peter's relations with his peers. Everyone knew what Peter had done and now everyone would know it had been dealt with openly. They would also know that God had not changed His mind about Peter's place in the group.

For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

Peter would feed Jesus' sheep and lambs because that was what God called Peter to do. It was an assignment from heaven. **What has the Lord assigned you to do?**

v. 18 – Jesus gave Peter a word at the Last Supper that Satan had requested permission to sift Peter like wheat. Here Jesus gave Peter another "word" about His future. We will discuss this "word" more in the verses below.

### **Days Five & Six**

<sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" <sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." <sup>23</sup> Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

v. 19 – Jesus was telling Peter what kind of death He would suffer, which tradition tells us was crucifixion. (There is a tradition, made popular in the fourth century, that portrayed Peter being crucified upside down at his own request. This cannot be verified.) **Why did Jesus give Peter this advance warning, when He did not do the same for the others?** I don't know. I think Jesus gives us the answer to my question in the next verse. His next command to Peter was for Peter to follow Him. That command assumes that Jesus was going somewhere, He will make His direction clear and that Peter was expected to follow without question. **Do you see that this is the same for you and me?** If Jesus wants us to follow, then He must make clear where He is going but not why He is going there. We follow out of love and trust.

v. 20 – Peter saw the mystery disciple and asked Jesus when and how this man would die, since Jesus had given Peter a word of knowledge about Peter's death. I am still intrigued as to why John kept the identity of this man, which of course is John himself, such a guarded secret. I suppose for the same reason that Matthew told the story of his conversion in Matthew 9 by describing it in the third person. The apostles were careful not to get in the way of the message or the Messenger. They knew it was all about Jesus and not about them, even though they had to take center stage to write their gospel accounts.

**How selfless are you in the service of God?** For some, selfless means invisibility, which of course isn't possible. God wants to use your personality and gifts to accomplish His purpose for His glory. **So if God doesn't use you, who will He use?** So be careful not to step so far out of the picture that you are totally out of the picture!

v. 21 – Peter saw John and asked Jesus to give him some insight into John's death, like He had just done for Peter. I am not sure why Peter asked this. Maybe his curiosity got the best of him. Perhaps he saw Jesus as a source of information on the future and Peter wanted more of that, so he could be "in the know." Or still again, maybe Peter didn't like the information Jesus gave him and wanted to see if Jesus had a word about John's death that would make Peter feel better, like he wasn't being punished or singled out as a result of his most recent failure.

v. 22 – Jesus told Peter it was none of his business what happened to John or any of the other men. Peter's only duty and responsibility were to follow Jesus as Jesus directed. Jesus does not have to apologize or explain His decisions to any disciple. He has a plan for each and it is no one's business what that plan is, except for the person for whom the plan is intended. It is also not for any disciple to try and figure out his or her own way. It is just each person's duty to know it and follow it faithfully.

**Do you know where you are going and what God's plan is for you? Are you curious about someone else's plan, even someone close to you? Is that plan any of your business? Have you expected God to explain His ways to you and have you ever said, "What about him or her, Lord?" as a way of complaining or questioning your own way that God has assigned?**

v. 23 – Jesus’ response was misunderstood and that spawned a rumor that John would never die. John took the time to explain that this was not the case. John would die, but His manner of death, and life for that matter, were no one’s business but the Lord’s. If Jesus’ words to His friends created misunderstanding and rumors, then His words today will certainly do the same. This should not be a surprise to us. Note, however, that John took the time to correct the misinterpretation and to use it as a “teachable moment.”

I have found that our enemy tries to disrupt our communications in the church because he is the father of lies and rumors. He is the prince of the air, so he controls the airwaves, so to speak. We must always be writing, speaking and broadcasting to offer the correct assessment and perspective on what the Lord is saying and doing. We must be aware that there is an intelligent being who is opposing our every move. We must also understand that the limited nature of our own understanding will contribute to these misinterpretations, so we must always work to make sure we are clear about what we hear and what others say. **Are you a good communicator? A good listener?**

### Day Seven

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. <sup>25</sup> Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

v. 24 – John finally revealed that he was the secret disciple whom Jesus loved. It is interesting that Jesus had a favorite disciple, one He loved more than the others. **Or is that what John was saying here? If he wasn’t saying that, why would he go out of his way to say that Jesus loved him, when we know that Jesus loved them all? Is it offensive or inappropriate to think that Jesus would or could love one disciple more than the others, sort of like someone having a lot of friends, but one being the best friend?**

**Is it possible to love one of your children more than the others and still be a good parent? I think it is possible. How much more can a perfect God love a disciple with distinction without diminishing His love for the others?**

v. 25 – Jesus was a busy man! He was constantly on the move and did more than could possibly be recorded in His three and a half years of ministry. John was an eyewitness of much of that and we know, as he wrote in the previous verse, that his testimony is true and accurate. How do we know? We know because the Spirit bears witness with your spirit that it is true. Plus John wrote to exalt and honor Jesus and not to promote himself, as evidenced by his hesitancy to identify himself as the beloved disciple.

As we close this study of thirty weeks, we see that John wrote with purpose and chose to include the things Jesus did to support his purpose – that readers would believe that Jesus is the Son of God! John could have included more, but did not.

You don't have to do or be it all to serve God. You can take your perspective and gifts and allow God to use them for His purpose and glory. John told a story from his experience with the Spirit's inspiration and it was true to who he was. The same can happen to you. I am not implying you can write more of the inspired Word of God; that has already been done. You can, however, be true to who you are and perform deeds that are consistent with your insight and passion.

So as we close, I pray that this special gospel study has ministered to your needs. I know it has to mine. I have learned a lot about the Lord and His work through Jesus. John's gospel has not always been my favorite, for I felt it was hard to understand at times. This verse-by-verse study has helped me appreciate the beauty of John's work and the story it has told of Jesus' magnificence.

The things that stand out to me as I close are:

1. Jesus was clear about who He was in an indirect kind of way. Those who did not want to see would not see, but those who wanted to do so heard loud and clear that He was the Son of God.
2. Jesus had enemies, not the least of which was Satan himself.
3. John's gospel did not feel compelled to repeat stories of the other three gospels, making it unique. I want to be unique in what I do as well.

Let's close this study in prayer:

*Father, I thank You for the grace to finish this work. I commit it to You and Your watchful care and ask that You would use this study so that men may come to know you more fully. I pray that You will breathe on this study and take it to places where men and women need the Word. I pray that people will read this and see You, while they know that another John has endeavored to write about the Lord He loves. Lord, this work was and is a labor of love for You and I thank You for the privilege of looking into Your word and seeing things, by Your grace. Amen.*