

# OpenTheo

## Sea of Galilee, The Great Commission (Part 1)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In "Sea of Galilee, The Great Commission" presented by Steve Gregg, the focus is on post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. One of the peculiarities mentioned is the possibility of John chapter 21 being an afterthought appendix. The author discusses in detail the significant events that took place when Jesus appeared to His disciples on the Sea of Galilee, specifically mentioning Peter's conversation with Jesus about love interpreted in Greek as *agape* and *phileo*, and how Peter was commissioned to be a shepherd and leader of the church. The talk concludes with the prediction of Peter's death, a future event that was mentioned by Jesus.

### **Transcript**

In this session we'll be looking at further appearances of Christ after His resurrection. In the last session we talked about the times that Jesus appeared after His resurrection. On the day of His resurrection, and certainly the largest number of recorded appearances all took place on the same day, Sunday, Resurrection Sunday.

But in our last session we also not only read about those appearances, but also eight days later, which must have been, we presume on a Monday, He appeared again and Thomas was present then, and that's as far as we went. There are two or more other appearances of Christ that we need to deal with. One of them is the subject of the entirety of John chapter 21.

John chapter 21, it's kind of peculiar. There's a lot of things peculiar about the gospel of John. It's just, it's different.

It's got its own character with reference to the other gospels. But chapter 20 of John, verses 30 and 31 sound like the book is closing, like it's over. I mean, it just has that sound.

And the closing verses of chapter 20 say, And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. Doesn't that sound like a conclusion to the book? And yet we have

another chapter given.

And for that reason, some have felt that John originally didn't intend to write chapter 21, but he did so as an afterthought, or there was an appendix or something like that. Whether this is true or not, we may never know. But it is peculiar that John chapter 20 ends the way it does, and then it goes on to tell another story as if it had never given those closing statements.

In chapter 21 of John, After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way he showed himself. Now, all of the appearances we've read of prior to this were not in Galilee, but they were in Jerusalem or on the road to Emmaus, which was near Jerusalem. In other words, they were Judean appearances, though the angels told the women to tell the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee.

Well, he did meet them in Galilee, but he met them prior to that in Judea. And I speculated when we were going through the class last time that maybe he met them earlier than he suggested because they weren't going to Galilee. They didn't believe he was risen.

The women reported this, and the disciples didn't believe them. And so Jesus had to intervene himself and appear to the disciples there in Judea. But now he does meet with them in Galilee.

Whether this is the only or first or one of several times that he met with them in Galilee, we do not know it. We just have a very sketchy record. This was by the Sea of Tiberias, which is another name for the Sea of Galilee.

And therefore, he's in the northern part of the country, not in Judea anymore. The disciples, at least some of them, Simon Peter, Thomas, called Didymus, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. That makes a total of seven.

Now, Nathaniel, who is named here, is not found in any of the lists of the twelve apostles. John's gospel is, in fact, the only gospel that doesn't give us a list of the names of the twelve. The synoptic writers all give us lists of names of the twelve.

John does not. But John does mention Nathaniel in another connection, way back in chapter one. The very opening chapter, Nathaniel is mentioned.

He wasn't mentioned again until the last chapter of John in this connection. In chapter one, he was a friend of Philip's, and he was under the fig tree when Philip found him and called him to come meet Jesus. He's the one who said, You are the Christ, the King of Israel, the Son of God.

And Jesus said, You believe that because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You'll see greater things than these. And we never read of Nathaniel by name again after John chapter one until here. Now, the impression is certainly given that he was probably, from John chapter one on, he probably was a disciple of Jesus, just like his friend Philip was.

Now, his friend Philip is mentioned in all the lists of the apostles in the synoptic gospels. But the mention of Nathaniel in this particular connection, namely, flanked in the list by Simon, Peter, and Thomas, who were clearly apostles on the one side, and by the sons of Zebedee, who were also apostles on the other side, would suggest that he was, John wants us to understand that Nathaniel is one of the apostles, even though his name doesn't appear in the list of the twelve. I've told you before, when we covered the relevant passages in the synoptics, there is the name of another guy, Bartholomew, in the list of the twelve.

And his name is generally associated very closely in the list with Philip. And Bartholomew just means son of Ptolemy, or son of Ptolemy. And that being so, it's not maybe perhaps his given name at all, it may be his family name.

I mean, Simon Peter, for instance, was Simon Bar-Jonah. That means Simon, son of Jonah. Son of so-and-so functioned as sort of a last name, as in our own society, someone's name might be Peterson, or Johnson, or Erickson, or something like that.

You know, the son of Eric, the son of Peter, the son of John. Those names are that way, yes. Pardon? Oh, okay.

Among the Scots, eh? Yes, so there are ways in which our modern family names convey the same kind of information that Bar such-and-such conveyed. So, Bar-Jonah was actually Peter's last name. It means son of Jonah, his father's name was Jonah.

And it's possible that Nathaniel's last name was Bartholomew, which means son of Tholomew, or Ptolemy. That's not known for certain. But it seems to be the best way to explain the phenomenon that John does mention Nathaniel as if he were, you know, of the company of the apostles.

He mentions him in the company. And it would seem to be maybe Nathaniel was his given name, and Bartholomew was his family name, son of Tholomew. Anyway, Nathaniel here appears again for the first time since chapter one.

And it says two others of his disciples, too. Now, I don't know why the names of five of them are given and not the names of the other two. And we are left only to guess who they are.

It would be fruitless to do so, since we have no idea. We've already got Peter, James, and John in the list. Andrew's not mentioned.

Perhaps he was there, too. After all, he was a fisherman with them, and this is a story about fishing. So maybe Andrew was one of the other two.

And maybe Philip, who was close to Nathaniel. But that's only a guess, and it apparently isn't important enough for it to be listed. So it's just a peculiarity that he does name five and then doesn't name the other two.

Technically, what he says about the other two does not require that they were necessarily apostles. He says two other of his disciples, and the word disciples isn't quite the same as apostles. Every Christian is a disciple.

But in all likelihood, we are to understand these were seven actual apostles. And as far as who the remaining two unnamed are, we're left to either wonder or not care. Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing.

They said to him, we're going with you also. They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. It wasn't much of a blessing on their enterprise.

Now, some people feel that this was a bad thing for them to do. After all, Jesus had called Peter and his companions away from fishing when he first called them to be disciples. And they'd left their nets, they'd left their boats, they'd left everything to follow Jesus.

And many have represented in telling the story this as sort of almost a compromise on Peter's part. He's just getting bored, waiting around for Jesus to show. By the way, they didn't know when Jesus might show up.

He kind of popped in unexpectedly and disappeared when they didn't want him to go. I mean, he might have gone weeks between appearances. They just wouldn't have any idea whether they were even going to see him again or not.

So, I mean, the question would be relevant. Well, what do we do? You know, Jesus had not yet given them the Great Commission, so they weren't to go out into all the world yet. Jesus is just kind of there.

He's not there. He sometimes appears, but most of the time they haven't the faintest idea where he is or whether they're going to see him anymore. So, I don't think Peter should be faulted for saying, Hey, I'm tired of sitting around here doing nothing.

I'm going to go out and fish. After all, Jesus never told Peter, after calling him to be a disciple, that he could never fish again. In fact, there's one time mentioned at the end of Matthew 17 when Jesus actually sent Peter out to fish, to go out and get a fish that had a coin in its mouth.

So, fishing was not wrong. I mean, Peter apparently kept his boat and his tackle and his nets and so forth. He forsook them.

That's what we read when we read about the call of the fishermen. They forsook them. They left them.

But they apparently didn't just leave them out to rot on the beach or for vandals to go carry them off. They must have left them in the charge of their servants or whatever. After all, James and John were partners of Peter and Andrew, and they had servants, we're told, their father had servants.

Peter may have had servants, or it may have been for the sons of Zebedee, their servants to take care of it. But apparently they didn't just irresponsibly abandon the boat and the nets and say, Well, bon voyage, we'll never see those again. Because we find them in a boat frequently in the stories in the Gospels.

Going across the lake, rowing Jesus across the other side. No doubt the boats that they took were the boats they already owned. And it seemed no explanation is needed to say, Well, they went out and got in the boat and threw their nets over.

I mean, they still owned them. And what this tells us, of course, is that even though the Bible tells us that they forsook their boats and they forsook their nets and they forsook their profession, it doesn't mean that they liquidated their assets and got rid of them all. Forsaking all does not necessarily mean that you don't maintain stewardship of some of the things that you already possess.

There's nothing wrong with keeping your car if you feel like now that you're a Christian, God wants you to use the car. It's his now, but it's yours to manage and yours to take care of. And so we can see that they did keep their fishing equipment handy, and so it was not impossible nor probably inappropriate for Peter to go fishing.

Now, what Jesus ends up saying to him by the end of this chapter, some have interpreted in the light of Jesus kind of mildly rebuking him for going fishing on this occasion. We'll talk about that when we get to the point. But I don't personally interpret it that way, and I seriously doubt that there's anything wrong to be assumed about Peter doing this.

If he was wrong, then seven of the apostles, including John himself, the teller of the story, was wrong also, and none of them got rebuked in this story. So I don't think Peter was rebuked for fishing either. Nothing wrong with fishing.

And so they caught nothing all night. But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Now, this could be because of the phenomenon we've seen already.

Several times people who encountered Jesus after his resurrection didn't recognize him. It could be that he looked different. It could be their eyes were supernaturally repelled, or it could be that they were just so far offshore they couldn't make out the features of the person that was in the distance.

Then Jesus said to them, Children, have you any food? Which presumably means, have you caught any fish? And they answered him no. Apparently, at this point, they still didn't recognize his voice, though he shouted to them across the lake. I wonder how they felt about him calling them children, however.

Since they didn't know it was Jesus at this point, it must have seemed a little condescending. These were grown men. For some stranger on the shore to say, Children! I hear these grown men are out there in the boat, probably fathers themselves, maybe even grandfathers in a few cases.

And then we called them children. Jesus actually didn't usually call his disciples children, as far as we know. So it's a peculiarity of this particular encounter.

And one wonders whether they thought that strange, or maybe they thought it was irritating to be called by that name, condescending. They said no. And he said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you'll find some.

Now, it doesn't mention that they gave any kind of protest to this. We know from Luke chapter 5, that when Jesus first preached from Peter's boat, and then after the crowds were dismissed, he said, Peter, let down your nets for a catch. Peter protested and said, Listen, we've been fishing all night.

The fish are all somewhere else. They're not there. But if you insist, I'll go ahead and do it.

And he did, and then he caught a great catch of fish. Whether Peter, you know, didn't like the suggestion, or thought it was a stupid suggestion, I don't know. It's possible that, because there are hills and mountains around the Sea of Galilee, that Jesus was positioned up on a hill, you know, on shore, high enough that maybe they figured, maybe this guy can see something in the water that we can't see from here.

Maybe he can see a school of fish over there or something. You know, I mean, we don't know what they thought. All we know is they obeyed.

And they did so without knowing it was Jesus commanding them. And so they put their nets down. They cast.

And they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It's the Lord. This catch of fish, well, you know, he got the revelation when he saw the catch of fish.

Now that's either because it was just a plain miracle, and he knew that only the Lord could do a miracle like that, or, it could be that this was sort of like a signature act of Christ, as far as John was concerned. He'd seen him do that when he called him to be a disciple initially. He gave him a catch of fish like that.

So, maybe he just thought, Wow, that's just the kind of thing Jesus did. That's Jesus over there. And he said, That's the Lord.

Now, even though John knew it was the Lord, in the gospel, we get a pretty good character sketch of John and Peter, who, by the way, were very close to each other, not only prior to their call as fishermen, I mean, when they were called from being fishermen to be disciples, they were working together as fishermen, but even in the book of Acts, Peter and John go together to the temple to our prayer. Peter and John do things together. They apparently were friends, but in John's gospel, we read probably more than anywhere else of the difference in their temperaments and in their personalities, I think, because you read in the story of the resurrection appearances that when Mary Magdalene found the tomb, you know, the stone rolled, she ran and told Peter and John, and they both ran.

Now, John was faster and got to the tomb first, but he didn't presume to go into the tomb. He just stopped at the door of the tomb and looked in. Peter, coming along, puffing after him, just runs right by and, you know, just barges right in.

And then John, you know, afterwards, comes in following Peter. John doesn't do so many, I don't know what we'd say, impetuous or sudden things, you know, and here also. John recognizes it's the Lord, but he stays in the boat.

Peter, however, once he hears that it's the Lord, he jumps in the water, it says. Now, when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, before he had removed it, and plunged into the sea. Put on his outer garment, before he had removed it, I think is a way of correcting the King James.

I'm trying to remember. I think the King James says he was naked. He put on his clothes because he was naked or something like that.

It's certainly the impression in the King James is given that Peter was pretty stiff. Do you have that there, Tom? Before he was naked, yeah. Now, probably the new King James is correct in, you know, culturally speaking.

The word there is that he was naked. But naked might be a relative statement. It might mean that he was stripped down to his, you know, loin cloth or something.

There's just a bunch of men out there on the water and it's springtime, maybe even early summer by now, and warm. And they're working hard over the nets and stuff. And so he probably just took off all his outer clothing and stripped down to the waist or something.

And that's what they called naked. But the new King James perhaps they're just being a little more squeamish about the way that sounds. They say, well, he put on his outer garment because he had taken it off.

They don't say it quite as literally. You know, he put on his clothes because he was naked. So he didn't want to swim, you know, improperly dressed.

So he put on his outer garment, figured it wouldn't be hot in the water, so he put his overcoat back on and jumped into the water and started swimming to shore and left the disciples to pull this big load of fish behind him. And it says he plunged into the sea. And the other disciples came in the little boat for they were not far from the land and about 200 cubits.

That would be about 100 yards. 200 cubits would be about 300 feet, about 100 yards, like the length of a football field. That's how far they were.

That is far enough that they might not recognize someone. Yes. The disciples whom Jesus loved.

Why was John called that? It's really hard to know. Does it imply favoritism? I think it kind of could be interpreted that way, yes. Jesus definitely showed, I guess what on one level could be called favoritism among his disciples.

The three that we would call his inner circle definitely got privileges that the others did not. And I think there was a fair amount of jealousy among them about that because we find the disciples other than James and John getting upset with James and John because they're trying to push for some extra privileges when their mother asks if they can sit at right and left hands in the kingdom. I think there was maybe a fair amount of jealousy and rivalry among them, but despite that fact, Jesus still handpicked three to be given special privileges and clearly to have a higher degree of leadership in the church, as the book of Acts would indicate.

As far as the one of the three, John was one of those three, and to call him the disciple whom Jesus loved, it certainly gives the impression that he's saying that he was beloved by Christ even more than others. I mean, that might be what he's saying and it may just be the truth. Jesus may have gotten along with John a lot better than the others.

John might have been more of a man after God's own heart than the others were. John might have been more spiritually sensitive or whatever. But I do think it does imply a bit of favoritism on Jesus' part, which raises the question of whether favoritism is wrong.

Jesus never did anything wrong, and yet there are senses in which even among his friends, Jesus gave more time to some than to others. And the ones he didn't give as much time to were not necessarily mistreated by him in that respect. I mean, they were leaders, the apostles.



But I think Jesus just did what every man has to do. He can't give himself equally to every person on the planet. I mean, Jesus gave himself at a certain level to all the needy in the whole country, going around healing their sick, casting out the demons, teaching the multitudes, feeding them.

But he didn't give himself to those multitudes the way he gave himself to the twelve because he'd take them aside to have time alone to talk to them and stuff. But even of the twelve, there were three that he took places where he didn't take the others so that he could give them special instruction or revelation or whatever. And even among the three, there was one that seemed to stand out as one that he really liked best.

Now, the only way that would seem bad is when we think of Jesus in terms of God. You know, God isn't supposed to have favorites, I thought. But Jesus was God, and he was a man.

And as a man, he had limits on his time, which God does not. God the Father doesn't have limits on his time. Any human being, given 24 hours only per day, having to sleep some of those hours and having to do other duties, has only a certain amount of elective time to spend with individuals on a social level.

You know? And we all know that. We all know that in our own lives we're not equally close to everybody that we know. We're not even equally close to everybody that we like.

We can't be. I mean, there's some people who we spend more time with, and this shouldn't be any occasion of guilt. Jesus did the very same thing.

Now, as far as God having favorites, there's a couple of factors to consider here. One is that, A, God can be everywhere at once, has no limits on his time or the amount of attention he can give everyone. Therefore, he can be, he can treat everyone equally well and give them his full attention in his full time.

But, on the other hand, to say God has no favorites, as preachers are commonly heard to say, is not necessarily biblical. It is true that the Bible says he's not a respecter of persons, which is usually misunderstood to mean he has no favorites. I say it's misunderstood because the expression God is not a respecter of persons means that God doesn't honor people based on their race.

It's always in a context of Jew and Gentile. You know, there's no difference between Jew and Gentile because God is not a respecter of persons. Meaning that the natural considerations about a person, his race, his nationality, or even other issues, like whether he's rich or poor, those kinds of things that cause some people to command respect among their fellows, God doesn't show respect on those basis.

But the Bible definitely says, God himself says, repeatedly, those who honor me, I will

honor. And those who despise me will be lightly esteemed. He definitely has favorites.

He definitely honors, especially those who honor him. And those who don't honor him, he honors them less. And so there's a sense which we could say God does have favorites.

In the days before the flood, Noah was certainly a favorite of his. And Enoch appears to have been a favorite of his. And among the disciples, well, certainly the choice of twelve may suggest that they were among, well, they were certainly the favored ones, whether they were favorites or simply favored, I don't know.

But, you know, what you bring up is relevant, you know, to our concerns because we do hear, first of all, an awful lot, God has no favorites. That's true in one sense. He doesn't have any favorite races or classes of people.

That is, he doesn't favor the rich or the athletic or the wise or the powerful or the Jew or the Gentile. I mean, he doesn't favor one group of people on those kinds of bases. But he certainly has people that he prefers to others based on, you know, they're relating to him, you know.

Those who honor him, he honors more. And whether that was the case among the disciples, that is, whether John honored the Lord more than the others did, I can't say it. Maybe that John and Jesus hit it off better.

Maybe John, we know John was more into, you know, the love idea and that was certainly the wavelength Jesus was on. Maybe John was more of a loving guy, I don't know, or more sensitive. I don't know why.

But John, I think, describes himself that way because it was true. Yeah, he's the only one who used that term. Now, on one hand, it almost seems, you know, I have to say, it's always, to my first impression, seemed almost boastful for John to describe himself as the one that Jesus loved.

But it possibly had nothing boastful in his mind at all. After all, for Jesus to love him doesn't necessarily bespeak any virtue of his own. It might have astonished him that Jesus would love such a one as him.

You know, I mean, it could be just a tribute to Jesus. John could be essentially saying, for all we know, you know, I'm such a schmuck and yet Jesus loved me. You know, I mean, that's, you know, the incredible love of Christ that he would love me in a special way like he did when I'm no better than anyone else.

You know, I mean, he might have found that a marvelous and astonishing thing rather than something that he's boasting about. You know, to say that Jesus loved me in a special way and gave me special privileges and gifts, if I were to say such a thing, probably a fair number of people who heard me say it would say, boy, is he ever

arrogant. But why would that be arrogant? To say that I am loved in the way that God loves people, which is without reference to their own merits, to say that, you know, God gave me some gifts, some real privileges, if we really mean gifts, gifts are not given on the basis of merit.

They're given on the basis of generosity. You know, I mean, a person who says those things is not necessarily boasting. Now, a person might say all those things which are really humble things to say, but he may say them in such a way as to be proud of them.

But John needn't be considered to be guilty of that, I think. I expect that John would have been sensitive enough at this point not to say this if it was coming from a place of arrogance. It would be too much of a giveaway that he was proud.

So I think that his ability to say this indicates that it was something he was so humble about and not proud about that it never crossed his mind that people would think that sounded proud. You know? He must not have intended it in such a way. So, Peter swims ashore and the others row the boat dragging the net of fish which they couldn't get into the boat.

Then as soon as they had, verse 9, come to land, they saw a fire of coals there and fish laid on it. Well, they hadn't caught any fish all night, but Jesus had a few, where'd he get them? These professional fishermen out there fishing all night and don't catch a one. And here Jesus already has his cooked.

And they're cooked over a fire of coals. And they got fish laid on it and bread. And Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.

He had enough for himself, but didn't have enough for them. They had to bring their own fish. It was a, you know, potluck.

And he said, Bring some of the fish that you've caught. Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, figuring he hadn't done his share of the work dragging it through the water. He pulled it up on shore full of large fish, 153 large fish.

And although there were so many, the net was not broken. Now, I don't know if this, this statement is significant. I'm not sure why he would have mentioned it.

I believe that in the previous stories of Jesus giving a multitude of fish, it specifies that the nets were breaking. There were so many fish, the nets were breaking. And maybe it's just a point of coincidence with no spiritual significance at all, but John, as a fisherman himself, thought, this is pretty amazing.

I mean, nets usually break under this kind of strain for some reason. You know, the net was still in good repair. There may be some mystical, you know, suggestions here.

Knowing John, you know, knowing John, he's always into those mystical things. I've heard people talk about the net as being like, you know, the church or something. And the fish, you know, you're a fisherman, bring in the fish.

And the church, you know, when the disciples were mending their nets, when Jesus first called them, I've heard preachers apply that to, it's like mending relationships in the church, you know, putting the church together so that when the haul of fish comes in, they won't slip out through the cracks or whatever. I mean, there's all kinds of spiritualizing that's done by preachers about this. I don't have any idea whether John had anything remotely like that in mind.

But he mentions the net was not broken, suggesting that the amount of fish was such that it was noteworthy that the net didn't break. It's like they should have broken the net, whether it's a miracle that it didn't break or significant, who knows. Verse 12, Jesus said to them, come and eat breakfast.

Yet none of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? Knowing that it was the Lord. I commented on this verse yesterday just because we were talking about the phenomenon of people who knew Jesus well upon seeing him after his resurrection, many times not knowing who he was. Mary Magdalene didn't recognize him at first.

The men on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize him at first. Even the disciples didn't recognize him in this story at the beginning when he was on shore, maybe because of distance, but there certainly was no distance now. They were gathered around the fire.

And the strangeness of this verse is that it sounds like they wanted to ask him who he was. They didn't dare. You don't use that kind of language unless what you mean is they kind of wanted to, but they didn't dare.

They were afraid to. They knew it was him, so they didn't dare ask. But if they knew it was him, why did they even consider asking? That's a strange thing.

It's almost like they knew and they didn't know. He looked like him and he didn't look like him. It's a strange thing, these resurrection appearances.

We don't know to what degree Jesus looked different than he did before. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them and likewise the fish. This is now the third time Jesus showed himself to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Now he had shown himself to others a fair number of times more than this, but this is the third time he showed himself to the gathered disciples. Now here it wasn't all eleven. There was only seven of them.

Excuse me. But the other two times mentioned by John it was the gathered ten, that is the eleven minus Thomas, and then the full eleven including Thomas, and now there's

only seven of them. But the other appearances he'd made were to only one or two or three people at a time, not even the apostles in those cases.

So it says in verse 15, So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these? He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, Feed my lambs. He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? And he said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

And he said to him, Tend my sheep. And he said to him a third time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? And Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.

And Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. Now there is an attempt on the part of the New King James translators to put in the margin some evidence of the Greek background for this discussion about love of Jesus. There are, in fact, two different Greek words used in the discussion.

Now the discussion probably took place in Aramaic. Peter and Jesus normally, most naturally would speak Aramaic. Therefore, in the writing of John's gospel, we probably have a translation from the Aramaic into Greek because the only gospel of John's we have are in Greek.

Now in the Greek, this conversation is rendered using two different Greek words. Now I don't know anything about the Aramaic to tell you the truth. So I don't know whether there are corresponding different Greek words for love, different words for love in the Aramaic that have the same range of meaning.

Or whether the word love in Aramaic was in every case the same word when Jesus spoke. But in translating it into Greek, John brought out the nuances by using different Greek words. One of the words for love that is used in this is agape, which most would know, of course, is a special New Testament word for the love of God, the love of Christ, the love that we're supposed to have for Christ and for each other as the Holy Spirit produces this in us as the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is agape, the Bible says. First Corinthians 13, it tells us what love is. Charity in the King James, but love in most translations, it uses the word agape all the way through.

And that is the special love of God It is the word that is generally used for the love that God has for us, for the love he expects us to have for him, and the love he wants us to have for one another. It's unselfish, it's sacrificial, it's pure, it's loving somebody because you love them, not necessarily because they earn it, not because they're lovely even, but it's just a gracious, generous love, a sacrificial, self-giving kind of a love. That's what

agape refers to.

Now there's another word in the Greek for love, and that is phileo. And phileo is a more ordinary word for love. It's related to the word for brother.

And it has to do with the kind of love that exists between brothers in the natural, that is between brothers who get along. And a positive kind of an affection and a love, a familial, family type of love. It's a very positive emotion, a very positive thing.

Now there are times in the Bible when phileo and agape are used interchangeably. A fair number of expositors have overlooked this fact. Well, I shouldn't say expositors, I should say preachers.

Preachers often wax eloquent about the difference between agape and phileo. And sometimes they add a third Greek word, eros, which means love, but it means it in a sensual, sexual sort of way in many cases. Eros is sort of like lust, you know.

But it can be translated love, but it usually means love in the sense of making love. It has to do with sex and passion. Now the word eros actually isn't found in the New Testament, but it is in the Greek language.

But in the New Testament, phileo and agape are the principal words. And while there are different nuances of the words, they are sometimes used interchangeably. So to draw a very major line of difference in their interpretation is perhaps something that should not be done or done only with caution.

But in this discourse, there is the employment of both of those words as follows. In verse 15, Jesus said, Simon son of Jonah, Do you agape me more than these? Peter said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I phileo you. And Jesus said, Be my lambs.

Then Jesus said to him a second time, Simon son of Jonah, Do you agape me? And he said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I phileo you. He said to him, Ten my sheep. Then he said to him a third time, Simon son of Jonah, Do you phileo me? Now of course Peter had been affirming all along that he did.

Jesus had been asking, Do you agape? Do you have agape love for me? And Peter had not answered in quite the same term. He said, I have phileo love for you. And on the third question, Jesus changed the question.

Do you even have phileo love for me? And that grieved Peter to be asked in those terms. And he said, Lord, you know everything. You know all things.

You know that I have phileo for you. He never did come around saying, I have agape for you, which is what Jesus asked the first two times. Jesus actually came down to his level and said, Okay, let's talk about phileo.

Do you have that even? All three times Peter affirmed that he had phileo for Christ. Why? Probably because Jesus had said, If you agape me, you will keep my commandments. And in fact, back in John chapter 13, in verse 36, Simon Peter had said to Jesus in the upper room, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered, Where I'm going, you cannot follow me now, but you shall follow me afterward.

Peter said to him, Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake. Now, Jesus had said, Greater agape has no man than this that he lay down his life for his friend. Peter said, I agape you, Lord.

I will lay down my life for you. I have this great love for you. This agape love.

Jesus answered him, Will you lay down your life for my sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied me three times. Now, Peter did deny him three times. He did not lay his life down for him.

He did not show himself to have agape love. And when Jesus asked him, Do you have agape for me? Peter could not bring himself to say that he did. Because he had protested earlier that he had that very kind of love and proved that he did not by his three denials.

The fact that Jesus asked him this question three times is usually thought by scholars to correspond to the fact that Peter had denied Jesus three times and Peter, you know, three times asked whether, you know, things have changed for him. Do you agape me now? And he says, No. Yes.

Yes, I phileo you. I have affection for you. I feel towards you, you know, in a friendly manner, in a brotherly manner.

But, no doubt, Peter wished he could say, I agape you. But he couldn't because he was ashamed. He knew that he had denied the Lord.

He had said that he would die for the Lord, which would be the evidence of agape. But he did not do it. And so three times he could only say, I phileo you.

Finally, Jesus came down and said, Do you phileo me? Because, after all, even if you had not laid down your life for a friend, even if you don't have that kind of love, would you deny your friend? You know? Would you deny your brother? And, you know, he's kind of bringing Peter, I think, to, you know, he's bringing to Peter's mind again those failures and asking him, you know, well, what about this? Now, the opening question, do you love me more than these? Some people have thought the these refers to the fish. These are the people who thought Peter should have never gone fishing again. Jesus called him from his job of fishing and now he's gone back to his employment.

You know, back to the money game. Back to fishing. And here's this hundred and some

odd fish out here, big fish, a lot of money worth on there.

For a fisherman, he probably, you know, could easily run the figures in his mind and calculate how much money this is worth. Hey, fishing's getting prosperous now. I think maybe I'll go back to fishing.

And Jesus said, do you love me more than these? With a gesture toward the fish. You know, I called you away from this and now you've gone back to it. Who do you love more, the fish or me? I don't think that's the meaning.

But those who, as I said earlier, think that it was wrong for Peter to go back fishing would suggest Jesus was kind of rubbing it in. You know, what do you love, me or the fish? You want to be a fisherman? Or you want to be an apostle? That's not how I understand his words. Do you love me more than these? I would take to be these other apostles, these other disciples.

And the reason for asking it that way is that although John's Gospel doesn't record it so, the synoptics tell us that when Peter told Jesus that he would die for him, he said, these others might deny you, but I will never deny you. That's how the synoptics record Peter's promise that he would never deny the Lord. He said, the others, all men may deny you, but I won't.

And the suggestion is, I do love you more than these others do. Lord, I'll never deny. I don't know about these other guys.

I've had some questions about them myself. I can understand you saying you're all going to deny me if you mean them. Because, I mean, they're pretty flaky.

But not me. I love you better than they do. And when Jesus said, do you love me more than these? It's probably, that's in the synoptic Gospels in the parallels.

I don't have the reference to that in my fingertips. If I could look them up, maybe I should. Let me look up one of those places.

And frankly, I'm not sure if even all of the synoptics record that exact statement, but let me find it just for the sake of being thorough here if I can. It'd be, right now I'm looking at Matthew 26. I'll see if it's in here.

Yes. Matthew 26 has it in verse 33. Peter answered and said to him, even if all are made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble.

Suggesting, you know, I'm stronger than these others because I'm more willing to go the distance with you, Lord. I love you more than they do. And so Jesus said, well, do you? Do you love me more than these? They fled, you fled.

And you even denied me. And Peter is apparently kind of ashamed throughout this



discourse, especially the third time. And yet each time, Jesus says to him something about being a shepherd again.

Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep, Jesus says, each time. Now Jesus' sheep obviously are his disciples to say, feed my sheep means shepherd the flock. He was essentially commissioning Peter to be a leader still or again.

Remember, Peter had denied him three times and Jesus had formally said, if anyone denies me before me, I'll deny him before my father. Which means that having denied the Lord, Peter would have serious credibility loss as a Christian leader. In fact, there'd be some questions as even to his salvation for having denied the Lord.

But Jesus formally reinstated him into the apostolic leadership role that he had formerly had. When he said, feed my sheep, he's basically saying, you're a shepherd. You're the one in charge here.

And I'm going to put you in a position sort of above others in the church. Maybe not above the other apostles. We never read of Peter being above the other apostles.

In fact, decisions like whether circumcision should be imposed or whatever was decided among the apostles, including Peter. Peter gave his testimony, but James actually gave the dictates of it. So, I mean, it sounds like the apostles in general as a whole had an equal kind of authority among themselves.

Peter didn't have more than they, but he at least was part of the eldership again. He was going to be part of the leadership body to feed the flock. That would be the church at large.

So, we have Peter then recommissioned to his leadership. Now, it's interesting that Peter later on, when writing to the elders of the church, or of the churches, in 1 Peter, which he addressed to the churches of several different areas, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Dithynia. That's a lot of churches that this letter is sent to.

But in the final chapter of 1 Peter, in chapter 5, he says, The elders who are among you, I exhort, who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed, shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint, but willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly, not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And so, he tells the leaders of the church you need to shepherd the flock. That's what Jesus had told him.

He also was an elder. Although as an apostle, he was even more than an elder. Now, at verse 18, Jesus continues speaking to Peter.

Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked

where you wished. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. This, he spoke, signifying by what death Peter would glorify God.

And when he had spoken this, he said to him, follow me. Now, notice Jesus predicted the death of Peter. It was not at all clear from the prediction that he was predicting the death of Peter.

You know, you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish. It doesn't necessarily have a clear reference to martyrdom or death at all. However, John wrote this after Peter was dead.

John wrote this gospel probably later than any other.