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February 9th: Genesis 39 & John 21

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Joseph in the house of Potiphar. Jesus appears to his disciples by the sea.

Some passages referenced:

Genesis 16, 21 (Abram, Sarai, Hagar, and Ishmael)

Luke 5:1-11 (the miraculous catch of fish at the first calling of the disciples); Ezekiel 47:1-12 (waters flowing out from the temple); John 13:36-38 (Peter's earlier statements about following Jesus to death); 2 Peter 1:14 (Peter claims that Jesus told him about his coming death).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis 39. Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had brought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favour in his sight, and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house, and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house, and of all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.

The blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance, and after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph, and said, Lie with me.

But he refused, and said to his master's wife, Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me, except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her, or to be with her.

But one day, when he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house were there in the house, she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me. But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and got out of the house, and as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled out of the house, she called to the men of her household, and said to them, See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me.

And I cried out with a loud voice, and as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled and got out of the house. Then she laid up his garment by her, until his master came home, and she told him the same story, saying, The Hebrew servant whom you have brought among us came in to me to laugh at me. But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me, and fled out of the house.

As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, This is the way your servant treated me, his anger was kindled. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him steadfast love, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him.

And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. In Genesis 39, it is once again extremely

important that we read it alongside the passages that surround it. Chapters 37, 38, and 39 belong very much together.

In chapter 37, a garment is stripped from Joseph. He is cast into a pit, and the garment is later presented as evidence. In the chapters that follow, there is a story of goats and disguise.

And we see the same thing in the story of Joseph in chapter 37. This is the third iteration of some of these themes. And it highlights the entangled themes of Judah and Joseph and the ways that their stories and their characters are bound up together and playing off against each other as a sort of diptych.

Joseph, once again, is the favoured son in this situation. He is the favoured servant. He has things entrusted into his hands.

Judah is tempted to lie with a woman in chapter 38, and he gives in to that temptation. But when Joseph is tempted by part of his wife, he resists. In both cases, personal items are taken and later produced in evidence.

In the case of Judah, it's the cord, the staff, and the signet. In the case of Joseph, it's his garment. The story of chapter 39 is bookended by two statements, in verses 1-6 and then in verses 20-23.

In both of these sections, we see the same sorts of patterns played out. Joseph is taken down to Egypt. Joseph is placed in the jail.

God is with him. God is with him in the house. God is with him in the jail.

He finds favour in the sight of Potiphar. He finds favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. All things are entrusted to his oversight in both situations.

Potiphar does not concern himself with the property that he has entrusted in Joseph's hand, and the keeper of the prison pays no attention to anything in Joseph's charge. God causes everything that Joseph does to prosper at the beginning and at the end. Even in the most dramatic change in Joseph's condition, there is still great continuity, and continuity also with what we see in chapter 37.

This recalls in some ways the story of Jacob in Laban's house, where even as his external condition deteriorates and he's brought into a greater state of servitude, he still rises and is blessed and is made to prosper. God blesses Jacob even in servitude, and the same is true with Joseph his son. There are two temptation scenes with Potiphar's wife.

In the first she comes and lifts up her eyes on Joseph and says, lie with me. He refuses and he gives three reasons. First of all, his master's trust and his trustworthiness in response.

Second, the fact that she is the one thing that has been held back from him. And then third, the fact that he cannot do this thing and sin against God. Now this is a forbidden fruit story.

Potiphar is like God in this situation and Joseph is like Adam. Joseph sees himself as responsible to a higher master though. And the theme of loyalty in Joseph's story is an important one.

The question of to whom is he loyal? Is he going to be faithful or is he going to be someone who's in it for himself? He is the one who exemplifies wisdom in the garden. He resists temptation and he exercises shrewdness and wisdom and things prosper in his hands under the rule of a father figure. Just as in the Garden of Eden there's just one thing that's forbidden to him and he refuses to take the forbidden fruit of Potiphar's wife.

On the other hand, Potiphar's wife acts as an Eve type character. She sees that Joseph is good and she wants to take him. Now this might remind us of some other stories as well.

We might think of the story of Sarai in the land of Egypt and Pharaoh sees that she is beautiful just as Potiphar's wife sees the handsomeness or the beauty of Joseph and wants to take him. However, even if Joseph is faithful in resisting this temptation, he will end up being cast out of this garden type place and having the garment removed from him. This temptation is repeated day after day.

She keeps tempting him in this way. And the second key temptation scene, she catches his garment and says, lie with me. And he's in a very compromised situation here.

She has evidence in her hand and yet there's no witness to bear up his side of the story. And so if he's faithful he'll end up being accused of unfaithfulness anyway. If he wants to be seen as faithful, perhaps the best thing for him to do is to lie with her.

She will keep the story secret and he'll appear to be a really good servant for his master. His master will praise him as his mistress praises him. And yet he will have been fundamentally unfaithful.

He would have taken the forbidden fruit, the one thing that was forbidden to him. I've mentioned the story of Sarai and Pharaoh but there's another story that's more important as a background here. Abram, Sarai and Hagar.

In the story of chapter 16, a Hebrew mistreats an Egyptian servant and in that case there's a sort of sexual end in the situation too. They want to use Hagar to raise up seed for Sarai. And here the Egyptian mistress wants to use the servant Joseph, the Hebrew servant, for her own sexual pleasure.

The accusation that she later makes against Joseph is a significant one. She makes it twice. She claims that her husband has brought in this Hebrew to laugh at us.

Now that's the same expression that is used of Ishmael in chapter 21 verse 9. It's the reason why Sarah wanted to cast out the bondwoman and her son, Hagar and Ishmael. Once again, Sarai blamed her husband in chapters 21 and 16 and here Potiphar's wife blames her husband. There are more fall themes playing out.

We saw that in chapter 16 that it's a fall event that's taking place. The woman takes this forbidden fruit as it were, gives it to her husband and in that situation the husband listens to the voice of his wife calling back to the language used in the fall. Now Joseph is here suffering an Ishmael-like experience.

He's already been brought down into Egypt by the Ishmaelites. In chapter 37 there were a series of events that played according to the pattern of chapter 21 as Hagar and Ishmael are sent out into the wilderness. And those patterns suggest that Joseph is an Ishmaelite character.

He's a character who's connected with Hagar and Ishmael. Now Hagar was the Egyptian servant afflicted as a stranger in the house of the Hebrews. Now we see a Hebrew servant afflicted in the house of the Egyptians.

And once again there are themes that connect the story. Potiphar's wife in certain respects is behaving like Sarai, wanting to cast out the bondwoman and her son as the one who's brought in to laugh. Again the connection with Isaac's name there.

What is the point of all of this? Well it seems to me that Hagar's story did not end in chapter 21. It's playing beneath the surface of the story still. Abram and Sarai used Hagar as a means of raising up seed for themselves.

But Hagar was never merely a means to an end. Hagar is a person in her own right, seen by God. God visits her in the wilderness and delivers her.

And God cares for Hagar. And Hagar's not just going to be cast out of the story. Abram and Sarai may think that she's out of the story.

And there may be a number of generations that have passed since she last appeared. But now the story is playing out again. And it's playing out again because it will not be until Israel has seen itself and entered into the experience of Hagar and Ishmael and restored this lost son.

This son who, like Ishmael, has been cast out of the family. Until they restore that son, enter into that son's experience, place themselves in the shoes of Hagar and are redeemed from that situation. And enter into Hagar's experience where she experienced a sort of Exodus-like event.

Afflicted by Sarai like Israel was afflicted by Pharaoh and then brought out of that land in which they were a stranger. They have to enter into the experience of the Egyptian. Only

when they've begun to see the world through Hagar and Ishmael's eyes will they be prepared to be part of that great deliverance and redemption that God has planned to work through them.

As we're listening to these stories then it's important to recognise the partial playing out of musical themes as it were. Like listening to a piece of music where you hear snatches of a theme that calls your mind back to a previous set of events in an opera or something like that. Bringing to mind the charged emotions and realities of a past series of events and shows you that they are at play in the present.

That's what we see in the case of the story of Hagar and also in the case of the story of the Garden of Eden. Potiphar's wife gathers the men of her house first. Why is she doing this? I think it's because they are probably jealous brothers of Joseph in this situation.

Like the jealous brothers in chapter 37, they've seen Joseph advance ahead of them, favoured over them. And as jealous brothers they will want to support anyone who's going to bring Joseph down. It also gives her leverage against her husband.

Why is Potiphar angry when she speaks to him? At whom is he angry? Seems to me it's quite likely that he's angry at her. He knows that there's something more going on in this situation, that Joseph is a faithful servant and that his wife is not faithful. He puts Joseph in with the king's prisoners, the prison that was under the control of the captain of the guard.

Now who is the captain of the guard? He is the captain of the guard. Why isn't he putting Joseph in with just common prisoners? Why is he putting him in a prison where he's with prisoners that would receive more favourable treatment, more significant figures? What's more, he allows Joseph to arise to prominence within this context and gives him great authority, much as he enjoyed earlier on in the story of chapter 39. It seems to me that he knows that his wife is not telling the truth and that Joseph is actually faithful.

A question to consider. There are lots of twos in the Joseph and the Judah stories. There are two dreams of Joseph, there are two sons that die, there are two that are born through Tamar, there are two temptations by part of his wife, there are two dreams in the prisons, two dreams of Pharaoh, two sets of seven years, two sons of Joseph, two visits of the brothers, two times the Egyptians beg for food, etc.

One of the twos we see are two stories of Joseph being stripped of a garment and thrown into a pit. And in both cases there is a garment presented as evidence against him. The story of Joseph being stripped of his garment and thrown into the pit in chapter 37 is one in which he had very little agency.

But in this situation there seems to be an amplification of his faithfulness for various reasons. Once again he's stripped of a garment, once again he's thrown into a pit. But

there's a development, not just a comparison.

There's something that moves forward in the story. What are some of the ways in which these two incidents differ even in their similarities? And what can we learn from those differences and developments? The sons of Zebedee and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing.

They said to him, we will go with you. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, Children, do you have any fish? They answered him, No. He said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish.

That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, It is the Lord. When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish that you have just caught. So Simon Peter went aboard, and hauled the net ashore full of large fish, one hundred and fifty of them.

And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, Come, and have breakfast. Now none of the disciples dared ask him, Who are you? They knew it was the Lord.

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, 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 a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, Tend my sheep.

He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you. Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted.

But when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and

carry you where you do not want to go. This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this he said to him, Follow me.

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper, and had said, Lord, who is it that is going to betray you? When Peter saw him he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man? Jesus said to him, If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me. So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

Now, there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. John chapter 21 is an unusual chapter.

We've just read John chapter 20 verses 30 and 31. Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. That seems like a pretty good ending for the Gospel.

But yet, the Gospel goes on for a whole other chapter. What's this other chapter doing here? The question of what this chapter is doing here has exercised many scholars, and many have thought that John chapter 20 verses 30 to 31 is the ending of the book, and that chapter 21 is an awkward later addition. But yet, that doesn't seem to be the case to me.

As you look through the structure of the Gospel more generally, this seems to have served the purpose of an epilogue. Now, an epilogue is not part of the main body of a story. It's fenced off from the main narrative, but yet it is intended to be part of the narrative more generally.

It's not just an appendix that's been added at some later point. It's deliberately set apart, but it's part of the design of the work. And in the case of the Gospel of John, as Richard Borkham and others have argued, this balances the prologue with which the Gospel begins in verses 1 to 18 of chapter 1. And what the prologue does is give us a sense of the prehistory to the Gospel story, what occurs before any of the events of the Gospel.

And then, the epilogue gives us a sense of what's happening next, what's going to happen into the future of the Church's mission. The epilogue previews what the Church is going to do, and gives us an understanding of the character of its mission, and how its ministers are prepared for it. As Richard Borkham points out again, the story of the Gospel opens with the words, in the beginning, and the last words of Christ in verse 23 are, There is a holding of the narrative of the Gospel between these two poles, the very

beginning of history and the very end of history.

Borkham has also observed that while the prologue has 496 syllables, the epilogue has 496 words, which would heighten the sense of a balance between them. Now, the epilogue is a story about the failure of the disciples in their fishing, followed by a miraculous catch of fish. And this is a story very similar to the story associated with the first calling of Peter, James, John and Andrew, in Luke chapter 5 verses 1 to 11.

Not a story that's recorded in John's Gospel, but which would be familiar to readers of the Gospel, who knew other Gospel accounts. Peter takes the lead in the plan to go fishing. Some have seen this fishing expedition as a bad thing, that Peter and the other disciples are returning to their original trade, abandoning the Gospel, abandoning the work of Christ.

I don't think that's necessarily the case. Jesus' question to his disciples about whether they have any food in verse 5 might recall the similar question that he asked in the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 6 verse 5. Once again, Jesus instructs them and they receive numerous fish. So it recalls, first of all, the calling of Peter, but also recalls the bread and the fish of the feeding of the 5,000.

There's a miracle here, once again, that involves believing and obeying Jesus' words. We've seen in the signs of the first half of the Gospel that most of them involve taking Jesus' word and obeying it. There's no pyrotechnics.

It's not something that Christ does directly without any other party being involved. Indeed, most of the time Jesus is giving instructions to people that they must obey. Take up your bed and walk, draw some of the water, return to your home, and give out the bread and the fish.

Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam. Lazarus, come forth, open up the grave. All these sorts of things are events in which people must obey for the miracle to take place.

And it's the believing of Christ's word that is really important here. The beloved disciple tells Peter, not the other disciples, it is the Lord. However, although the beloved disciple is the first to recognise Jesus, Peter is the one who plunges into the sea and seeks to beat the boat to the land.

The fact that he puts on his outer garment before doing so suggests some greater feat of physical strength, especially as he then goes and drags the net filled with 153 fish to the land seemingly single-handedly. The beloved disciple is physically outmatched by Peter by some distance in the previous chapter, but Peter is really without equal here. Putting on the garment again might also suggest that he's returning to his office in some sense.

It's an image of restoration. The catching of fish is probably symbolic of the role of the church in the mission to the Gentiles. The church is like a part of the land that's been

brought out to sea.

The nations are presented as the sea in the Old Testament, and Peter's plunging into the sea could maybe be related to his leading of the way in the Gentile mission. The fact that the net was not broken maybe suggests the capacity of the church to fulfil its mission in the world. Now the fact that there were 153 fish caught is an unusual detail, in which many have seen symbolism I think quite rightly.

Why are we given the exact number of the fish? Why not just say a great multitude of fish? Or maybe even around 150 fish? Why give that specific a detail? James Jordan has argued that 153 is the triangular number of 17. He's not the only person to argue this, but I think there's something there. Crucial background I think is found in Ezekiel chapter 47, verses 1 to 12.

Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the water was trickling out on the south side. Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle deep.

Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was knee deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water, and it was waist deep. Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen.

It was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. And he said to me, Son of man, have you seen this? Then he led me back to the bank of the river. As I went back I saw on the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other.

And he said to me, This water flows toward the eastern region, and goes down into the Araba, and enters the sea. When the water flows into the sea the water will become fresh, and wherever the river goes every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh, so everything will live where the river goes.

Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From En Gedi to En Eglim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the great sea.

But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh, they are to be left for salt. And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail.

But they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing. We've already seen Jesus and John as the Gospel writer take up the imagery of this passage earlier on within

the Gospels.

Jesus is the one who provides living water. Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water, like the waters from the temple. Water flows from his peers' side.

Christ is the one who awakens the winds of the garden, so that it blows out the fragrance, but also so that the living water from the spring can flow forth into the world. Christ is the one who opens up this living water, and as it flows out, there is healing for the rivers and the waters. And fish thrive, and then fishermen can catch many fish as they spread out their nets.

These are all themes that we're seeing here. First of all, the flowing out of the living waters as Christ's tomb is opened up, and the living waters of that Holy of Holies flow out into the world. The living water of the royal lover's garden.

Some scholars have suggested that there's an association with all the kinds of fish in the world, and 153 is the number of them. That's one possible interpretation. But there is another, and that is the gematria of the words *gedi* and *eglayim*.

In Hebrew, letters serve the purpose also of numbers, and so they have a numerical value attached. And so when you have a particular word, it also has a numerical value that can be given to that word. *Gedi* is 17, *eglayim* is 153, and 153 is the triangular number of 17, which many have noticed independent of the connection between those two names.

This seems like quite a striking connection to me, probably too strong to be just a coincidence. The fact that the fishermen are catching fish from *En Gedi* to *En Eglayim* maybe suggests this movement from 17 to 153, which is an expansive movement, as that 17 is made into a triangular number, and the ministry of the Church is going out into the world more broadly. This also helps us to see this event as a sign.

It's not just a miracle, it's not just a great act of power, but it's a symbol of the growing ministry and mission of the Church, a ministry that will involve the catching of fish from many nations, the healing of the waters as the waters flow out, and it will involve Peter pioneering in that way as well. And all of these things are symbolised within this particular event. Jesus has prepared a fire of coals with fish and with bread, and the fish and the bread might recall the feeding of the 5,000.

In that particular occasion, Jesus involved his disciples in the ministry there, and he gave them a ministry in which they were participants in the spreading of this food. Here he's doing the same thing. The fire of coals also recalls the fire of coals of chapter 18, verse 18, the fire of coals by which Peter denied Jesus.

The fact that Jesus asked Peter three times whether he loves him would also seem to recall Peter's three denials. Jesus, as in the story of Emmaus, reveals himself in a shared

meal and a bread action. But there's some sort of doubt lingering in some way, or at least they know it's Jesus, but after Easter something has definitively changed about him.

This is not Jesus as they knew him previously. There's something about him that has changed. He's in a resurrected body.

There's a sense that something is not the same, and he's going to move on. Jesus, as he questions Peter, focuses on Peter's love. Does he love Jesus more than the other disciples? Now he had bragged earlier that even if all the others were forsaken, he would not forsake him.

And Jesus' question is one that challenges him on that front. He calls him to feed his lambs. Now is this a reference primarily to the weaker of the sheep, the small of the sheep, the children, and the people who are more vulnerable, those who have just come to faith? Perhaps.

I wouldn't read too much into it, nor would I read too much into the different words for love used here, as some have done. Jesus says much the same thing each time. And the point is that Peter is to demonstrate his love for Christ in his care for his people.

Remember that when Peter denied Christ, he also denied his association with Christ's people. Here he's being told that to demonstrate his love for Christ, he has to demonstrate it by loving and caring for Christ's people in their vulnerability. Jesus then goes on to predict Peter's death.

The physical strength that Peter has just displayed will depart, and he'll be girded, as Jesus was, for the utmost act of service. The suggestion is one of martyrdom, specifically on a cross. He will stretch out his hands.

There's a parallel here between the death of Peter and the death of his Lord. In 2 Peter 1, verse 14, Peter suggests that Jesus had informed him about the nature and the timing of the death that awaited him. Now, all of this calls back as well to chapter 13, verse 36 to 38.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward. Peter said to him, Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Jesus answered, will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

So Jesus restores him, but he also gives him an assurance that he will now be able to follow him. And he will be able to follow him to that point of martyrdom. Not the martyrdom, maybe, that Peter expected, this martyrdom where he can chop off the ear of the servant and fight for Christ.

But now a martyrdom where he will be seen in that very act of weakness, where he will be led to a place where he doesn't want to go. He will be put in a situation where he's not in power. And it will be precisely in this moment of weakness, rather than the martyrdom of strength that Peter was anticipating, that he will follow his Lord.

At this point, Peter proceeds to ask about the manner of the beloved disciple's death. This isn't for Peter to know. He must rather focus upon following his own calling that he's been given.

At this point also, the identity of the author of the gospel is revealed to be the beloved disciple. Like certain other figures within the gospel, the beloved disciple is never explicitly named. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is never actually explicitly named.

She's spoken of as the mother of Christ or as woman. I would suggest this is because they are playing not just specific historical parts, but also symbolic purposes. We're supposed to see in these specific characters, characters that we can identify with, that we can recognise our own connection with them, and the way that they stand for the broader reality of the church or the paradigmatic disciple.

And this concluding passage presents the characters of Peter and the beloved disciple alongside each other, revealing them to have two unique and crucial callings. The beloved disciple and Peter have already, as I've noted, been played up against each other in different ways, compared and contrasted. The beloved disciple has a closeness to Christ that Peter maybe does not.

Peter is the one who pioneers a mission in many ways, in the way that the beloved disciple does not. The beloved disciple and Peter are nonetheless always found in association with each other. They work together.

They're not at odds and in a fundamental rivalry with each other. Even though they're racing and other things like that, and one's going ahead out of the boat, it's not seen as some fundamental opposition or antagonism between the two. There's a recognition that they both have different parts to play.

And there's something cryptic about the destiny of the beloved disciple. If I will that he remain until I come. And this seems to be discussed quite extensively by people following Jesus' statement.

What might be meant by it? Well, I think one thing that might be meant by it is a fulfilment of what Jesus says elsewhere. That some of those standing here will not see death until they see the Kingdom of God coming as power. And that refers in part to the events of the Transfiguration, which occurs beforehand in the Synoptic Gospels.

But I think it also refers to the events of AD 70. The events in which Christ would come in judgment upon Jerusalem. I think this anticipates that in part.

In the book of Revelation, John is the great witness of the prophecy concerning those events. And he seems to be the one who lives to see those events take place. Unlike most of the other apostles who die before they occur.

There's also something about the character of the ministry of the beloved disciple, or John as I believe he is, that does continue to the end. Peter seems to be established as the chief shepherd of the church at this point and earlier. But John is the chief witness.

He is the one who is in the side of Christ, much as Christ is in the side of the Father. And in the light of the extreme emphasis upon witness within the book, it's significant that the witness bearer that comes to the forefront at the very end is the beloved disciple. While the beloved disciple will not survive until the very end of all things, his witness will do.

The beloved disciple and his witness are active means of the Spirit's advocacy concerning righteousness, concerning the judgment of the world, and testifying to Christ within the underlying legal drama of human history. And as the readers of his testimony were left with the question of where we stand in relationship to it, the gospel began with a statement about time. The very beginning is the place where Christ is found.

And the very end of history is where Christ is to be found as well. He is going to come. But if the whole scope of time is referenced, there is also the whole scope of space referenced too.

The whole world would not be able to contain the witness to all the things that Christ has done if they were written down. In the very prologue of the gospel then, and in the very epilogue, we see that Christ completes the full span of human history. He's the Alpha and the Omega.

He's also the one who fills space, the one who cannot be contained by space, the one who's greater than any of the scope that this world, this created universe offers. He is the one who's greater than all these things, for he is with God and he is God. A question to consider at the end of this treatment of the Gospel of John.

The Gospel of John begins with the witness of a John and ends with the witness of a John. The witness of John the Baptist and then the witness of John the beloved disciple. The book of Revelation contains many similar patterns and themes.

Once again, it begins with an emphasis upon witness. And as we work through it, we can see many patterns and similarities emerging. And it ends in a similar place too.

What are some of the ways in which the ending of the book of Revelation mirrors the ending of the Gospel of John?