

# OpenTheo

## John 21



### **Gospel of John** - Steve Gregg

In "John 21," Steve Gregg provides insight into the final chapter of the Gospel of John. He notes that this chapter serves as an intentional epilogue to the previous 20 chapters and recounts the story of Jesus appearing to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberius. Gregg delves into the significance of the interactions between Jesus and Peter, examining their use of different words for love and discussing the possibility of hidden meanings in their dialogue. Ultimately, Gregg suggests that this chapter provides important context for understanding the fate of the disciple John.

### **Transcript**

Now, we saw that the 20th chapter of John closed the way a book might close, with a summary statement. It certainly feels as if the Gospel of John should close with the last words in chapter 20. It closed in chapter 20, verses 30 through 31 with these words, 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.

So, it's like winding it up, summarizing it, saying, okay, I've said this much, I could say more, but this is enough. I've said enough on this subject, and it gives his purpose in writing, it's so that you will believe in Christ and have life. Certainly that would be a very fitting close to the book.

And, therefore, many scholars believe that that was originally the close of the book, and that maybe John, after he had intended for the book to be closed, thought he might add one more memoir about a meeting that he and Peter and five other disciples had with Jesus at the Sea of Galilee, where a significant conversation took place between Jesus and Peter. Now, this may be true, we don't know, or it may be that chapter 21 was added deliberately to be like an epilogue. It's clear that chapter 21 also ends the way we might expect the book to end.

In chapter 21, verse 25, it says, And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not

contain the books that would be written. Amen. So, both chapter 20 and chapter 21 end with the statement, there are other things that could be recorded, but it would be unrealistic and unnecessary to try to make a comprehensive record of all that Jesus did.

In the case of the closing words of chapter 20, he says, The reason not to is that the amount I've given you should be sufficient. What we've seen in this record should be enough to lead you to faith in Christ. And at the end of chapter 21, the reason he says that we don't give more is that, you know, where would it end? If I wish to be comprehensive, I would have to write so many books that, using, obviously, hyperbole, even the world itself couldn't contain those books.

And so, it's clear that 21 is written as an end of the book 2, but it may have been an afterthought after the book had reasonably closed in chapter 20. But there's one more resurrection appearance that John wishes to share, and it is unique to the Gospel of John. Like so many other things in the Gospel, they're not recorded in the other Gospels.

This one, likewise, is not found in the other Gospels. It says, After these things, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. That's the term that John's Gospel consistently uses for the Sea of Galilee or the Lake of Galilee.

Actually, this body of water had a number of names. It was called the Sea of Galilee. Here, it's called the Sea of Tiberias.

It's also called Gennesaret. But in John's Gospel, it's always called the Sea of Tiberias. And in this way, he showed himself.

Simon Peter, Thomas, called Didymus, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Now, there's seven men here, and all of them have been mentioned previously. At least, the names that are mentioned here have been mentioned before, except for the sons of Zebedee.

We have never read of the sons of Zebedee in the Gospel of John previously. Obviously, the writer is believed to be one of those sons of Zebedee. And he has referred to himself more obscurely as the other disciple, in some cases, where he was with another, or as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

And it is believed that he was John, and therefore, the sons of Zebedee is a reference to himself and his brother James. But it's interesting that we would find that expression, the sons of Zebedee, here when the Gospel of John has never previously mentioned who they are. Has not mentioned Zebedee or James or John by name.

But it is presumed that the sons of Zebedee are known to the readers. And then for some reason, two other of his disciples are mentioned, but not named. It seems like after identifying who five of them were, it would not be any trouble to add the names of the other two as well.

But for whatever reasons, they are omitted. And Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing. And they said to him, we're going with you also.

And they went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. It is often suggested by commentators that Peter did something wrong by choosing to go fishing again. They say, well, you know, when he first met Jesus, Jesus called him away from fishing.

Fishing was something that was part of his old life, his old vocation. And Jesus had called him away from fishing to be a disciple. And now Peter seemingly is discouraged in going back to his old way.

Well, this is, to my mind, very unfair. The Bible does not criticize Peter for this. What is he supposed to be doing? Jesus has not yet commissioned them to go to all the world and teach all nations.

They are really just filling in time between unpredictable appearances of Jesus. You know, they've gone back to Galilee where they live. From time to time, but not very often, Jesus appears to them.

But what are they supposed to do in between? Now the time will come when he'll actually commission them to go to all the world, but he'll also tell them to wait in Jerusalem until they are endued with power from on high. So they really are not supposed to be out preaching quite yet. But what are they supposed to do? Obviously, they have no instructions from him.

It should not be thought that going fishing is a return to the old life, as if Jesus called Peter from fishing as some kind of an unworthy activity. After all, Jesus had instructed Peter to fish. One time, even during their time together, when he told him to go and throw a hook in the water and pull up the first fish and find a coin in its mouth to pay the temple tax for himself and Peter.

Nothing was wrong with Peter fishing. It's just that when Jesus had been with him, there were more important things to do. With Jesus gone, and without any specific assignment being given to them, there's no reason for them not to fish.

What are they going to do? They might as well use their time productively. However, on this occasion, it didn't prove productive at all. They fished all night and didn't catch anything at all.

And when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. It may be that they were too far distant to recognize him, or maybe it was foggy that morning and they could just make out that there's some individual there on the shore. Nothing surprising about someone being on the shore of the lake, so they didn't have any suspicions about this being another appearance of the

risen Jesus.

Then Jesus said to them, Children, have you any food? And they answered him, No. Now, it must have seemed strange to them that he called them children. Actually, Jesus didn't generally call his disciples children, so it's not as if that was a common term for him to use, as if they say, Oh, that must be Jesus.

But it certainly wouldn't seem to be a very normal thing for an ordinary man to say to strangers, to adult men calling them children. And I've never heard any explanation of why this term would have been used or how the disciples would have reacted to being addressed as children. It's a peculiar thing.

And their statement, No, might have had a note of annoyance in it. They had gone all night without sleep. It's often hard not to be annoyed by small things when you haven't had any sleep all night.

Plus, they have the discouragement of having wasted their night fishing and taking nothing in. And then this individual on the shore, unrecognized by them, refers to them by this diminutive title. I would assume they might have a little bit of irritation in their response.

And then he said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. How strange that those instructions must have seemed to them, not yet knowing this was Jesus. If they knew it was Jesus, then they'd remember, Oh, he told us to do something like that before, and we caught a bunch of fish.

And so they would trust him and say, Okay, we'll do it. Remember the first time Peter was called to be a disciple. According to Luke chapter 5, it was because Jesus had been preaching in his boat.

And after he'd sent the crowds away, he said to Peter, Put your net in the water for a catch of fish. And Peter said, Well, Lord, you know, we've been fishing all night, and we haven't caught anything. But he said, At your word, I'll do it.

He knew it was Jesus. He respected Jesus. It seemed like an unrealistic suggestion, but hey, who's going to say no to the Master? And so Peter did it.

But on this occasion, he didn't know it was the Master. What a strange thing it must have seemed to think that a man on the shore would be able to see a shoal of fish in the water, that far out where the disciples couldn't see them. You might think that they would have just scoffed and done nothing in response to this suggestion.

But I guess they figured no one would make that suggestion unless he had reason to do so. And maybe they thought at the angle he was seeing, he could see there was some fishing over on that side of the boat that they were not able to see from the angle they

were looking. Whatever reason, they complied with the command.

And it says, So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of the fish. Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It's the Lord. Now, recognizing Jesus in this case was a matter of recognizing his characteristic actions.

This was not the first time they'd had a supernatural catch of fish. It was the second. And the first time surprised them as much as this time.

It was after an unproductive time of fishing. But now that they're following his instructions, they succeed. And John just sees the likeness.

He can't help but see. This is not just a miracle. This is another miracle of the type that Jesus did before.

And he recognizes in the characteristic providence here the Lord's hand. Now, it is desirable for us to be able to recognize God's activity in our lives. And a lot of times, although we know as a matter of doctrine that he's always present, and we probably don't have any doubts about that as a matter of theology, we often don't have any real sense that it is so.

I mean, we're not aware of working and acting and doing our duties and so forth under his gaze. Like I said, we may know it as a matter of theology, but knowing it by revelation is not always the case. And yet, there's many times when we see an answer to prayer so striking or a characteristic providence of Christ that we say, wow, that's the Lord.

I recognize it's like when Jacob had his dream and he woke up and said, wow, the Lord is in this place and I didn't know it. It's like we've been in the presence of God, but until he does something recognizable, since he is invisible, when he does something visible and recognizable, then his presence becomes something that we're more aware of. It's like a revelation of his presence with us.

And those times of recognition of his presence are the things that kind of spark enthusiasm in our walk with God, that we see his hand at work around us. Remember, Nehemiah and Ezra both were seeing the hand of God upon themselves in the amazing ways in which God opened doors for them, by giving them favor in the eyes of the king of Persia or doing other things. This is because the good hand of God was upon them.

They saw the hand of God in them. And we need to have our senses aroused to recognize the hand of God in situations that other people might not see them in. John was the first to recognize this is the hand of the Lord.

That's Jesus there. Don't you remember? This kind of thing happened before. It was Jesus

then, it's Jesus now.

That's the Lord. And when Peter heard that, and Peter must have been a little slower on the uptake because he didn't deduce that as quickly as John, but when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord from John, he put on his outer garment, for he had removed it, and he plunged into the sea. Now he's going to swim ashore, and normally you'd expect someone to take off some of their clothes if they're going to try to swim, rather than add clothing onto their body, because you don't want to encumber your arms and legs.

You're out in the middle of the lake, you don't want to drown, and to have soggy, heavy, wet clothing on you is not an advantage in swimming. And so some have thought that Peter was stripped down to maybe total nudity, working there in the boat. It was probably a hot evening.

It was, of course, early summer or late spring, and they were laboring hard, and it may be that there wasn't any stigma attached to people taking off their clothes when they were only around other guys and working like that. Or at least it is believed he was stripped down to his underwear so that he didn't feel presentable. And so he actually, even though it would encumber him more in swimming, he put his clothing on, put on his outer garment, because he was not in his present condition presentable, and he plunged into the sea, and the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about 200 cubits, so about 300 feet, about the length of a football field is how far they had to bring it in.

And they were dragging the net with the fish, so even though they were eager to see Jesus, they weren't eager to give up the fish either. It slowed them down. Peter didn't want to be slowed down, being impulsive as he always was, he just jumped into the water.

He could have just ridden in the boat with the others, but he wanted to get there first. Then as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. So Jesus had found some fish and bread.

Where he got the bread is hard to say. It's unlikely that he baked it there on the shore, and it's also not probable that he supernaturally turned rocks into bread or made bread materialize magically or miraculously. We don't know where he got the bread.

He may have walked into town and bought it, you know, in the marketplace. The resurrected Jesus, it's hard to say. This is left unexplained, where the bread came from.

The fish, we presume, came out of the sea. How Jesus got them, we don't know, but he might have just commanded them to come. You never know.

He had command over nature. But we have him with a regular breakfast, such as they might normally have, already hot and waiting for them, but not enough for all of them.

So he tells them to bring some fish of their own.

Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish which you have caught just now. So Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, 153. And although there were so many, the net was not broken.

Now, it was not the disciples that dragged the net to shore. It was Peter. Peter had not helped drag it to the shore.

The others had had to row the boat, pulling this heavy load against the strain of that resistance. He hadn't had any participation, so he let them rest, and he pulled the net all to shore. And they counted the fish.

It may be that they only counted them after all this story was over. Maybe even after Jesus disappeared, they may have gone back to the nets and counted. But we know the number.

Many people have tried to make some significance of the number, 153 fish. Jerome, for example, claimed that the Greeks had listed 153 nations of the earth, 153 ethnic nations, and that each fish represented one of them, so that as Peter and the others were called the fishers of men, it suggested that they would go to all nations, like they would bring in fish from every nation, one fish representing each one. However, it's not really clear that there ever really were 153 nations.

Jerome said so, but he cited a source which actually says there were 157. So he may have altered it just to fit the number of the fishes. It's hard to say.

In order to find some mystical significance in the number of fish that's given, people have come up with all kinds of ways of saying, well, if you take the square of 12 and the square of 3 and add them together, you come up with 153, or they come up with all kinds of things like that. But if it's that hard to find significance in the number, maybe there is no significance in the number. If you have to go to mathematical Bible codes and things like that to figure it out, then I have a suspicion it's artificial.

The number is no doubt given because it was an unusually large number of fish to pull up in one net, and they had counted them so they knew the number, so they gave the number. Not that the number itself had symbolic significance, it just gives us an impression of the size of the cat. 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. As I said in our previous session, that is one of the most peculiar sentences in the Gospel of John. They didn't dare to ask him who he was.

Certainly that wording suggests that they very much wanted to, but they didn't dare do so. Like, you know, he might scold them for asking who he was. But they did know it was

him.

But they kind of wanted to ask anyway. As I said in the previous lecture, I don't know what to make of this, except that I'm trying to put myself in their position. Seeing Jesus glorified, he might have actually looked a little different in some ways.

His characteristics, his face and so forth, might have had some differences about it. Although he still had the marks from his crucifixion, so he had the same body. It's just probable that it was just a surreal situation.

They could hardly believe that it was him. They knew it was, but they wanted to pinch themselves perhaps, or verify it somehow. But they didn't dare to ask.

And Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. And this is now the third time Jesus showed himself to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. Not if you take all the accounts.

It means, this is the third reference in this gospel. It says, to them, to his disciples. He had appeared to Mary, and then twice to the disciples.

And this is the third time to the disciples. The fourth time, if you include Mary. And obviously the writer is not including Mary, and therefore not including all occurrences.

It's not trying to tell us that he hadn't appeared yet to the two men on the road to Emmaus. Or that he had not appeared to James at this time. What it's telling us is that the gathered group of disciples, this is the third time now, that they've had occasion to see him.

So, when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter. Now, this section that we're about to read at the end is no doubt the reason for the addition of this chapter. Not just to give us another case of a miracle Jesus did.

But rather, to give us the significant conversation between Jesus and Peter. And, it does not tell us that they got up and walked and had a private conversation. But it would seem to be implied, because it says in verse 20, which is part of the same narrative.

Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following. So, apparently Jesus and Peter were in motion, because they were being followed. So, after breakfast, apparently Peter and Jesus got up and took a walk along the shore where this conversation took place.

And John stayed close by. Not necessarily to eavesdrop. But just not wanting to get far from Jesus, probably.

He probably stayed far enough away to give them their privacy. So, when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more



than these? And 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 the third time, Simon, son of Jonah, 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 all things.

You know that I love you. Jesus said to him, feed my sheep. This segment here is unusual in that John uses several sets of synonyms.

When he could use the same words in the positions. For example, three times Peter is asked if he loves Jesus. Twice the question uses the word *agape*, for love.

And the third time, the word *phileo*, for love, a different Greek word. Now these words do have some difference in nuance, but they are commonly used in John earlier interchangeably. They are synonyms.

They are different words for love, and it's true that in some context they do carry slightly different nuances from each other. But they are true synonyms for the word love. And we have the question asked three times, but twice using one word, and once using the other word.

When Peter is told to care for Jesus' sheep, there are two different words used there too. Feed and tend. Which are essentially synonyms also of what you do for sheep.

Also, he changes the word sheep to lambs on one occasion. Which are largely the same concept. Take care of my lambs, take care of my sheep.

And then also the word know is used twice. When Peter says, you know all things, you know that I love you, the word know is not the same. They are synonyms.

Two different Greek words for know are used. So here we have a segment where the same thing is being said three times. And yet there are at least four cases in it where the words change using synonyms for them.

And there is a tendency on many people's part to try to find the reason why he says lambs in one case and sheep in another case. Or why he says feed in one case and tend in another case. Or why know is one word the first time and know is a different word the second time.

I've never heard any convincing exposition of why these changes would be significant. However, there are lots of teachers who try to find significance in the change from *agape* to *phileo*. Because twice Jesus says, Peter do you *agape* me? Peter's answer every time

is phileo.

So Jesus says, do you agape me? And Peter says, I phileo you. Jesus said, do you agape me? Peter says, I phileo you. And then Jesus says, well do you phileo me? And that's when Peter was grieved that Jesus asked him, do you phileo me? And he said, Lord you know all things, you know I phileo you.

Phileo and agape, as I said, are synonyms. But agape is also a word that is used often, not in every context, of a more divine type of love. The love of God for us, the love of Christ for us, is said to be agape in the Greek.

And the love that Jesus commands us to have for each other is also agape. When Jesus said, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you, it's the word agape. Because of this, because the love of God for us and our love for God and for each other is said to be agape, it is often said that agape is a higher form of love than mere human love.

It is an unconditional love. It is eternal love. It is unflinching and indestructible love.

And yet phileo is another Greek word and it means family love. Love that you have for your brother or for a family member. It's affection.

And so, some have said that what Jesus is asking Peter the first two times is, do you have this selfless, self-giving love for me? And Peter can only say, I am fond of you. I have affection for you. And Peter is asked the same question twice and gives the same answer.

So, Jesus then modifies the question, well, are you fond of me? Do you have affection for me? And maybe even question whether that is true. This change from agape to phileo is a common theme when people preach on this passage to make it clear that there is a difference. However, in the Aramaic, which they were probably speaking, there may not be the same distinction as in the Greek.

And therefore, agape and phileo can both be Greek translations of the same Aramaic word. And we don't know whether the same Aramaic word was used throughout in the conversation, but John is simply using different Greek words as he does with sheep and lambs and tend and feed and know and know. That it would be more a matter of stylistic preference to not have too much recurrence of the same word in a short space.

Some translators actually are sensitive to that too, in that in the same Greek word in several places, they'll give different English words. In fact, in 1 John, there is a place where the same Greek word is used three times in one sentence or two sentences in one verse. And the King James translators have translated that word as continue, remain and abide.

Three different English words for the same Greek word in one verse, in 1 John. And that's just because sometimes translators feel like it's a little burdensome to just repeat the same word over and over again. So for stylistic reasons, they change it.

Peter may have used the same Aramaic word that Jesus used. We don't know. And that John, for stylistic reasons, may have chosen different Greek words.

And so this little pericope has all these instances of synonyms in it that need to be explained or not. Maybe they don't need to be explained. It may be that Jesus was using different Aramaic words than Peter was using.

We just don't know which words in Aramaic were being used. John, however, in translating this way, might have been intending to bring out such a difference that was intended. Even if Jesus and Peter used the same Aramaic words, John, in writing this, may have known by inspiration or simply by insight that when Jesus was asking the question the first two times, he meant it in a different way.

He meant something like agape. And when Peter answered, he meant it something like phileo. And so John used these different Greek words.

Agape, after all, would be a self-sacrificing love. Jesus said, Greater agape has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. Peter, in the upper room, had protested to Jesus that even if all the others forsook Jesus, he would not.

And he would be willing to lay his life down for him. He had protested that he had this kind of love for Jesus. And then when it came down to it, and he had occasion to really put his money where his mouth was, he backed down.

And he denied Jesus three times, showing that he did not quite have that kind of love for Jesus, as he had protested. What's more, Peter had said at that time, even if the others deny you, I won't. He had protested a superior loyalty to Jesus, superior to the other disciples.

So when Jesus asked the question the first time, he says, do you love me more than these? Apparently meaning more than these other disciples do. Now an alternate way of saying that question would be, do you love me more than these fish? People who think that Peter had kind of backslidden back to fishing again, which is, I think, an unfair assessment of the situation. But those who like to explain the story that way would say, Jesus is now saying, well, do you love these fish more than you love me? Or do you love me more than you love these? But I don't think that's the meaning of his statement.

I think he's asking, do you love me more than these other disciples do? After all, you once told me you do. And then you didn't. And it's interesting that there were three times that Jesus was denied by Peter.

And now there's three times he's given Peter the chance to give the right answer. He gave the wrong answer three times when people said, do you love Jesus? Are you one of his disciples? Do you love Jesus? No. Do you love Jesus? No.

Do you love Jesus? No, I don't even know the man. He had said three times. And now Jesus comes back to him and says, well, do you love me? And he affirmed all three times that he loved him, although it may possibly be that Peter was not able to bring himself to say, I agape you, knowing that he had once professed that kind of love for Jesus and then proven that he didn't have it after all.

So maybe he was ashamed to use the word agape in responding or a similar word in Aramaic. So that might be the reason why there are different Greek words used here that Jesus was pressing for. Do you agape me? You said you do.

You said you'd die for me. You said you love me more than these others do. Do you agape me more than they do? And Peter was ashamed, of course, and could only say, well, I'm fond of you.

You know, I love you, but it may be not like I should. And Jesus asked twice agape and only got the same answer. So Jesus says, well, do you phileo me? Do you love me in any sense? And Peter, despite his inability to use the word agape, did affirm that he loved Jesus.

And most scholars agree that this was Jesus giving him the opportunity to recover from his three denials. Because on an earlier occasion in the life of Jesus, recorded in the 10th chapter of Matthew, Jesus said, whoever denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father in heaven. And whoever confesses me before men, I will confess him before my Father in heaven.

Peter had denied Jesus before men. In a sense, he stood condemned as one whom Jesus should deny before the Father and therefore disown. Peter had disowned Jesus.

Jesus then should disown him. But Jesus seems to be giving him a chance to, as it were, redeem himself, to get it right this time. Let's go through that again.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could just go through some of those times again? When we look back and say where we did the wrong thing and think, boy, I wish I could just kind of set the clock back to before that happened and do it differently this time. Unfortunately, we don't have that opportunity very often. But it's like Jesus is doing essentially the same thing.

He says, let's set the calendar back a few days here. Three times you were asked if you love me and you gave the wrong answer. Let's try that again.

Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? And he did give the right answer. At

least he owned Jesus. He said he loved Jesus.

And he got it right. And each time, Jesus said, well, then feed my sheep or feed my lambs or tend my sheep, tend my lambs. In other words, he commissioned him to be a shepherd of God's people.

Now, when he first called him, he called him to be a fisher of men, which is evangelistic work. And now, adding to that duty, no doubt, is the shepherding, pastoral work of tending the church. Not just evangelizing the lost and bringing fish in, but also taking care of the flock.

Peter, as an apostle, had both the evangelistic and pastoral duties that all the apostles did. The Roman Catholics, of course, used this scripture to say that Jesus was making Peter the chief of the apostles. That the other apostles were the sheep, and he was made the shepherd.

And that Jesus was telling Peter, tend my sheep or feed my sheep. In other words, you be the overseer of all the other apostles. And so the Roman Catholics believed that Peter was the chief of the apostles.

And that's important to them because they believe that the popes in any generation are the successors to Peter and therefore the chief of all the bishops of the churches. But this is reading certainly more into this than is necessary. After all, Peter himself wrote to lesser leaders in the churches.

In 1 Peter 5, he wrote to the elders of the churches. Now every church had, or most of the churches, had elders. These were just the local officials.

They didn't have the rank of apostles. In 1 Peter 5, verse 1, Peter says, The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also the partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. He says then, Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers.

And he goes on and explains how that is to be done. But notice, Peter himself gives the same commission to the elders of the churches as Jesus gave to him. If Jesus' statements to Peter amount to placing him above all the other apostles, then would not the same words spoken to the elders amount to putting them above all the apostles? I mean, how is it that it would mean that in one case and not in the other? It seems clear that Peter is saying, I too am an elder.

You are elders and I'm an elder. Now, I also happen to be an apostle. But it is in the capacity of an elder that we have this duty to shepherd the sheep.

All elders must shepherd the flock. Peter has to do so too because he is also an elder. He's also a leader.

He's a very special leader in that he belongs to the apostolic company but he sees himself and his fellow elders, as he puts it, he says, I'm also a fellow elder. They're all, all Christian leaders are supposed to shepherd the flock. Therefore, Peter did not indicate that he was the unique shepherd of the flock.

Jesus is that. In fact, Peter even says that in the same passage because he says in verse 4, 1 Peter 5, 4, And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of glory that does not fade away. So, the elders and Peter are shepherds but there is a chief shepherd and he's not talking about himself.

Peter's not the chief shepherd. Jesus is the chief shepherd. All the others are just shepherds, including Peter.

So, when Jesus says to Peter, Feed or tend my sheep or my lambs, there's no reason to think that he's saying anything more to Peter than what Peter says to the elders in 1 Peter 5, verse 2. There is a chief shepherd, but it isn't Peter and Jesus is not making him a chief shepherd. He's just making him a shepherd. He's simply restoring him to the position that he and the other apostles had before in which the other apostles did not forfeit, but he did.

By denying Christ, he essentially was like Judas. He had defected. But Jesus restored him and recommissioned him and gave him authority with the other apostles and with all Christian leaders to shepherd the flock instead of just disowning him as Peter had disowned Jesus.

Then he makes this little prophetic statement to Peter, verse 18. 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.

It says, this he spoke signifying by what death Peter would glorify God. And when he had so spoken this, he said to him, follow me. Now, the tradition of the church is that Peter glorified God in his death by being crucified.

In fact, the story is told in some of the ancient writings, whether reliably or not, no one knows, that Peter was actually crucified upside down. As the story goes, he was condemned by Nero to be crucified as Jesus was. And Peter did not believe himself worthy to die in the manner that Jesus did and thought he should die worse.

And so Peter himself requested that he be crucified upside down. And his request was granted. This story about Peter being crucified upside down is often retold, but it's really found in an apocryphal gospel.

I think it's called the Acts of Peter or the Gospel of Peter. There's an apocryphal gospel from which that story comes. And most of the things in that gospel are not reliable.

Therefore, that story may not be either. However, it is no doubt reliable that Peter did die crucified, whether upside down or right side up, we don't know. And John, writing no doubt after Peter had died, and knowing how Peter had died, recognized in these sayings of Jesus to him a prediction of how Peter would die.

You know, the statement Jesus made to Peter is vague. If you did not have other information about how Peter died, you wouldn't see any obvious prediction of crucifixion here necessarily. True, he says, you will stretch out your hands, but he doesn't say which direction.

You might stretch out your hands to have handcuffs put on you or to be bound. He says people will bind you, they will gird you, they'll take you where you don't want to go. It doesn't say anything specific about crucifixion, but the wording was such, ambiguous enough, that once John, knowing the facts of how Peter had died, could look back and say, well, that's really alluded to by what Jesus said to him.

In any case, what Jesus is saying to him is, you were a man at your own liberty when you were younger. You chose your own profession. You had your own business.

You worked when you wanted to work. You went where you wanted to go. But that's not the case anymore.

As my disciple, you are not at your own liberty. You are now going to be a subject to other people's will, including those who will persecute you, including those who will take you where you don't want to go. Even if Peter didn't recognize this as a specific statement about his martyrdom, though John later recognized it as such, whether Peter did or not, he saw it as kind of undesirable.

It's kind of negative to have someone bind you and gird you and take you where you don't want to go. So Jesus is giving him sort of a negative, somewhat of a pessimistic view of how things may end up for Peter. But he said, nonetheless, follow me.

And then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, which tells us that disciple is one who also had leaned on his breast at the supper and said, Lord, who is it who will betray you? That was, I think, the first time we... Maybe it wasn't the first time, but it was one of the early times when we were introduced to John by this disciple whom Jesus loved. So we're told that this is that same disciple. Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, but Lord, what about this man? Now, Jesus had just made a prediction about Peter's future that was not... what should we say? Not pleasant, not encouraging.

Peter was going to have... He was going to be at the mercy of others who would do things to him and take him places where he didn't want to go. This is not sounding good. What about John? Is that going to happen to him too? Now, Peter and John were very close.

We find that they were apparently living together in Jerusalem when Mary Magdalene came and brought the report. They also were apparently the two disciples who earlier had gone and got the donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. They also, of course, were two of the three that we usually call the inner circle, Peter, James, and John, and they were on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus when the others were not.

They were in the house of Jairus when he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead when the others were not. They were the ones that Jesus took with him into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with him when the others were left at the gate. Peter, James, and John, as a group, were especially privileged to do some things and see some things with Jesus that others were not, but James is not included in some of the things where Peter and John act together, including them being the first males to appear at the tomb of Jesus after the resurrection.

Furthermore, in the Book of Acts, we see them still acting together. It is they together who are entering the temple in Acts 3 and cure the man who is lame, and they got arrested together, Peter and John. Likewise, apparently, in later stories in Acts, the two seem to be partners.

And so Peter and John have this partnership, and Peter's been told that bad things are going to happen to him, undesirable things are going to happen to him. And he wonders, is John, you know, my partner, is that going to happen to him too? Just curious. He may be implying, am I going to have it worse than him? If so, is that really fair? Is he going to have to suffer as much as I'm going to have to suffer? There may have been a little of that in the question.

But Jesus' answer was, if I will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me. Jesus gives each person his own commission. God has for each one their own destiny, their own lot, their own cross to bear.

And we will find at times there are others who seem to have it easier than we do. And it's really foolish to compare ourselves with others and say, well, it seems like someone else has an easier life than I have. Yeah, well, if we want to make comparisons, how about compare me to Richard Wurmbrand or to Brother Yun in China.

These men were tortured for years. If we want to make comparisons here, it's not a wise thing to do. It's not wise to compare yourself with other people because you can't.

You can't really know all that somebody else is going through. Much suffering is internal. Burdens that we bear, probably the most significant ones, are inside us.

Therefore, if I have external burdens and someone else does not appear to have external burdens, it's not wise or safe for me to assume that I'm suffering more than they are.



They may be suffering more than I am in ways that are not communicated to me. And they may get less sympathy than I do because no one can see what they're going through nor sympathize with them.

And people can see what I go through and they sympathize with me. Maybe I've got it easier in that way too. Maybe I'm more privileged to have external burdens than the internal ones.

I don't know. Not that I don't have internal ones too. The point is, it just is a fool's errand to try to say, well, is my situation like this other person's situation? No, because I'm not like them.

Everything from my birth to my present day has been different than their life from their birth to this present day. Different circumstances of birth, different upbringing, different family, different trials, different gifts, different challenges. Everything's different.

It's a foolish thing to think that everyone should have the same destiny and should have the same lot in life. Everything that each of us has is the thing that God has designed for us because it's suited to us and His purpose for us. And Peter apparently was wondering, you know, well, I've heard something about what's going to happen to me.

Let's hear what's going to happen to John now. And Jesus said, that's none of your business, is it? That's just not your concern. He didn't say what would happen to John.

He just said, that's not for you to be concerned about. You'd be concerned about one thing and that's what I've told you to do. And probably one of the biggest mistakes that Christians make that make them bitter or that make them unproductive or that in some other way impede their spiritual progress or productivity is comparing themselves with others and saying, are they doing as much as I'm doing? You know, why am I asked to carry this load and this other person doesn't seem to have it? How come these people aren't helping out? How come I'm doing all the work around here? Well, that's between them and God.

And what you're doing is between you and God. The question is not, is anyone else doing the same thing or as much as you're doing? The question is, are you doing what you're supposed to be doing? That's all that you need to be concerned about. Nothing else.

Are you doing what God has given you to do? That's all you need to worry about. The day will come when God settles all the scores, will reward and punish and do all those things. That's not your jurisdiction.

That's not your providence. That's not for you to be even distracted by. And so he said, what if I want him to stay alive until I come? What is that to you? Now the suggestion here is that Peter will not stay alive until Jesus comes.

Basically, Jesus is saying, what if John's lot is different than yours? What if he does in fact survive until I come back? And you don't. Is that something you want to lodge a complaint about that? You want to protest that? Or why don't you just not think about that? And just think about what I've told you is my will for you. That's what you need to be concerned about.

Just follow me. You follow me and you won't have to pay attention to how well or in what circumstances others are following me. That's what he's saying to Peter.

Now, the way Jesus worded that led to a misunderstanding in the early church. And John tells us about that. No doubt, what John next tells us actually provides the reason why this chapter was added.

This chapter seems to be added in order to tell us two important things that we would not have gotten without it. One is this Peter who denied Jesus three times, which is on record, also had by the direct action of Jesus been restored to a shepherding role in the church. If not for the knowledge of that, there might have been many Christians in the early church who said, well, who do I care what Peter says? I don't respect him.

He denied the Lord three times. And this chapter is added to help us restore our confidence that we should recognize the apostleship of Peter and respect his leadership. That would especially be important in the early generations of the church.

But it is at all times, of course. But then there's this other thing. In the early church, the words that Jesus said to Peter about John came to be misunderstood and circulated in a modified form so that people began to think that Jesus had predicted His coming would be before the death of John.

That's what we read here. Verse 23, Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Now the writer says, Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die.

But if I will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? So he restates it exactly how Jesus said it. You see, there is no actual prediction here. He said, if it is my will, it's hypothetical that he live until I come.

What is that to you? The writer is saying Jesus did not predict that John would live until Jesus comes. He wrote this to say, No, he did not say that. He did not say that John would live until he comes.

And obviously John has not lived until then. I've actually had people call me on the radio and ask me based on this, Do you think John is still alive somewhere in the world today? Because Jesus hasn't come yet. Do you suppose somewhere in hiding, waiting to be revealed in the end times that John may still be alive? Because Jesus said this.

I think, why don't you read what it says? It does not say that John will not die. It's like, that rumor was going around, John says. And he corrects it.

And yet, despite the correction, people still read it wrong and get the wrong impressions from it. I guess there is no end to the possibilities of people misunderstanding things that are made very clear. But it would appear that one reason this 21st chapter was added to John was because perhaps after the first 20 chapters had been written, and it might have been considered a complete work, it became perhaps some short time later clear that there were misunderstandings circulating in the church about what Jesus had said on this occasion to Peter about John.

Therefore, it was thought necessary to add this chapter to kind of clear that up. To basically set the scene, set the stage of where that comment was made, what the context was, and what the actual statement was, and what it was not. And so, this clarification in verse 23 is probably giving us the reason why this whole chapter was added to the book.

Then verse 24, this is the disciple who testifies of these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. Now, who's we? It keeps talking about this disciple. He's been mentioned many times in the book.

And he probably was mentioned as early as chapter 1 when two disciples of John the Baptist heard John speak about Jesus and followed Jesus, and one of them was Andrew, but the other was unnamed. In all likelihood, the other one was John. And we've had these many anonymous references to John, that other disciple, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

And now we're talking about him again here in this chapter. And the close of the book is this is the disciple that wrote these things and testified of these things. And we know his testimony is true.

Well, who's we? It seems obvious that the book has come down to us preserved by a group of people. And most would assume that they would be the leaders of the church in Ephesus where John spent his final years. After John was on Patmos and wrote the book of Revelation, tradition says that he was released from that imprisonment by the emperor Nerva, and he went and spent his final years in the city of Ephesus.

And in that city, you may remember hearing the story how even when he was very old and decrepit and could hardly sit up, they'd actually bring him into every church service on a pallet. And they'd say, Brother John, do you have any word for the church? And he'd kind of get up on one elbow and stick his other finger in the air and say, Love one another! And then he'd collapse down and they'd take him on out again. He was so weak he could hardly sit up but he would always have the same exhortation.

That's how some of the church fathers have recorded the final years of John in Ephesus. And if indeed he died in Ephesus in peace, an old man, then he did die differently than Peter did. And differently from all the apostles.

All the other apostles died violently as martyrs. John seems to have been the only one who died peaceably. But he didn't live to see Jesus come back.

By the way, there is a tradition also about him that he was condemned to die a martyr and that he was dipped in boiling oil which was a way to kill a man, obviously, but it didn't kill him. In fact, it didn't even burn him, it would seem. And because he was not burned, he was then banished to the island of Patmos instead.

The story could be true. Something similar happened to one of John's own disciples, a man named Polycarp. Polycarp was a disciple of John and he was sent to be burned at the stake and the fires wouldn't touch him until they killed him with a spear and then he died and then the fires burned his body.

But he was put at a stake and fires were built around him and the fires leaped around him but wouldn't touch his body. And this is verified by the witnesses of the church of Smyrna where he was bishop. And in the famous early document, the martyrdom of Polycarp.

And Polycarp was a disciple of John. It may be that John had a similar experience. He was dipped in boiling oil and the oil wouldn't touch him, wouldn't burn him.

In any case, John would be willing to be a martyr and it's not his fault if he didn't die that way. But if he died peaceably in the city of Ephesus then it's very possible that the leaders of the church there are the ones who preserved his memoirs. He wrote them but they collected them.

Or maybe he didn't even write them with his hand. He may have dictated them. After all, we say Paul wrote Romans but he didn't write it with his own hand.

A man named Tertius wrote the book of Romans and he says so. In the greetings in the end of Romans after Paul says greet so and so, greet so and so, greet so and so, apparently Paul took a break and we see this verse, I Tertius who wrote this letter also greet you. So, a man named Tertius wrote the book of Romans.

Paul dictated it so he wrote it through an Emanuelis. These men may be the ones who actually wrote down John's memoirs at his dictation and they, like Tertius adding his own name and his own greetings at the end of Romans, these men add their own endorsements saying now this disciple is the one who is the witness to these things. He's the author of this book and we, we who have collected his writings or who have taken down dictation or we who have preserved what he said, we want to put our stamp of approval.

We can say we know he's telling the truth. Now, how would they know that he's telling the truth? They weren't there to see these things happen but what they're saying is we can give him a character reference. We know this man.

We know this man is not a liar. He's an apostle for one thing and we know that his testimony is reliable and so we just want to give him a character reference here so that you'll be even more inclined to believe him than you might otherwise have been. And there are also many other things that Jesus did which if they were written one by one I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Now this is the only I in the book. I suppose. The author who's writing it actually kind of tips his hand a little bit that he's actually there.

Of course you know that somebody's writing it but he never mentions himself previously. We have the we of the previous verse. We know that his testimony is true and if John is the writer he's always referred to himself in the third person.

The disciple, the other disciple, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Never I. But now at the very end whoever is writing the actual final draft says I suppose that it would be impossible to write down everything Jesus did and said and for the world to contain the books of those writings. And thus we have the incomplete story of Jesus.

Incomplete partly because no one could tell the complete story without occupying too much paper and ink and too much space in the universe for the books. Also incomplete because it's not over because as the book of Acts shows Jesus kept on doing the same things again after he went to heaven. He just did them through his new body, the church.

And so the story of Jesus doesn't ever end at the end of the gospels. It has not ended yet. It continues in the book of Acts.

It continues beyond the book of Acts. It continues even as we speak. Jesus through his body is still working miracles.

Still giving life to those who believe in him. Still present with his people. His spirit is still with us.

So that is why we still have life that John testifies of. He says these things are written so that you might believe and you might have life through believing. And so we do because we have Jesus in this life is in God's Son.

He that has the Son has life.