

JOHN 21 | Jesus' Charge to Peter

Sea of Tiberius Encounter

1 After this Jesus revealed (φανερῶω, aor.) himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias,¹ and he revealed himself in this way.² 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.³ 3 Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing. They said to him, We will go with you.⁴ They went out and got into the boat,⁵ but that night⁶ they caught nothing. 4 Just as day was breaking,⁷ Jesus stood on the shore.⁸ Yet the disciples did not recognise⁹ that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, Mates (Παιδιά),¹⁰ do you have any fish?¹¹ They answered him, No. 6 He said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.¹² So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.¹³ 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved¹⁴ therefore said to Peter, It is the Lord!¹⁵ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw

¹ The traditional location for this scene is Tabgha. Tiberius was the sitting Roman emperor.

² Jesus determined the time, place, and manner of his resurrection appearances. Jesus had instructed the disciples to meet him in Galilee (Mt 28:7; Mk 14:28; 16:7). This encounter likely took place after Jesus' appearance to Thomas in the upper room (Jn 20:26-29) but before the first world missions conference (Mt 28:16-20), with more than 500 attending (1 Co 15:6). The disciples were shiftless and waiting around the Sea of Galilee. They were wondering when Jesus would show up. Peter thought they should fill time by fishing.

³ Similar to Jn 1:35-51. There were a total of seven disciples present.

⁴ Peter is the natural leader of the disciples. The other disciple are happy to acknowledge his leadership.

⁵ It was likely the same boat as Lk 5:3. **Lk 5:3** 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁶ Night was a usual time for fishing.

⁷ **Jn 8:12** 12 ...I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. **Jn 9:5** 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

⁸ We are not told how Jesus got from Jerusalem to the Sea of Tiberius.

⁹ Are we ready to recognise Jesus when he shows up? Are we eagerly expecting him to show up? Will we recognise him when he comes?

¹⁰ In Jn 15:15, Jesus called the disciples friends. In Jn 20:17, he called them brothers. Now he calls them children. "[A]s a form of familiar address on the part of a respected pers., who feels himself on terms of fatherly intimacy w. those whom he addresses" (*BDAG*, 749). This was a "common term of address to men at work" (Dods, 1:868).

¹¹ Jesus already knew the answer to his question. He wanted the disciples to admit their futility.

¹² From port to starboard. **Lk 5:4-6** 4 ...[Jesus] said to Simon, Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. 5 And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets. 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.

¹³ See Lk 5:1-11. This is the last recorded miracle of Jesus, and the only one recorded after his resurrection (T. Constable, 538). Obedience to Jesus was the key to the disciples' supernatural success (T. Constable, 539). This scene reminds of an earlier scene in *John* at the Sea of Tiberius (Jn 6:1, 11).

¹⁴ John is the disciple whom Jesus loved, and Peter is the disciple who loves Jesus.

¹⁵ When God grants success to our evangelistic labours, may we be quick to say, "It is the Lord!"

himself into the sea.¹⁶ 8 The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish,¹⁷ for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.¹⁸ 9 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire¹⁹ in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread.²⁰ 10 Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish that you have just caught. 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish (ἰχθύς), 153²¹ of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.²² 12 Jesus said to them, Come and have breakfast.²³ Now none of the disciples dared ask him, Who are you? They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish.²⁴ 14 This was now the third time²⁵ that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Peter Reinstated to Leadership

15 When they had finished breakfast,²⁶ Jesus said to Simon Peter,²⁷ Simon, son of John,²⁸ do you love (ἀγαπάω) me more than these?²⁹ He said to him, Yes, Lord. You know that I love

¹⁶ True to character, John shows insight and Peter shows action.

¹⁷ Sometimes we have to rush to Jesus and let others do the work.

¹⁸ The many details of this account show it must have come from an eyewitness.

¹⁹ Peter denied Jesus three times around a charcoal fire. **Jn 18:18** Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

²⁰ **Jn 6:9** 9 There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many? **Mk 10:45** 45 ...Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.... The fish and bread are a peace offering.

²¹ Why this detail? Perhaps it was the number of known nations in the world at that time. Or perhaps John recorded the number as evidence it is eyewitness testimony. Professional fisherman kept track of how many fish they caught.

²² God will empower the apostles to catch a multitude of men, women, and children, yet their “nets” won’t break.

²³ Jesus issues three invitations in John: “Come and see” (Jn 1:39), “Come and drink” (Jn 7:37), and “Come and eat” (Jn 21:12).

²⁴ Caring for physical needs prepares the way to care for spiritual needs (W. Wiersbe, 1:397).

²⁵ The three appearances *John* describes prove the eighth sign of *John*, Jesus’ resurrection. “Chronologically this was at least Jesus’ seventh post-resurrection appearance (cf. 20:11-18; Matt. 28:8-10; 1 Cor. 15:5; Luke 24:13-32; John 20:19-23, 26-29). Nevertheless it was the third appearance to the disciples, and the third appearance to the disciples that John recorded” (T. Constable, 543).

²⁶ Educating followed eating, as in the upper room (Jn 13-17)(T. Constable, 544).

²⁷ Peter represented all the disciples in this encounter, because he was their leader.

²⁸ Jesus addressed Peter in this way only on very special occasions (Jn 1:42; Mt 16:17; Mk 14:37).

²⁹ Peter’s love is to be compared with the other disciples? Earlier Peter had claimed his love for Jesus was greater than that of the other disciples’ (Mt 26:33; Mk 14:29; Lk 22:33).

(φιλέω)³⁰ you. He said to him, Feed (βόσκω, pres.) my sheep (ἀρνίον).³¹ 16 He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love (ἀγαπάω) me?³² He said to him, Yes, Lord. You know that I love (φιλέω) you. He said to him, Shepherd (ποιμαίνω, pres.) my sheep (πρόβατον). 17 He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love (φιλέω) me?³³ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Do you love (φιλέω) me? and he said to him, Lord, you know everything.³⁴ You know (γινώσκω, pres.) that I love (φιλέω, pres.) you.³⁵ Jesus said to him,

Feed (βόσκω, pres.) my sheep (πρόβατον).³⁶ 18 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.³⁷

19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify (δοξάζω, fut.) God.)³⁸ And after saying this he said to him, Keep following (ἀκολουθέω, pres.) me.³⁹

³⁰ Most scholars recognise ἀγαπάω is a somewhat stronger love than φιλέω. Peter does not claim complete devotion to Jesus. His denial of Jesus had humbled him.

³¹ See *God as Shepherd, Apostles, Elders, and Disciple Making*. Jesus earlier called Peter to be a fisherman (Mt 4:19). Now he calls him to be a shepherd. But they are Jesus's sheep, not Peter's sheep. Are we ready to go to work for Jesus as fishermen and shepherds? How many excellent fisherman and shepherds can our church produce in the next 30 years? As disciple makers, we show our love for Jesus by feeding his sheep (believers and disciples).

³² This time there is no comparison.

³³ Jesus' three questions are slightly different from one another. Now he uses Peter's term for love.

³⁴ Like Peter, we are to recognise Jesus knows everything about us, past, present, and future, especially the attitude of our heart towards him.

³⁵ Peter's threefold profession of love counteracts his previous threefold denial (Jn 18:17, 25, 27).

³⁶ In this way Jesus restores Peter to his position of leadership among the disciples. It is only those who truly love Jesus who are qualified to shepherd Jesus' sheep (A. W. Pink, 3:325-26). Peter is to be Jesus' under-shepherd and is key in founding Jesus' church, but he is not be a "pope" in the way we understand it today. **Mt 16:16-18** 16 Simon Peter replied, You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. 17 And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock [the Great Confession] I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

³⁷ As disciples makers of Jesus in a hostile world, we must expect a gradual loss of religious freedom—to share the gospel, meet publicly, voice biblical truth in public, or to assert absolute moral statements in ethics.

³⁸ Peter was martyred in Rome in 64 ad, when Nero was the Roman emperor. Jesus is letting him know he will die himself by crucifixion (Jn 12:33, 18:32, 1 Pe 4:16). At the time of writing (85-90 ad), Peter's death would have occurred 20 years previously. Peter certainly does love Jesus. Is our love for Jesus such that we would be willing to die by crucifixion for him. **Jn 12:32-33** 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. 33 He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. **Jn 18:31-32** 31 Pilate said to them, Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law The Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death. 32 This was to fulfil the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. **1 Pe 5:13** 13 She who is at Babylon [Rome], who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son

³⁹ Disciple makers are to keep following Jesus, all the way to death, if necessary. As disciple makers, we are to send off our fully trained disciples with an exhortation to keep following us as we keep following Jesus.

John's Death and Jesus' Second Coming

20 Peter turned and saw the disciple [John] whom Jesus loved (ἀγαπάω, imperf.)⁴⁰ following (ἀκολουθέω, pres.) them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, Lord, who is it that is going to deliver you?⁴¹ 21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man?⁴² 22 Jesus said to him, If it is my desire (θέλω) that he remain until I come,⁴³ what is that to you? You keep following (ἀκολουθέω, pres.) me! 23 So the saying spread abroad among the brothers and sisters that this disciple was not to die.⁴⁴ Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die but, If it is my desire that he remain until I come, what is that to you?⁴⁵ 24 This is the disciple who is testifying⁴⁶ about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.⁴⁷

Jesus' Amazing Life

25 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 scrolls (βιβλία) that would be written.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Peter is the disciple who loves Jesus. John is the disciple whom Jesus loves.

⁴¹ **Jn 13:25** 25 So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, Lord, who is it?

⁴² If we concern ourselves with how other disciples are following Jesus, we ourselves will stop following Jesus.

⁴³ See *Jesus' Second Coming*.

⁴⁴ This rumour persisted because John was still alive.

⁴⁵ If and when John dies, it won't mean that Jesus is not coming back.

⁴⁶ See *Witness Testimony*.

⁴⁷ See *Truth*. John passes the witness reliability test. See below.

⁴⁸ This is a colophon, a finishing stroke and crowning touch to the gospel. Jesus was, after all, the Word become flesh (Jn 1:14). **1 Jn 1:1-3** 1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Messiah.

Biblical Worldview

1. John at a Glance.

2. John 21.

- a. John 20 is about believing in Jesus as a believer. John 21 is about following Jesus as a disciple maker.

3. Sea of Tiberius Encounter (Jn 21:1-14).

- a. Do we want Jesus to reveal himself to us (v. 1)? Jesus gets to choose when he will reveal himself to us, but we have to want it. And when he reveals himself, he's got a lesson to teach us.
 - (1) After his resurrection, Jesus revealed himself only to a select group of people.
 - (a) Ac 10.
- b. The disciples are at the Sea of Tiberius (v. 1), just as they were earlier:
 - (1) Matthew 4
 - (2) Luke 5
 - (3) John 6
- c. The now-believing Thomas (v. 2) is right where he should be—with six other disciples waiting for Jesus to show up.
- d. Luke 5 and John 21 bookend Peter's experience with Jesus during Jesus' first coming.
- e. Without Jesus, Peter and the disciples cannot catch fish. With him, they can catch many.
 - (1) **Jn 15:5** I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that produces much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.
- f. Contrast Peter here with Peter in Acts 2.

4. Peter Reinstated to Leadership (Jn 21:15-19).

- a. Peter's huge spiritual failure does not permanently end his disciple making career.
 - (1) **Ac 1:15** 15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said....
- b. Peter is to show his love for Jesus by feeding and shepherding Jesus' sheep.
 - (1) **1 Pe 5:1-4** 1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a co-elder (συμπρεσβύτερος) and a witness of the sufferings of Messiah, as well as a partner (κοινωνός) in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd (ποιμαίνω, aor.) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples (τύπος) to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
- c. Feeding and shepherding Jesus' sheep is how Peter is to "follow" Jesus.
 - (1) **Jn 12:25-26** 25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him.
- d. This will require Peter's consecration: dedication, obedience, and sacrifice.
 - (1) See Disciple Making.

- (2) Are you willing to consecrate yourself to someone you cannot see and with whom you have never personally spoken?
- e. Peter's following Jesus and shepherding his sheep will come at great personal cost.
- (1) Peter's martyrdom is attested by:
- (a) Clement of Rome (c. 96 ad).
- 1) "But that we may cease from the ancient examples, let us come to those who became athletes near *to our own time*; let us take the noble examples from our generation. Because of jealousy and envy, the greatest and most righteous pillars of the church were persecuted and they competed until death. Let us set before our eyes the good apostles: Peter, who because of unrighteous jealousy, not once or twice but many times endured hardship and thus having given his testimony he went to the place of glory he deserved" (*1 Clement* 5.1-4).
- (b) Ignatius of Antioch ([]).
- 1) "I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul: they were apostles, I am a convict; they were free, but I am even now still a slave. But if I suffer, I will be a freedman of Jesus Christ, and will rise up free in him. In the meantime, as a prisoner I am learning to desire nothing" (*Letter to the Romans* 4.3).
- (c) Irenaeus of Lyons ([]).
- 1) "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia" (*Against Heresies* 3.1-3).
- (d) Eusebius of Caesarea ([]).
- 1) "And that they both suffered martyrdom at the same time is stated by Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, in his epistle to the Romans, in the following words: 'You have thus by such an admonition bound together the planting of Peter and of Paul at Rome and Corinth. For both of them planted and likewise taught us in our Corinth. And they taught together in like manner in Italy, and suffered martyrdom at the same time.' I have quoted these things in order that the truth of the history might be still more confirmed" (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.25.8).
- 2) "Peter appears to have preached in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia to the Jews of the dispersion. And at last, having come to Rome, he was crucified head-downwards; for he had requested that he might suffer in this way. What do we need to say concerning Paul, who preached the Gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and afterwards suffered martyrdom in Rome under Nero? These facts are related by Origen in the third volume of his Commentary on Genesis" (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.1.2).
- (e) Tertullian.

- 1) “We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then does Paul obtain a birth suited to Roman citizenship, when in Rome he springs to life again ennobled by martyrdom” (*Scorpiace* 15).
 - 2) “The story in the *Acts of Peter* of his martyrdom by crucifixion (*cf.* Jn. 21:18ff.) head downwards cannot be accepted as reliable, but this work may preserve some valid traditions” (A. F. Walls, *New Bible Dictionary*, 907).
- f. The cost will be worth it.
- (1) **Mt 19:27-30** 27 Then Peter said in reply, See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have? 28 Jesus said to them, Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

5. John’s Life Expectancy (Jn 21:20-24).

- a. John’s gospel passes the reliable witness testimony test:
 - (1) John was there.
 - (2) John story is corroborated.
 - (a) Every New Testament book, especially the other three gospels, confirm the general account of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.
 - (b) There are four minimal facts all historians agree upon.
 - 1) Jesus died.
 - 2) Jesus’ tomb was empty.
 - 3) Jesus’ disciples’ believed they saw Jesus risen from the dead.
 - 4) Jesus’ disciples were afterwards transformed.
 - (3) John didn’t change his story over time.
 - (a) John writes *John* in 85-90 ad. His story never changed.
 - (4) John had nothing to gain from lying.
 - (a) He did not gain money, sex, or power.
 - (b) He lost his brother James in 44 ad by Herod Agrippa I (Ac 12:2).
 - (c) He lost all his close friends, the other apostles, to martyrdom.

6. Colophon: Jesus’ Amazing Life (Jn 21:25).

- a. “At the beginning of the story we stand in the presence of the bewildering eternities, and at the close we are thus brought in amazement to a recognition of the infinitudes which have been condensed in the life and activities of a Person on whom we may look, to whom we may listen, and yet who forever defies any to say all that is to be said concerning Him” (Morgan, *An Exposition...*, 449).

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