

**John 21**  
**February 8, 2026**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: If you were Peter, what would be hardest about seeing Jesus again after denying Him? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** We should take great encouragement from today's text. In spite of Peter's faults and failures, Jesus *restores* Peter and commissions him into a shepherd type role. And we will learn that Peter did indeed love the Lord, and he was not ashamed to admit it. The other disciples were certainly listening and benefiting from the conversation, for they too had failed the Lord after boasting of their devotion. Peter had already confessed his sin and been forgiven. Now he was being restored to apostleship and leadership. I think we can all agree and confess that we have failed Jesus at different times throughout our life. Let's take heart that Jesus is not trying to "replace" us when we fail, but rather *restore* us! Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

**Jesus and the Miraculous Catch of Fish**

21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias (Sea of Galilee). It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> He called out to them, "**Friends, haven't you any fish?**"

"No," they answered.

<sup>6</sup> He said, "**Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.**" When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

<sup>7</sup> Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "**It is the Lord!**" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "**Bring some of the fish you have just caught.**"

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

**Jesus Reinstates Peter**

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "**Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?**"

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “**Feed my lambs.**”

<sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, “**Simon son of John, do you truly love me?**”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “**Take care of my sheep.**”

<sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, “**Simon son of John, do you love me?**”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “**Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.**” <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “**Follow me!**”

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, “**If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.**” <sup>23</sup> Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “**If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?**”

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

<sup>25</sup> Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

Failure does not disqualify you from calling. Peter’s denial is not the end of his story. Jesus restores, not replaces, those who fail. Your worst moment does not cancel God’s purpose. Restoration often comes through honest conversation with Jesus.

### **Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

***Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 396-400). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.***

### **TRANSFORMED TO SERVE - John 21**

The average reader would conclude that John completed his book with the dramatic testimony of Thomas (John 20:28–31), and the reader would wonder why John added another chapter. The main reason is the Apostle Peter, John's close associate in ministry (Acts 3:1). John did not want to end his Gospel without telling his readers that Peter was restored to his apostleship. Apart from the information in this chapter, we would wonder why Peter was so prominent in the first twelve chapters of the Book of Acts.

John had another purpose in mind: he wanted to refute the foolish rumor that had spread among the believers that John would live until the return of the Lord (John 21:23). John made it clear that our Lord's words had been greatly misunderstood.

I think John may have had another purpose in mind: he wanted to teach us how to relate to the risen Christ. During the forty days between His resurrection and ascension, our Lord appeared and disappeared at will, visiting with the disciples and preparing them for the coming of the Spirit and their future ministries (Acts 1:1–9). They never knew when He would appear, so they had to stay alert! (The fact that He may return for His people *today* ought to keep us on our toes!) It was an important time for the disciples because they were about to take His place in the world and begin to carry the message to others.

I see in this chapter three pictures of the believer and a responsibility attached to each picture.

#### **We Are Fishers of Men—Obey Him (John 21:1–8)**

The Lord had instructed His disciples to meet Him in Galilee, which helps to explain why they were at the Sea of Galilee, or Sea of Tiberias (Matt. 26:32; 28:7–10; Mark 16:7). But John did not explain why Peter decided to go fishing, and Bible students are not in agreement in their suggestions. Some claim that he was perfectly within his rights, that he needed to pay his bills and the best way to get money was to go fishing. Why sit around idle? Get busy!

Others believe that Peter had been called *from* that kind of life (Luke 5:1–11) and that it was wrong for him to return. Furthermore, when he went fishing, Peter took six other men with him! If he was wrong, they were wrong too; and it is a sad thing when a believer leads others astray. By the way, it is interesting that at least seven of the twelve disciples were probably fishermen. Why did Jesus call so many fishermen to follow Him? For one thing, fishermen are courageous, and Jesus needs brave people to follow Him. They are also dedicated to one thing and cannot easily be distracted. Fishermen do not quit! (We are thinking, of course, of professional fishermen, not idle people on vacation!) They know how to take orders, and they know how to work together.

Whether Peter and his friends were right or wrong we cannot prove—though I personally think that they were wrong—but we do know this: their efforts were in vain. Had they forgotten the

Lord's words, "For without Me, ye can do nothing"? (John 15:5) They toiled all night and caught nothing. Certainly, Peter must have remembered what happened two years before, when Jesus called him into full-time discipleship (Luke 5:1–11). On that occasion, Peter had fished all night and caught nothing, but Jesus had turned his failure into success.

Perhaps Peter's impulsiveness and self-confidence were revealing themselves again. He was sincere, and he worked hard, but there were no results. How like some believers in the service of the Lord! They sincerely believe that they are doing God's will, but their labors are in vain. They are serving without direction from the Lord, so they cannot expect blessing from the Lord. After His resurrection, our Lord was sometimes not recognized (Luke 24:16; John 20:14); so it was that His disciples did not recognize Him when, at dawning, He appeared on the shore. His question expected a negative reply: "You have not caught anything to eat, have you?" Their reply was brief and perhaps a bit embarrassed: "No."

It was time for Jesus to take over the situation, just as He did when He called Peter into discipleship. He told them where to cast the net; they obeyed, and they caught 153 fish! The difference between success and failure was the width of the ship! We are never far from success when we permit Jesus to give the orders, and we are usually closer to success than we realize. It was John who first realized that the stranger on the shore was their own Lord and Master. It was John who leaned on the Lord's breast at the table (John 13:23) and who stood by the cross when his Lord suffered and died (John 19:26). It is love that recognizes the Lord and shares that good news with others: "It is the Lord!"

With characteristic impulsiveness, Peter quickly put on his outer garment ("naked" simply means "stripped for work") and dove into the water! He wanted to get to Jesus! This is in contrast to Luke 5:8 where Peter told the Lord to depart from him. The other six men followed in the boat, bringing the net full of fish. In the experience recorded in Luke 5, the nets began to break; but in this experience, the net held fast.

Perhaps we can see in these two "fishing miracles" an illustration of how the Lord helps His people fish for lost souls. All of our efforts are useless apart from His direction and blessing. During this present age, we do not know how many fish we have caught, and it often appears that the nets are breaking! But at the end of the age, when we see the Lord, not one fish will be lost and we will discover how many there are.

Jesus called the disciples and us to be "fishers of men." This phrase was not invented by Jesus; it had been used for years by Greek and Roman teachers. To be a "fisher of men" in that day meant to seek to persuade men and "catch" them with the truth. A fisherman catches living fish, but when he gets them, they die. A Christian witness seeks to catch "dead fish" (dead in their sins), and when he or she "catches" them, they are made alive in Christ!

Now we can understand why Jesus had so many fishermen in the disciple band. Fishermen know how to work. They have courage and faith to go out "into the deep." They have much patience and persistence, and they will not quit. They know how to cooperate with one another, and they are skilled in using the equipment and the boat. What examples for us to follow as we seek to "catch fish" for Jesus Christ!

We are indeed “fishers of men,” and there are “fish” all around us. If we obey His directions, we will catch the fish.

### **We Are Shepherds—Love Him (John 21:9–18)**

Jesus met His disciples on the beach where He had already prepared breakfast for them. This entire scene must have stirred Peter’s memory and touched his conscience. Surely he was recalling that first catch of fish (Luke 5:1–11) and perhaps even the feeding of the 5,000 with bread and fish (John 6). It was at the close of the latter event that Peter had given his clear-cut witness of faith in Jesus Christ (John 6:66–71). The “fire of coals” would certainly remind him of the fire at which he denied the Lord (John 18:18). It is good for us to remember the past; we may have something to confess.

Three “invitations” stand out in John’s Gospel: “Come and see” (John 1:39); “Come and drink” (John 7:37); and “Come and dine” (John 21:12). How loving of Jesus to feed Peter before He dealt with his spiritual needs. He gave Peter opportunity to dry off, get warm, satisfy his hunger, and enjoy personal fellowship. This is a good example for us to follow as we care for God’s people. Certainly the spiritual is more important than the physical, but caring for the physical can prepare the way for spiritual ministry. Our Lord does not so emphasize “the soul” that He neglects the body.

Peter and his Lord had already met privately and no doubt taken care of Peter’s sins (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), but since Peter had denied the Lord *publicly*, it was important that there be a public restoration. Sin should be dealt with only to the extent that it is known. Private sins should be confessed in private, public sins in public. Since Peter had denied his Lord three times, Jesus asked him three personal questions. He also encouraged him by giving a threefold commission that restored Peter to his ministry.

The key issue is Peter’s love for the Lord Jesus, and that should be a key matter with us today. But what did the Lord mean by “more than these”? Was He asking, “Do you love Me more than you love these other men?” Not likely, because this had never been a problem among the disciples. They all loved the Lord Jesus supremely, even though they did not always obey Him completely. Perhaps Jesus meant, “Do you love Me more than you love these boats and nets and fish?” Again, this is not likely, for there is no evidence that Peter ever desired to go back permanently into the fishing business. Fishing did not seem to compete with the Saviour’s love.

The question probably meant, “Do you love Me—as you claimed—more than these other disciples love Me?” Peter had boasted of his love for Christ and had even contrasted it with that of the other men. “I will lay down my life for Thy sake!” (John 13:37) “Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended!” (Matt. 26:33) There is more than a hint in these boastful statements that Peter believed that he loved the Lord more than did the other disciples.

Many commentaries point out that, in this conversation, two different words are used for “love.” In His questions in John 21:15–16, our Lord used *agape*, which is the Greek word for the highest kind of love, sacrificing love, divine love. Peter always used *phileo*, which is the love of friend for friend, fondness for another. In John 21:17, Jesus and Peter both used *phileo*.

However, it is doubtful that we should make too much of an issue over this, because the two words are often used interchangeably in the Gospel of John. In John 3:16, God's love for man is *agape* love; but in John 16:27, it is *phileo* love. The Father's love for His Son is *agape* love in John 3:35 but *phileo* love in John 5:20. Christians are supposed to love one another. In John 13:34, this love is *agape* love; but in John 15:19, it is *phileo* love. It would appear that John used these two words as synonyms, whatever fine distinctions there might have been between them.

Before we judge Peter too severely, two other matters should be considered. When answering the first two questions, Peter did affirm his *agape* love when he said, "Yes, Lord!" The fact that Peter himself used *phileo* did not negate his wholehearted assent to the Lord's use of *agape*. Second, Peter and Jesus undoubtedly spoke in Aramaic, even though the Holy Spirit recorded the conversation in common Greek. It might be unwise for us to press the Greek too far in this case.

In spite of his faults and failures, Peter did indeed love the Lord, and he was not ashamed to admit it. The other men were certainly listening "over Peter's shoulder" and benefiting from the conversation, for they too had failed the Lord after boasting of their devotion. Peter had already confessed his sin and been forgiven. Now he was being restored to apostleship and leadership. The image, however, changes from that of the fisherman to that of the shepherd. Peter was to minister both as an evangelist (catching the fish) and a pastor (shepherding the flock). It is unfortunate when we divorce these two because they should go together. Pastors ought to evangelize (2 Tim. 4:5) and then shepherd the people they have won so that they mature in the Lord.

Jesus gave three admonitions to Peter: "Feed My lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," and "Feed My sheep." Both the lambs and the more mature sheep need feeding and leading, and that is the task of the spiritual shepherd. It is an awesome responsibility to be a shepherd of God's flock! (1 Peter 5:2) There are enemies that want to destroy the flock, and the shepherd must be alert and courageous (Acts 20:28–35). By nature, sheep are ignorant and defenseless, and they need the protection and guidance of the shepherd.

While it is true that the Holy Spirit equips people to serve as shepherds and gives these people to churches (Eph. 4:11ff), it is also true that each individual Christian must help to care for the flock. Each of us has a gift or gifts from the Lord, and we should use what He has given us to help protect and perfect the flock. Sheep are prone to wander, and we must look after each other and encourage each other.

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20–21), and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Pastors are "under-shepherds" who must obey Him as they minister to the flock. *The most important thing the pastor can do is to love Jesus Christ.* If he truly loves Jesus Christ, the pastor will also love His sheep and tenderly care for them. The Greek word for "sheep" at the end of John 21:17 means "dear sheep." Our Lord's sheep are dear to Him and He wants His ministers to love them and care for them personally and lovingly. (See Ezek. 34 for God's indictment of unfaithful shepherds, the leaders of Judah.) A pastor who loves the flock will serve it faithfully, no matter what the cost.

### **We Are Disciples—Follow Him (John 21:19–25)**

Jesus had just spoken about Peter's life and ministry, and now He talks about Peter's death. This must have been a shock to Peter, to have the Lord discuss his death in such an open manner. No doubt Peter was rejoicing that he had been restored to fellowship and apostleship. Why bring up martyrdom?

The first time Jesus spoke about His own death, Peter had opposed it (Matt. 16:21ff). Peter had even used his sword in the Garden in a futile attempt to protect his Lord. Yet Peter had boasted he would die for the Lord Jesus! But when the pressure was on, Peter failed miserably. (You and I probably would have done worse!) Anyone who yields himself to serve the Lord must honestly confront this matter of death.

When a person has settled the matter of death, then he is ready to live and to serve! Our Lord's own death is a repeated theme in John's Gospel: He knew that His "hour" would come, and He was prepared to obey the Father's will. We as His followers must yield ourselves—just as He yielded Himself for us—and be "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1–2) who are "ready to be offered" (2 Tim. 4:6–8) if it is the will of God.

Earlier that morning, Peter had "girded himself" and hurried to shore to meet Jesus (John 21:7). The day would come when another would take charge of Peter—and kill him (see 2 Peter 1:13–14). Tradition tells us that Peter was indeed crucified, but that he asked to be crucified upside down, because he was not worthy to die exactly as his Master had died.

But Peter's death would not be a tragedy; it would glorify God! The death of Lazarus glorified God (John 11:4, 40) and so did the death of Jesus (John 12:23ff). Paul's great concern was that he glorify God, whether by life or by death (Phil. 1:20–21). This should be our desire as well. Our Lord's words, "Follow Me!" must have brought new joy and love to Peter's heart. Literally, Jesus said, "Keep on following Me." Immediately, Peter began to follow Jesus, just as he had done before his great denial. However, for a moment *Peter took his eyes off the Lord Jesus*, a mistake he had made at least two other times. After that first great catch of fish, Peter took his eyes off his Lord and looked at *himself*. "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8) When he was walking on the stormy sea with Jesus, Peter looked away from the Lord and began to look at the wind and waves; and immediately he began to sink (Matt. 14:30). It is dangerous to look at the circumstances instead of looking to the Lord.

Why did Peter look away from his Lord and start to look back? He heard somebody walking behind him. It was the Apostle John who was also following Jesus Christ. Peter did a foolish thing and asked Jesus, "What shall this man do?" In other words, "Lord, you just told me what will happen to me; now, what will happen to John?"

The Lord rebuked Peter and reminded him that his job was to follow, not to meddle into the lives of other believers. Beware when you get your eyes off the Lord and start to look at other Christians! "Looking unto Jesus" should be the aim and practice of every believer (Heb. 12:1–2). To be distracted by ourselves, our circumstances, or by other Christians, is to disobey the Lord and possibly get detoured out of the will of God. Keep your eyes of faith on Him and on Him alone.

This does not mean that we ignore others, because we do have the responsibility of caring for one another (Phil. 2:1–4). Rather, it means that we must not permit our curiosity about others to distract us from following the Lord. God has His plan for us; He also has plans for our Christian friends and associates. How He works in their lives is His business. Our business is to follow Him as He leads us (see Rom. 14:1–13).

I recall a critical time in my own ministry when I was disturbed because other ministers were apparently getting God’s “blessing” in abundance while I seemed to be reaping a meager harvest. I must confess that I envied them and wished that God had given their gifts to me. But the Lord tenderly rebuked me with, “What is that to thee? Follow thou Me.” It was just the message I needed, and I have tried to heed it ever since.

Jesus did not say that John would live until His return, but that is the way some of the misguided believers understood it. More problems are caused by confused saints than by lost sinners! Misinterpreting the Word of God only creates misunderstanding about God’s people and God’s plans for His people.

However, there is a somewhat enigmatic quality to what the Lord said about John. Jesus did not say that John would live until He returned, nor did He say that John would die before He returned. As it was, John lived the longest of all the disciples and did witness the Lord’s return when he saw the visions that he recorded in the Book of Revelation.

As John came to the close of his book, he affirmed again the credibility of his witness. (Remember, *witness* is a key theme in the Gospel of John. The word is used forty-seven times.) John witnessed these events himself and wrote them for us as he was led by the Holy Spirit. He could have included so much more, but he wrote only what the Spirit told him to write.

The book ends with Peter and John together following Jesus, and He led them right into the Book of Acts! What an exciting thing it was to receive the power of the Spirit and to bear witness of Jesus Christ! Had they not trusted Him, been transformed by Him, and followed Him, they would have remained successful fishermen on the Sea of Galilee; and the world would never have heard of them.

Jesus Christ is transforming lives today. Wherever He finds a believer who is willing to yield to His will, listen to His Word, and follow His way, He begins to transform that believer and accomplish remarkable things in that life. He also begins to do wonderful things through that life.

Peter and John have been off the scene (except for their books) for centuries, but you and I are still here. We are taking His place and taking their place. What a responsibility! What a privilege!

We can succeed only as we permit Him to transform us.

**Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 344-346) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

## **V. The Epilogue (chap. 21)**

John's purposes in this final chapter are (a) to reveal how Jesus reinstated Peter after his great fall, and (b) to correct a serious error about the Lord's return. The chapter also provides additional clues to the identity of the author. Some critics have argued that this chapter is anticlimactic after the great conclusion in chapter 20, and therefore was written by another (anonymous) writer. But the linguistic evidence does not support this notion. In addition, other great books of Scripture have appendixes after reaching a grand climax (cf., e.g., Rom. 16 following Rom. 15:33). Thus John 21 is neither without value nor out of harmony with other Bible books.

### **A. Jesus' appearance by the lake (21:1–14).**

21:1–3. An angel had promised that **Jesus** would meet with **His disciples** in Galilee (Matt. 28:7). It was significant evidence for Jesus to manifest Himself in a different location and at a later time (cf. Acts 1:3). (**The Sea of Tiberias** is another name for the Sea of Galilee; cf. comments on John 6:1.) The **disciples** had gone to Jerusalem and had experienced a tumultuous series of events: the Triumphal Entry, the expectation of a new kingdom, a betrayal by a trusted friend, near arrest, denial of Jesus by their leader Peter, the agonizing crucifixion of Jesus, the Resurrection, and the manifestations of the risen Lord. Understandably they were confused and unsure of the future.

**Peter** went fishing since he may have misunderstood the Lord's commission (20:22). **Peter** also had a family to support and undoubtedly had a sense of failure over his sin in denying the Lord. His leadership quality is evident in that six other disciples went **with** him. Their lack of success without Jesus' aid (cf. 15:5) and their great catch with His help gave them direction for their new lives.

21:4–6. **Early in the morning** the **disciples** failed to recognize **Jesus ... on the shore** either because of distance or lack of light. **He called out to them, Friends, haven't you any fish?** The word "friends" (*paidia*) is literally, "little children" or perhaps "lads." In response to His authoritative voice and instruction (v. 6), they hauled in a huge catch **of fish** (cf. v. 11). This similarity to an earlier miracle (Luke 5:1–11) enabled the disciples to identify the Lord and to recognize His ability to do great signs after His resurrection.

21:7–9. This revelation of **Jesus** and His power to His disciples dawned first in the beloved **disciple**, who exclaimed, **It is the Lord!** (cf. 20:28) John had also been first to discern the significance of the grave clothes (20:8). Hearing John's word, **Peter** immediately **jumped into the water**, and apparently swam to Jesus. This is typical of his impulsive nature (he went first into the tomb; 20:6). This psychological insight into Peter's character reinforces the historical reliability of John's eyewitness testimony. Peter's action contrasts strikingly with the time he started to sink in the water (Matt. 14:30). Jesus had prepared a breakfast of charcoaled **fish** with **bread** for the hungry disciples.

21:10–11. Mention of the **large fish, 153** in all, has given rise to all kinds of allegorical and symbolic interpretations. But probably John mentioned the number as a matter of historical detail. With a group of men fishing, the common procedure would be for them to count the fish they caught and then divide them equally among the fishermen. A spiritual lesson here is that great blessing comes to one's efforts when he follows the Lord's will.

21:12–14. When **Jesus** invited them to eat with Him, **none of** them asked **who** He was for **they knew it was the Lord**. The fact that both Mary (20:14) and the Emmaus Road disciples (Luke 24:13–35) did not immediately identify the Lord may indicate some difference in the Lord's resurrection appearance here. Yet the identification was so certain that all the disciples knew it was **Jesus**. Their meal together stamped an indelible impression on their minds. Years later in his preaching Peter spoke of himself as a reliable witness who ate and drank with Jesus after His resurrection (Acts 10:41). **The third time** means Jesus' third appearance to the apostles, which John narrated (cf. John 20:19, 24 for the other two appearances).

### **B. Jesus' reinstating of Peter (21:15–23).**

21:15–17. Earlier **Peter** had denied Jesus beside a fire (18:18, 25). Now beside another fire he was restored publicly.

**Jesus** called him **Simon Son of John**, as He had when He first met Peter (1:42). Jesus asked him, **Do you truly love Me more than these?** What did Jesus mean by "these"? Jesus probably was referring to the disciples, in light of Peter's proud statement that he never would fall away no matter what others did (Matt. 26:33, 35; Luke 22:33; John 13:37). Jesus' threefold question and threefold commission of apostolic mission contrast directly with Peter's three denials. Three times Peter said he did not even know the Lord (18:17, 25, 27); now three times he said he loved the Lord (21:15–17). No matter how great a person is, he may fall (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12). But God's grace and forgiveness will restore the repentant. This provision of grace would be important, for the church would soon face great persecution and even church leaders would waver in their commitments.

Three times **Jesus** commissioned **Peter** to care for the flock: **Feed My lambs;** (v. 15); **Take care of My sheep** (v. 16); **Feed My sheep** (v. 17). Some Roman Catholics assume that this asserts Peter's primacy, but this is foreign to the passage (cf. 1 Peter 5:2). In Jesus' three questions of **love** (*agapas*, *agapas*, and *phileis*) and His three commands of duty (*boske*, "tend"; *poimaine*, "herd, lead to pasture"; *boske*) various Greek synonyms are used. Since it is difficult to see any consistent distinctions that John intended, most scholars see these as stylistic variations.

21:18–19. **I tell you the truth** (cf. comments on 1:51) introduces a solemn prediction of Peter's coming crucifixion. In old age **Peter** was tied to a cross and had his hands stretched out (cf. 1 Clement 5:4; 6:1; Eusebius *The Ecclesiastical History* 2. 25). Obedience to Jesus' command, **Follow Me**, is the key issue in every Christian's life. As Jesus followed the Father's will, so His disciples should follow their Lord whether the path leads to a cross or to some other difficult experience.

21:20–23. **Peter**, having been informed about God’s plan for his life, naturally wondered what the future held for his friend John, **the disciple whom Jesus loved**. **Jesus** sharply rebuked Peter for being curious about God’s will for another’s life: **What is that to you? You must follow Me**. Some disciples can be easily distracted by unnecessary questions about God’s secret will; as a result they neglect God’s plainly revealed will. God’s plans for Christians vary and His reasons are not often made known. Peter was to commit himself to God’s plain commands to him. John then corrected a faulty inference made by some believers that John **would not die**. Interestingly Jesus’ last words recorded by John in this Gospel refer to His **return**. Of course, Jesus gave no indication *when* He would return. The false **rumor** about Jesus’ words to Peter show the possibility of misunderstanding God’s promises. Christians must seek to understand God’s Word accurately.

### C. The colophon (21:24–25).

21:24–25. The Fourth Gospel ends with information about its composition. The beloved **disciple** is identified as the author (cf. comments on “Authorship” in the *Introduction*). The first sentence in verse 24 may have been someone other than John, but the wording sounds Johannine (cf. 19:35). **These things** most likely refer to the entire Gospel. The words, **We know that his testimony is true**, were probably written by someone other than John. They are an endorsement, perhaps by the Ephesian church, or a testimony from the early church as a whole. They were certainly in a position to know the facts better than any generation since then.

The final verse—with its statement about the world **not** having **room for all the books that could be written** about Jesus’ deeds—may seem at first glance to be an exorbitant overstatement. (The **I** seems to suggest John as the author of this verse though that is uncertain.) Yet the Gospels record only a small sample of Jesus’ words and works. Someone has estimated that a person can read aloud Jesus’ words recorded in the Gospels in only about three hours. But if all that the infinite Son of God said and did in His Incarnation were pondered, the resulting commentary would be endless.

**White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 490-491). Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

### Miracles Continue (21:1–14)

The miraculous catch of fish, an almost casual appearance and fellowship of the risen Christ with the disciples, constitutes the third recorded appearance of Jesus following His resurrection. Here Jesus demonstrated again His power over the natural world.

### Do You Love Me? (21:15–25)

Following their breakfast meal on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus turned to Peter and asked a series of questions related to Peter’s devotion. The first word for love, used in Jesus’ first two questions, refers to a love that involves the will and personality. The second kind of love, indicated by the word for love used in the third question of Jesus, refers more to the emotions than to the will.

Regardless of whether or not much is to be made of these word distinctions, the key issue is that of love for Christ, and this Peter surely expressed. His earlier three denials are here answered in

three affirmations of love and service. Jesus clearly wanted love for Him to include both will and emotions, demonstrated in a life of discipleship and devotion to the church.

Then Jesus forecast the kind of death Peter would die in order to glorify God. The early church understood the “stretching out of hands” mentioned here to mean crucifixion. Tradition understands the death of Peter to have been by upside-down crucifixion.

The final words of the Gospel of John change from firsthand narrative to that of a plural perspective. It would seem that the Gospel of the apostle John was preserved and then another author, equally inspired by the living God, added his own testimony on behalf of a community of faith as witness to the truth of all that the apostle had written. Not everything from the life of Christ was recorded but only those things the author felt supported the goal of leading individuals to belief in Jesus as the Son of God who came to take away the sins of the world. Theological and Ethical Significance. From this Gospel we learn much about God as Father.

Contemporary believers are indebted to John for their habit of referring to God simply as “the Father.” The Father is active (5:17), bringing blessing on those He has created. He is love (3:16; see 1 John 4:8–10). We know love because we see it in the cross; it is sacrificial giving, not for deserving people but for undeserving sinners. He is a great God whose will is done in bringing about our salvation (6:44).

The Gospel throughout focuses on Jesus Christ. It is clear that God in Christ has revealed Himself (1:1–18). God is active in Christ, the Savior of the world, bringing about the salvation He has planned (4:42).

John’s Gospel tells us more about the Holy Spirit than do the other Evangelists. The Spirit was active from the start of Jesus’ ministry (1:32), but the Spirit’s full work was to begin at the consummation of Jesus’ own ministry (7:37–39). The Spirit brings life (3:1–8), a life of the highest quality (10:10), and leads believers in the way of truth (16:13). The Spirit thus universalizes Jesus’ ministry for Christians of all ages.

In response to the work of God in their lives, Christians are to be characterized by love (13:34–35). They owe all they have to the love of God, and it is proper that they respond to that love by loving God and other people.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 21. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**