

## John 21:1-25

Throughout the centuries, man has only needed to lift his eyes to the starry heavens in order to appreciate the majesty and the wisdom of God.

Yes, as the psalmist has so rightly pointed out, **"The heavens declare the glory of God."**

And for many years, sailors depended upon the exact placement of these heavenly bodies to guide them over trackless oceans.

And today, with our increased ability to observe the breathtaking wonders of space, one would think that there would be an equivalent increase in the appreciation of His handiwork.

Ironically, the Great Architect is rarely mentioned.

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However, in addition to God's mighty power, He also possesses quite another side to His nature, a wonderful attribute that Jesus pointed out to His followers for their comfort.

We can read all about it in Luke 12:6-7 **"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?**

**7: But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."**

That's right. Not only do we have a mighty God, but we have a very personal God.

And didn't Jesus say --- **"I and my Father  
are one"**?

Well, yes, He did --- in John 10:30.

And didn't we get a glimpse of the Son's  
tender heart in our last lesson?

Why, yes, we did!

Certainly, Mary had her facts all wrong.

Jesus' body hadn't been stolen away.

But her fears and her tears were very real,  
and that's what mattered to Jesus, and  
it mattered a great deal.

And then there was Thomas.

While the other disciples rejoiced, Thomas  
refused to believe that Jesus had risen  
from the dead.

Jesus made a special visit and a special  
point to bring him on board.

Yes, even though Christ had just purchased  
so great salvation, and had risen

victorious over the grave, He never lost sight of the personal needs of His friends.

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In today's lesson, Jesus had another problem.

Peter was drifting away, and he was dragging the other disciples down with him.

Certainly the big fisherman had great potential, but he had always been a hard man to control.

That was particularly evident the night before the crucifixion.

Jesus had cautioned His disciples that as yet, they were not ready for the path ahead.

Specifically, He said **"Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now."**

The fact of the matter was that they had not been empowered by the Holy Spirit as yet.

But Peter was determined to follow Jesus anyway.

He was so confident in his own steadfast loyalty that he ignored Jesus' warning, and plunged headlong into defeat.

And there was no need for this hasty action. The situation would soon change, and along with it, Jesus' directions would change.

Yes, after His resurrection, and during His first meeting with the disciples, Jesus would say --- **"as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."**

He even **"breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost."**

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In today's lesson, we will find the very man who had been so determined to go when Jesus said stay, now contemplating staying when Jesus said go.

John 21:1-3 **"After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself.**

**2: There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.**

**3: Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing."**

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Only a few weeks ago, the Jews had made their move.

While Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem attending the Passover, they arrested Him.

Almost overnight, their Leader had been crucified, and the disciples found themselves meeting behind closed doors.

It was enough to make your head spin.

And then, and just as suddenly, the whole situation changed.

Their risen Lord had appeared in their midst and given them their life's commission.

Only a week later, He appeared for a second time and dealt with Thomas's unbelief.

No doubt it was shortly after this that the disciples packed up their bags and went home.

It had become too dangerous to remain in  
Jerusalem, and besides that, hadn't  
Jesus said "--- **after I am risen again,  
I will go before you into Galilee.**"

Matthew 26:32

Yes, Galilee was the place to be.

They all knew they would be returning to  
Jerusalem in a few weeks to attend the  
Feast of Pentecost, but in the mean  
time, home looked pretty good to them.

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Once there, and among their familiar things,  
the events of the past few weeks almost  
seemed like a dream.

Peter was toying with the idea of returning  
to his old occupation.

And it wasn't long before his thoughts  
boiled to the surface --- "**I go a  
fishing,**" and the rest went with him.



It was a case of sheep following another sheep, rather than sheep following the Shepherd.

No wonder **"they caught nothing."**

V 4-5 **"But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. 5: Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No."**

That's the trouble with doing our own thing, isn't it?

Sooner or later, Jesus will ask the question --- **"have ye any meat?"**

Yes, we are responsible for the time and opportunities we have been given.

And some day we will give an account of our stewardship.

"If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15: If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

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However, this time Jesus hadn't appeared to call them into account.

No, His whole purpose was to rescue them, and in more ways than one.

V 6 "And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes."

So that was the problem! They had been casting their net on the left side of the ship all night.

No, I don't think so.

The lack of results had nothing to do with their method. It was a problem of leadership.

They had forgotten what Jesus told them on the way to the garden.

Remember His words --- **"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."**

And that's exactly what they had been doing.

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V 7 **"Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord."**

John had outrun Peter on the way to the sepulchre.

Did he also have better eyesight?

Not necessarily.

You see, there was an eerie familiarity to  
this whole situation.

The fact of the matter was it had all  
happened before.

Near the beginning of Jesus' public  
ministry, He borrowed Peter's boat to  
use as a platform from which to preach.

In appreciation, He said "**Launch out into  
the deep, and let down your nets for a  
draught.**"

They hadn't caught anything that night  
either, but now "**they inclosed a great  
multitude of fishes**".

And now it had happened again.

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The first time it happened, Jesus told them  
He would make them fishers of *men*.

Immediately, they forsook all "**and followed  
him.**"

This time they had forsaken Him, at least on a short time basis, and were following Peter.

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V 7-8 "--- **Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.**

**8: And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes."**

I don't think Peter had ever found a boat that could get him to Jesus fast enough.

He wasn't walking on the water this time, but he jumped overboard in his haste! How his enthusiasm must have warmed Jesus' heart!

V 9 **"As soon then as they were come to land,  
they saw a fire of coals there, and  
fish laid thereon, and bread."**

I wonder what Peter's thoughts were as he  
sat by that fire.

This time, he was surrounded by Jesus'  
friends.

The last time, he had done his level best to  
blend in with His enemies.

But Jesus hadn't built that fire to break  
his heart.

No, He knew His disciples would be tired and  
hungry when they finally reached land,  
so He had cooked their breakfast.

V 10-11 **"Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the  
fish which ye have now caught.**

**11: Simon Peter went up, and drew the  
net to land full of great fishes, an  
hundred and fifty and three: and for**

**all there were so many, yet was not the net broken."**

How kind of Jesus to acknowledge their catch, especially when it really wasn't *their* catch.

If He hadn't been there, there wouldn't have been any breakfast, or a single fish to provide one.

Nevertheless He said, --- **"Bring of the fish which ye have now caught."**

And I wouldn't be surprised if it was Jesus who suggested they count them.

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I don't really know if the precise number is significant, but the condition of the net certainly was.

153 large, struggling fish would have put a tremendous strain on the net, and yet it was not broken.

I find that rather prophetic.

After this most unusual breakfast, they  
would be manning quite another *net*.

And like the one that now lay on the shore,  
it would never break either.

Yes, the Gospel net has been gathering in  
the lost for over 2,000 years now, and  
not one soul who has entered that net  
has ever been lost.

John 21:12-13 "**Jesus saith unto them, Come  
and dine. And none of the disciples  
durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing  
that it was the Lord.**

**13: Jesus then cometh, and taketh  
bread, and giveth them, and fish  
likewise."**

Once again Jesus was among them as "**he that  
doth serve."**



It was a precious time, but one they all knew would never last.

Previously Jesus had made that point very clear.

V 14 **"This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead."**

There had always been a definite reason for Jesus' appearances, and this time was no different.

Certainly, the disciples needed their breakfast, but that wasn't the real reason why He was there.

As we have already noted, Peter was heading in the wrong direction, and the rest of the disciples were following him.

Yes, Peter was a hard man to steer.

In fact, he reminds me of a horse my father once had when I was a boy growing up on the farm.

It was a time when farmers were switching over from horses to tractors.

Dad had a steel-wheeled tractor to pull most of his implements, but he still depended upon his horses for a lot of the work.

Prince was a steady, obedient animal, but he was a bit on the small side.

King was big and strong, but he had a problem.

In the spring of the year, after a long layover in the barn, it was all Dad could do to control him.

After a few weeks, he would settle down, and was a real asset.

However, each year King became harder and harder to control.

Sooner or later, his rebellion would result in a serious accident.

One day, a horse trader drove up the lane with a dappled grey, and Dad traded him for King.

King would be headed up north to pull logs out of the bush.

It would be a hard life, and most horses didn't last too long up there.

Being a kind man, Dad hated to see his big horse go, but he just couldn't control him.

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Jesus wasn't about to lose Peter.

He would take him in hand, but not before he had his breakfast.

I'm sure you ladies know what I'm talking about.

V 15 **"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs."**

The first thing Peter noticed was the fact that Jesus was calling him **"Simon, son of Jonas."**

He hadn't called him that for a long time.

In fact, Jesus had changed his name the very first time He met him.

John 1:42 **"Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, (or Peter) which is by interpretation, A stone."**

At the moment, the name didn't fit, for he was exhibiting neither strength nor stability.

And then Jesus said --- **"lovest thou me more than these?"**

I'm really not sure what Jesus was referring to when He said **"more than these."**

Two possibilities present themselves.

He might have been pointing to that large pile of fish on the shore, or He might have been nodding His head in the direction of the other disciples.

However, Peter would know, and his response, **"Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee"** would seem to indicate the fish.

No doubt 153 large fish could be sold for a considerable sum, perhaps even enough to set the disciples up in business again.

If that were true, then the question might  
have been --- *Now that it is feasible  
to return to commercial fishing, do you  
love Me enough to give it all up?*

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The other possibility is a little more  
obscure, but worth mentioning.

Was Jesus referring to that night when Peter  
said, "**Though all men shall be offended  
because of thee, yet will I never be  
offended**"?

Don't forget, Peter had made this remark in  
the presence of the other disciples,  
and so included them in his comparison.

So, was Jesus was asking --- *Do you still  
think you love Me more than My other  
disciples?*

And if we consider the original Greek in which this Gospel was written, Peter's response might fit into this scenario.

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In fact, if we carefully consider both Jesus' and Peter's choice of words, we will discover a much deeper meaning embedded in their conversation than might first appear.

First of all, when Jesus said "**lovest thou me more than these,**" He used the word "agapao."

This word indicates a lofty, spiritual, and pure form of love.

In fact, it is used in scripture to describe God's love.

In answer, Peter used the word "phileo."

Certainly, this word describes a very sincere love, but not the kind Jesus had suggested.

Yes, it appears that this troubled man, who had once described his loyalty as being superior to all others, would not venture beyond the words, *I have a deep affection for you.*

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We have already made a comparison between the first and second time Jesus supplied them with fish, and noted some differences.

However, one difference still remains.

Previously, Jesus had emphasized the evangelistic aspect of their ministry -- **"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."**



This time He was looking for a shepherd as well as a fisherman.

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V 16 **"He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep."**

Even though Jesus was still using the same superior word for love, He didn't add the words **"more than these."**

So whether He had been referring to the fish or the disciples, the question now was, *Do you love Me?*

And that is a very important question.

Jesus' tender, loving care for His flock makes Him extremely unwilling to entrust any shepherd with the care of His sheep who is not motivated by love.

However, even though He still used the same superior word for love, He changed the word, that we continued to translate "feed" in our English text.

The first time He used a word that simply meant --- to supply food.

This time, He was asking Peter "to tend" or "shepherd" His sheep.

And that's also very important.

Not only must a shepherd feed the flock, but he must lead them in a right way.

Peter continued to say, **Yea, Lord; thou knowest that**" I have a deep affection for you.

V 17 **"He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest**

**all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."**

This third inquiry seemed to break Peter's heart.

Maybe he noticed that Jesus was now using His word for love.

So, in many words, and I believe with great emotion, Peter answered --- *Lord, you know me through and through. You know I denied you, and you know I cannot supply the same kind of love that you do, but I do love you.*

Peter had finally realized what Jesus had always known --- **"without me ye can do nothing."**

And on that basis, Jesus said --- **"Feed my sheep."**

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V 18-19 "Verily, verily, I say unto thee,  
When thou wast young, thou girdedst  
thyself, and walkedst whither thou  
wouldest: but when thou shalt be old,  
thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and  
another shall gird thee, and carry thee  
whither thou wouldest not.

19: This spake he, signifying by what  
death he should glorify God. And when  
he had spoken this, he saith unto him,  
**Follow me."**

Jesus had always known the manner of His own  
death, and, of course, He knew how each  
of His disciples would die.

But Peter was the only one with whom He  
shared that knowledge. He would die as  
a martyr.

This made Peter unique in two ways.

First of all, and as a relatively young man,  
Peter was assured of a long life.

However, this same information extinguished  
any hope that he would be raptured  
before his death.

Yes, I'm sure the other disciples were  
looking forward to Jesus' second  
coming.

Hadn't He said in the upper room --- **"And if  
I go and prepare a place for you, I  
will come again, and receive you unto  
myself ---"**?

And when He was finally received up into  
heaven, two angels comforted the  
disciples with these words --- **"this  
same Jesus, which is taken up from you  
into heaven, shall so come in like  
manner as ye have seen him go into  
heaven."**

And I'm sure they all hoped this great event would happen before they passed through death.

But for Peter, that wasn't a possibility.

V 20 **"Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?"**

Obviously, the Apostle John is indicated here.

V 21-22 **"Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?  
22: Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me."**

In an attempt to deflect Jesus' attention away from himself, Peter said, *And what about John?*

Jesus wasn't pleased.

In so many words, He said --- *Peter; I'm the Shepherd, and John is My sheep. Just mind your own business.*

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But what was Jesus referring to when He said --- **"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"**

I think He was referring to the possibility that John might be raptured before his death.

But that really wasn't Peter's concern.

Jesus was the Shepherd, and it was His prerogative to choose the pathway each of His sheep would follow.

Peter's only responsibility was to follow Him.

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Apparently the other disciples overheard this conversation, and they got it all wrong.

V 23 **"Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die."**

And the fact that John outlived all of the other disciples must have added fuel to the fire.

In fact, even though it was more than 50 years later when the Holy Spirit prompted John to write this Gospel, He still found it necessary to set the record straight --- **"yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"**

V 24-25 **"This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote**



these things: and we know that his testimony is true.

25: And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

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The other three Gospels had already been written when John penned his book.

Matthew had portrayed Jesus as the Messiah.

Mark's responsibility had been to show forth Jesus' ministry as the perfect servant, while Luke, the beloved physician, had written a most comprehensive account of Jesus, the perfect man.

Finally, John completed the picture by showing forth the divine nature of the Son of God.

Together, these gospels made a most comprehensive report.

And yet, as this dear old man reviewed the precious memories of his Saviour, he was prompted to say --- **"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."**

No, the half has not been told.

But praise God, the Christian has all of eternity in which to hear the rest of the story.

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There's no doubt in my mind that the Holy Spirit specifically chose John to write this Gospel.

He was one of the inner circle, along with his brother James and the Apostle Peter.

Together, these three men had the privilege of being with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration.

They were also chosen to accompany Him further into the garden than all the rest in order to share in His time of agonizing prayer.

Alas, they slept through it all.

Nevertheless, these three men occupied a very special place in Jesus' heart, but I think John was the closest.

And for that reason, I believe the Holy Spirit has chosen John to write what I

personally consider to be the one book  
in scripture that draws us closer to  
the Lord than any other.

During the Last Supper, it was John who sat  
beside Jesus, even leaning on His  
chest.

And it was John whom Jesus chose to take  
care of His mother.

I think that says a great deal for his  
character.

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A student of the Word, Culloss by name, made  
this statement: "I believe the writings  
of John have been blotted by more  
penitent's tears, and have won more  
hearts for the Redeemer than all the  
rest put together."

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Because of the book of John, we have been assured that Jesus is truly the Immanuel --- literally, God with us. He is also Israel's Messiah, a position He has never relinquished.

And He is our Saviour, the Good Shepherd Who has given His life for the sheep.

Our eternal security is wrapped up in His Words --- **"those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost."**

And this same Jesus, Who is all of these things and more, is looking forward to the time when He can bring us *home* --- **"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."**

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus."