

John 21: "What Now?"

Starter: John describes himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." If you were writing a gospel and had to refer to yourself in the third person, how would you describe yourself?

Here we are at the end of the book of John. Last week could have been the last chapter quite easily but there are no manuscripts which do not include this final passage. This suggests that it's not a later addition but that it was always part of John's gospel message. As you read the chapter, try to figure out what part it plays in the gospel.

Read John 21:1-14.

Mark (16:7) records the angel telling Mary to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee. This is where the disciples are in this passage - they're home. It seems natural with nothing to do to go back to what you know best - your old way of life. So Peter suggests fishing. This miracle ("sign") mirrors Luke 5 when Jesus first calls the disciples ("follow me and I will make you fishers of men") which is possibly what makes John realize that it is Jesus talking to them from the shore.

Q. Why do you think John records, "Now, none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord" (v.12)?

Read John 21:15-19.

I find it a bit strange that if Peter is the source for Mark's gospel that this passage isn't recorded there. This is Jesus' recommissioning (c.f. Matt 16:18) of Peter after his three-fold denial of him before the crucifixion.

Q. Matthew 10:33 says, "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." How do you reconcile that verse with what happens here to Peter?

Scholars have tried to make much of the symbolism and nuances in this chapter. Firstly there's the 153 fish - why state such a number (especially when John uses numbers symbolically elsewhere). Secondly the conversation between Jesus and Peter goes like this: (Agape = Self-giving love; Phileo = Friendship/Brotherly love.)

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you love (gk. *agapeo*) me more than these?

Peter: Yes, Lord; you know that I love (gk. *phileo*) you.

...

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you *agapeo* me?

Peter: Yes Lord; you know that I *phileo* you.

...

Jesus: Simon, son of John, do you *phileo* me?

Peter: ... You know that I *phileo* you.

Q. Now bearing in mind that the conversation would have been in Aramaic but John has chosen to record it this way in Greek - has Jesus lowered his standards for Peter?

Note: "Feed my lambs"; "Tend my sheep"; "Feed my sheep" is almost certainly stylistic only. Nevertheless, Jesus' command to Peter is a repeat of the command in Luke 5; it is simply this: "Follow me." But immediately preceding this Jesus tells Peter how he's going to die - an event which had probably happened by the time of John's writing.

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Q. Are these two things tied together? Are there a whole bunch of other passages that point to death before following Jesus? (Yes! Luke 9:23 and John 15:12-14 are just two for starters. ;-)

There was probably a misunderstanding about how long John was going to live for which he is addressing at the end of this chapter - a rumour made it around that John wasn't going to die but this wasn't what Jesus said. However, the important thing to note here is what Jesus says to Peter: "What is that to you? You follow me!"

Peter tried to return to his old way of life when he wasn't spurred on by Jesus but Jesus just realigned him - "Follow Me."

Final: What are the implications for discipleship based on the gospel of John and does this give us a specific reason for why John needed to add what we have as chapter 21?

John 20:31: "These [things] are written so that you may believe . . . and that by believing you may have life in his name."

21:19: "(This he said to show by what kind of death [Peter] was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to [Peter], "Follow me.""