

Gospel of John Chapter 21 - John Karmelich

Congratulations everyone! We made it to the final chapter of the Gospel of John. This was a 6-month project where, as always I've learned far more than I shared. For those who are fairly new, I've taught the entire bible over roughly a 20-year time period. When I finished that project I prayed, "now what"? I believe God said "Round 2" and then I believe He made this clear: "You heard me, why are you just sitting there?" I'm sharing all this because this Gospel of John study is part of Round 2! As always I'm grateful for everyone reading this and hope you enjoy this series on the Gospel of John!

With that out of my system, again, let me discuss the final chapter of the Gospel of John. So how does John finish this? In the last chapter, Jesus appeared resurrected to the disciples and a few others to say in effect, "Hey everybody, guess who's still alive?" Chapter 20 ended with John (the writer and one of the "12") saying he wrote this book to prove Jesus is God. So why have a Chapter 21? (I realize there's no chapter breaks in the original text!) I wondered why this text here in Chapter 21 is here, after Jesus made His grand entrance in Chapter 20 and John explained why he wrote the book at the end of 20?

In Chapter 21 we read of most of the disciples thinking, "OK Jesus rose from the dead and He's now in heaven, so what do we do now?" Seven of the "12" decided to go back to their old profession (fishing) even after Jesus told the 12, early in their discipleship they'd now be "fishers of men". Assume that we know this story, so how's it relevant to us? How many of us have had bad days/years etc., where doubt has crept in about our salvation? Do we wonder if it's too late to turn back to Jesus? Even if that isn't a "thing" right now, how many of us wonder if we're doing what Jesus wants us to be doing now? That's what this final chapter is about: Being where God wants us to be! First, it doesn't mean we have to quit our life to go be a missionary in a foreign country. I suspect for most of us are just where God wants us to be. I'm just saying the issues brought up in this chapter make a great check list of what God wants us to be doing as disciples.

With that said let's go through the chapter so I can explain the details. The last chapter ends with Jesus appearing to the disciples in a locked room in or near Jerusalem and then John wrote that this gospel is written to convince people Jesus is God. Now in Chapter 21, the scene switches to where seven of the disciples were near the Sea of Galilee. A technical note: The same sea is called the Sea of Tiberius in this chapter as John wrote this book near the end of his life. By that time, that sea was renamed after a Roman Emperor. That's the common name of that sea to this day. It could also be a subtle hint that the disciples were "messing up" as a non-Jewish term was used to describe that body of water. Also notice the first two disciples mentioned were the ones who messed up in the last few chapters: Peter (the one who denied Jesus three times) and "Doubting" Thomas are listed along with five others. John (author) likes to keep himself in the background and just refers to himself as one of the two "Sons of Zebedee".

The important thing is Peter, (in effect was the leader of "12") said "I'm going fishing" not to state he is doing something to Jesus returns but he's returning to his old lifestyle before meeting Jesus. The rest of those seven joined him at that point. Remember that these are expert fishermen. Yet they didn't catch a thing after working all night working. If our job isn't producing "fruit" on day 1, that doesn't mean that we must quit our job. To me signs from God are blunt and obvious (like what's next in the story).

The fishermen were working about 100 yards from shore (Verse 8). From the shore Jesus yelled out to them if they caught anything? Just the thing you want to hear when you've worked all night and did not earn a dime! Then Jesus from the shore yells out (the disciples didn't know it was Him) to cast their net on the other side of the boat. (I've watched fishermen on a pier switch sides because one person caught

a fish on that side, as if that makes a difference). Bottom line the disciples probably out of desperation, tried it and over 150 fish were in the net. (I picture God commanding all the fish to avoid the nets all of the night then when Jesus says "now" they all swim to where the nets were!) Anyway after that miracle John told Peter it's the Lord who gave the command to try the other side of the boat!

I must admit the next part confused me a bit. Peter wanted to swim to shore to be next to Jesus. Peter probably stripped to the waist for the sweaty hot work all night. He threw on his outer garment before he jumped in the water. I suspect he wanted to look presentable to Jesus, so off he went!

The rest of the disciples paddled to shore and started to drag in the fish. The type of fish they caught is now known as "St. Peter's fish". They probably weighed about 2 pounds a fish. The text says Peter did drag the net to shore by himself, which is why Peter is often portrayed as being strong. I think Jesus is the one who wanted Peter to drag the net and the text says it didn't break. So why those details? That's because Jesus told the disciples they'd be fishers of men (Luke 5:1). I believe Jesus desired that visual, so when He's going to lecture Peter to focus on ministry work, the idea is he'll be even more successful than what he did here. Let me explain it another way. I make a living as a real estate appraiser. By far the most fulfilling thing in my life is this ministry as God has used "little old me" for His glory!

When the disciples got to shore, Jesus had already made a charcoal fire with bread and fish cooking on it. (For the same Jesus who fed 5,000, this wasn't hard!) He then commanded the disciples to put a few of their fish there. This shows typical ministry work where God does things beyond our power but He expects us to use our efforts to make a difference.

All of this led to a discussion between Jesus and Peter. Remember Peter probably felt guilty about the fact he denied Jesus three times. That's probably why he swam to Jesus to seek forgiveness. Instead it was a series of questions where Jesus is asking in effect, "Do you love me more than anything else? At each question Peter responds with a different word saying in effect I care for you Jesus. I'm positive he felt guilt at all of this. The third time Jesus lowered to Peter's level and asked if he loved Jesus like one would a good friend? After the question, Jesus first said, "Feed my lambs" (help those new in the faith to draw closer to God), then Jesus said "Feed my sheep" (help veteran Christians grow closer). The last command was "Tend my sheep" which is to look after fellow believers. The idea is if Peter desired that he have full restoration, those are his "marching orders". For us non-professional pastors, it means that all of us are to help younger and older believers grow closer to Jesus and help each other to be the type of God fearing people He wants us to be!

The final part of the chapter deals with the prediction of how Peter and John's will die. Jesus told Peter he'll be a martyr one day for Jesus. So why tell him that? Pain hurts less when we know what's coming in the future! It's also a reminder that God calls some of us to be a martyr for Him. It doesn't mean we have to expect it as much as realize it was and is a common occurrence in the church around the world! Peter then says in effect, "I'll deal with my death when it time comes, but what about John?" Jesus said in effect, "That's none of your business! Peter just focus on following Me and I'll take care of the other disciples on My timing". That led to a rumor that the Second Coming won't occur till John died. That's not what Jesus said, but John wanted to kill that rumor at that moment!

The book ends with the comment that John the writer attests all of these things are true as He saw all of this with his own eyes. The final comment of this book was the fact that not all of Jesus' miracles are in this gospel or nor in all four gospels, as there were too many for any one writer to count.

OK John most of us know this story, and thanks for sharing a few details we probably never thought of as you went through the chapter. Why should we care? Because like Peter, we have moments when we mess up and wonder how do we get back on the right track? Obviously Jesus doesn't stand there to say "Now start doing this/that"! The bible and in particular this text in the final chapter helps us with what God wants us to do! You may have a responsibility at your church. You may have a ministry that God called you to do. All of us are called to feed lambs and sheep (children and adults, or young and old in the faith) and help them grow closer to God. Each of us are not called to every role, but no role is more or less important. So if we're not busy doing something for God, you know it may be time to jump off that boat (like Peter did) and work your way closer to Jesus. He wants to be close to each of us to have an intimate relationship with each one of us!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! To read the other one, click on one of the two links on this page. Thanks again for reading this. John