

The Gospel of John (121) **The Lord Jesus appears a third time to His Disciples (2)**

We are concluding our study of the Gospel of John with today's message. It has been an enjoyable and spiritually profitable journey for me these past 2 years and almost 8 months. I have learned much, and have learned to appreciate and esteem this Gospel much through this study. I pray and trust that you have also.

John 21 details the third occasion that John recounted of our Lord's resurrection appearance to His disciples. The first two had been in Jerusalem. This third occasion was in Galilee. The other Gospels record other occasions, but John gave us information respecting these three appearances of Jesus to His disciples.

We have already addressed the first 14 verses in which Jesus revealed Himself to seven of His disciples, after they had not initially recognized Him. The disciples had been fishing all night in the Sea of Tiberias, or Galilee, but had caught nothing. The next morning a "stranger" called to them from the shore, who instructed them to cast forth their net once again, but on the right side of the boat. The result was an immense catch of 163 fish. This revealed to John that it was the Lord Jesus who had called to them. After arriving to the shore, the disciples enjoyed a meal together that Jesus prepared for them. We then read of a verbal exchange between Jesus and the apostle Peter, as retold by John. Through these words Jesus restored and reinstated Peter to his responsible role as an apostle. Jesus also foretold that Peter would one day be martyred for his faith. But Jesus refused to give information to Peter respecting what John would encounter. Here is **John 21:15-25**.

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

¹⁶He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?"

And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. ¹⁸Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." ¹⁹This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

²⁰Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" ²¹Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?"

²²Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."

²³Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?"

²⁴This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

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

Let us consider this passage employing the following outline:

1. Jesus Christ examined Peter's love for him, giving him a commission (vs. 15-17)
2. Jesus Christ revealed to Peter his future suffering (vs. 18-19)
3. Jesus Christ responded to Peter's question concerning John's future (vs. 20-23)
4. John concluded his Gospel by glorifying what Jesus had done (vs. 24-25)

I. Jesus Christ examined Peter's love for him, giving him a commission (vs. 15-17)

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Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

Our Lord and His disciples finished the meal that He had provided and prepared for His disciples, though they had contributed to the fare (v. 10). They must have also enjoyed a lively and informative conversation while eating. Our Lord gave His disciples a great amount of instruction over the course of 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension into heaven. I imagine much instruction was given while conversing together while eating together. Sharing a meal with our Christian brethren can be both an enjoyable and spiritually beneficial occasion. But after their supper was completed, Jesus would speak with Peter alone, but John was present also. John's detailed account of this verbal exchange as well as what seems to be John's close proximity (v. 20), suggests that John had listened to what transpired between Jesus and Peter. We would affirm what **Donald Carson** wrote respecting the setting: "We are probably to think of Peter walking down the beach with Jesus, the beloved disciple not far behind, certainly within earshot."¹

Our Lord desired to speak with Peter apart from the gathering. He would not trouble Peter while eating or while in the hearing of all. Thankfully our Lord commonly comes to us when we are alone with Him and He seems to confront us in our conscience and speaks to us through His written Word, as He rebukes and corrects us of our failures and sometimes our defections.

I doubt not that Peter was uneasy while they all sat and dined together for his former defection and failure. Perhaps he felt that he no longer deserved be among Jesus' followers, after all, he had failed and had denied the Lord in a way that was more egregious than the others, though they, too, had proved unfaithful and cowardly. And he had done so three times, just as Jesus had told him and warned him in advance. But our Lord would now restore Peter fully, and though He did so rather indirectly, He did so thoroughly. As Peter had denied Jesus three times, Jesus posed a question to Peter, not once, but three times. Jesus then gave Peter instruction on what to do in his future service for Jesus as one who loved Him.

Some may one day find themselves as Peter. Because of their past failure, they believe that they have forfeited any privilege or opportunity to serve the Lord and His people. They do not question Jesus in any way regarding the identity of His person or the glory of serving Him, but the question the Lord's willingness to ever use them again. If anyone could have thought this of himself, Peter might well have done so. But our Lord restored him, and did so in a gracious manner. And it is clear from Peter's usefulness in his apostolic ministry and the prominent role in leadership in the early church, that his failure and subsequent recovery rather than disqualifying him, had actually better equipped him so that the Lord could and would bless his ministry. For the experience of Peter in his fall and recovery had surgically removed his pride, which had

¹ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 675.

been the greater barrier of receiving God's grace which is needful for a fruitful ministry. Not only do servants of Christ need to be instructed in His Word and ways, the Lord needs to correct errant thinking and amend wrong ways of behaving.

I appreciated reading the description of **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) of this work of Christ in restoring His apostle:

Christ foresaw that what He had to say to Peter would give him some uneasiness, and therefore would not say it till they had dined, because He would not spoil his dinner. Peter was conscious to himself that he had incurred his Master's displeasure, and could expect no other than to be upbraided with his treachery and ingratitude. "Was this thy kindness to thy friend? Did not I tell thee what a coward thou wouldest prove?" Nay, he might justly expect to be struck out of the roll of the disciples, and to be expelled from the sacred college. Twice, if not thrice, he had seen his Master since his resurrection, and He said not a word to him of it. We may suppose Peter full of doubts upon what terms he stood with his Master; sometimes hoping the best, because he had received favour from Him in common with the rest; yet not without some fears, lest the chiding would come at last that would pay for all. But now, at length, his Master put him out of his pain, said what He had to say to him, and confirmed him in his place as an apostle. He did not tell him of his fault hastily, but deferred it for some time; did not tell him of it unseasonably, to disturb the company at dinner, but *when they had dined* together, in token of reconciliation, then discoursed He with him about it, not as with a criminal, but as with a friend. Peter had reproached himself for it, and therefore Christ did not reproach him for it, nor tell him of it directly, but only by a tacit intimation; and, being satisfied in his sincerity, the offence was not only forgiven, but forgotten; and Christ let him know that he was as dear to Him as ever. Herein he has given us an encouraging instance of His tenderness towards penitents, and has taught us, in like manner, to restore such as are fallen with a spirit of meekness.

This is a common experience among disciples of Jesus Christ particularly in a local church setting. We learn to value and appreciate others' gifts and service, but we also see their faults and weaknesses. We should not view these so as to dismiss them or discredit their usefulness, but rather as opportunities to serve them by patiently and tenderly restoring them. We are to deal with them as we would have them deal with us. Each of us have areas of deficiency and have had occasions of weakness and failure, may others help us as we help them through these difficulties. Paul wrote, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

We read that our Lord queried Peter three times. Peter answered the same three times, with little variation. Jesus repeated the question so that the lesson learned by Peter would be settled and secure. Peter would be assured that his failure had been just that. But He was also showing Peter that his past failure was no hindrance or encumbrance to their relationship going forward and it would place no limitation on his service.

However our Lord was also preparing his apostle for the great responsibility He was entrusting to him in the care for His people. The Lord does not entrust the people He loves to just anyone, but only to that one who truly loves Him. If someone does not love Jesus, he is not qualified to care for the Lord's people. As one wrote:

His function would give occasion for the exercise of his *love*. Before Christ would commit His *sheep* to his care, He asked him, *Lovest thou Me?* Christ has such a tender regard to His flock that He will not trust it with any but those that love Him, and therefore will love all that are His for His sake. Those that do not truly love Christ will never truly love the souls of men, or will naturally care for their state as they should; nor will that minister love his work that does not love his Master. Nothing but the love of Christ will constrain ministers to go cheerfully through the difficulties and discouragements they

meet with in their work (2 Cor. 5:13f). But this love will make their work easy, and them in good earnest in it.²

The first question asked by Jesus was this, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” It seems to have been a formal inquiry, in that Jesus addressed him using his full family name. Perhaps Jesus may be likened to a father or mother, when upbraiding a son, who calls him by his first and middle names, and if really perturbed, his last name also, in order to get his focused attention. Jesus did not call him Cephas or Peter, which mean “rock”, the name that Jesus had assigned to him. That appellation signified that he would be a rock of stability, strong in conviction, and uncompromising in his witness. Peter had not shown himself in this regard recently. But Jesus calls him by his birth name, Simon the son of Jonah, perhaps to remind Peter of his insignificant background and that he had nothing which had commended him to the privileged office to which Jesus had advanced to him.

Again, Jesus asked, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” To what then, does the word, “these” refer? The grammar of the question itself lends itself to three different interpretations. First, Jesus may have been asking Peter if he loved Him more than Peter loved his fellow disciples. “Peter, do you love me more than you love these men, these brothers?” But this would involve a concern that is nowhere suggested in this fourth Gospel, or in any of the other Gospels either. Second, the grammar could be understood as Jesus asking Peter if he loved Him more than Peter loved his fishing, to which he had formerly devoted his life and had indulged all the previous night. “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these fish to which you had formerly devoted your life?” Those who believe that the disciples’ fishing excursion the previous night was itself a defection and departure would tend to interpret our Lord’s words this way. But probably the third possibility is most likely, “Peter, do you love me more than these other men love me?” You may recall that Peter had had made this claim when he was so certain that he would never deny the Lord. Matthew records Peter as essentially making this claim. We read in Matthew 26:31-33 these words:

Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

‘I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

³²But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” ³³Peter answered and said to Him, “*Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.*”

Peter had thought at that time that he loved Jesus more than all of the other disciples. Although they might deny Jesus, he never would do so because he loved Jesus more than they did. It is apparent that Jesus asked Peter, “Peter, do you still want to claim that you love me more than these other disciples?” As one described Jesus’ action, “Here is the sore spot on which Jesus now lays His finger in order to heal it completely from the inside out.”³

The question that Jesus posed to Peter may be one that He might ask you or me? “Do you love Me more than these? That is, more than other people do? I would hope we would be wise and answer, “No, Lord. I would never make that claim.” Or He might ask us, “Do you love me more than these? That is, more than other matters in your life? More than your work, your hobbies, your sports?” I would hope we would answer, “No Lord; granted, there are too many times when to many other things become too prominent in my heart, but, when I am thinking rightly and soberly, I do reaffirm with certainty, I love you more than these things.”

Peter really did not answer fully the first question that Jesus had posed to him. He responded to Jesus, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He did not make a boastful claim as he had formerly done, that he

² Matthew Henry

³ Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), pp. 1,419f.

loved Jesus more than the others loved Him, but he did confess that he loved Jesus. Peter acknowledged the Lord Himself knew that he loved Him, but he did not boast of any great degree of love as he had formerly. He had learned better than to make that claim ever again. Jesus then responded to Peter's response, "Feed My lambs."

But then Jesus asked the second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" In this second question Jesus dropped the comparative clause, "more than these?" In his answer to the first question Peter left that out, so Jesus in his second question left it off. We cannot say that we love Christ more than others, but it is enough that you can say honestly and sincerely, "I love You, Lord Jesus."

Peter responded the same way to the second question of Jesus. "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." Jesus then responded, "Tend My sheep." Then again, the third time Jesus asked Peter the same question: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" This time John described Peter as being grieved by Jesus asking the same question the third time. But he responded the same way, but with an added word: "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

We are not to think or boast that we love Jesus more or better than another. The Scriptures teach us that we are to think better of others than we do of ourselves. Philippians 2:3 reads, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." Certainly we are to strive to be the best, even better than others if possible, yet in the end if we are assessing matters spiritually, we will tend to think others better than ourselves, for we know much more about the evil within ourselves than we know of the evil that resides in them. Those that dismiss or marginalize other Christians in a church reveal that they have not learned the lesson that our Lord had taught Peter through his failure. Those who fail and refuse to be with other believers in the local church, show themselves to think too highly of themselves and they think too lowly of others that are in Christ.

Now some will attempt to draw some distinctions between these questions of Jesus because two different Greek words are used for the verb, "love." In the first two questions Jesus asked of Peter, John used the Greek word *ἀγαπᾷς* (*agapas*, a form of *agapo*) for "love." But in the third question of Jesus, the Greek word *φιλεῖς* (*fileis*, from *fileo*) is used for the word, "love." Much popular preaching declares that the first of these, *ἀγαπᾷς*, is a word that speaks of a greater or higher degree of love than *φιλεῖς*. And this may be true in various places that these words are used in the Scriptures. But it has been shown that in John's Gospel these two different Greek words are to be seen as synonymous in meaning. Here are the words of **Donald Carson** regarding this:

We have already seen that the two verbs are used interchangeably in this Gospel. The expression 'beloved disciple', more literally 'disciple whom Jesus *loved*', can be based on either verb. The Father loves the Son – and both verbs serve (3:35; 5:20). Jesus loved Lazarus – and again both verbs serve (11:5, 36).⁴

The three answers of Jesus also vary slightly. In the first and third responses of Jesus to Peter, He referenced His "sheep" (vs. 16, 17). Verse 15, however, records the word, "lambs." And then Jesus used two different Greek verbs to command Peter to care for His people. In verses 15 and 17 Jesus told Peter to "feed" His own. But in verse 16 He told Peter to "tend" to them. The word translated "tend" is the verb form of the word that is used of the work of the "pastor." The verb carries the idea of pastoring or shepherding His flock, which was to be specifically directed toward His "lambs." Here are the three verses with their difference in words as found in English (NKJV): Jesus directed Peter to

- "feed My lambs." (v. 15)
- "tend (shepherd) My sheep" (v. 16)
- "feed My sheep" (v. 17)

⁴ Ibid, p. 676. Carson provided 7 reasons that these two words should not be understood as conveying different meanings in John's Gospel. For a different opinion, see Lenski, pp. 1,418f.

Peter was to show forth his love for Jesus by spiritually caring for His people. He was to “feed” them the Word of God--the teaching of Jesus and the Scriptures. He was to shepherd them by spiritually protecting them and directing them in the course that would prove most spiritually helpful for them.

Now the question may be asked, “Do these words of Jesus refer only to Peter, or only to the apostles, or only to pastors, or are our Lord’s words to all of His disciples at all times? We would say that all our Lord’s words are applicable to all of these people. Roman Catholicism has always asserted that our Lord was referring to Peter directly, but also to all those popes that followed and replaced him in his office. They say that here Jesus exalted Peter to the position of Holy See over all of His people. On his web page it is asserted that he is:

THE HOLY FATHER -- The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful. (*LUMEN GENTIUM*, 23)⁵

We would regard that as great error and wholly blasphemous. Our Lord Jesus declared in one place, “Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven” (Matt. 23:9). But Rome says that you are to call the pope “Holy Father.” This is another of many blasphemous departures from the Word of God.

No, we should not restrict our Lord’s words to Peter so narrowly. I do not see it as unreasonable application of these words to affirm that this is the responsibility of every God-called pastor/elder of every true local church. Our love for our Lord Jesus may be best shown by our spiritual concern and care for His people, for His lambs and sheep. We have the responsibility, but also the loving privilege to feed the sheep belonging to our Lord, to shepherd them, to care for them, both lambs and sheep, both younger and more mature Christians. As one wrote,

Those whom Christ committed to Peter’s care were His lambs and His sheep. The church of Christ is His flock, *which He hath purchased with His own blood* (Acts 20:28), and He is *the chief shepherd* of it. In this flock some are lambs, young and tender and weak, others are sheep, grown to some strength and maturity. The Shepherd here takes care of both, and of the lambs first, for upon all occasions He showed a particular tenderness for them. *He gathers the lambs in His arms, and carries them in His bosom* (Isa. 40:11).⁶

In response to each our Lord’s three questions, Peter confessed that he knew that Jesus knew that he did love Him, and I suppose Peter was also acknowledging that he knew that Jesus knew just how much he loved Him. Upon our Lord’s first question, Peter answered, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” And then upon Jesus’ second same question Peter also answered, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” But Peter was grieved upon the third question, answering, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” It does not seem to suggest that Peter was all that comforted knowing that Jesus knew exactly to what degree he loved Him. Yes, Peter knew that Jesus knew he loved Him. But Peter knew also that Jesus knew exactly to what degree he loved Him. Peter had learned something about his own heart, and it was not pretty. And Peter knew that the Lord knew perfectly well the weak nature of Peter’s affection when he was confronted. And the fact that he had shriveled so quickly and completely by the words of a young maiden around a fire pit must have all the more troubled him. It is as though Peter were saying, “Yes. I love You, but it must not have been all that great a degree of love otherwise I would not have denied You as I had done.”

Some people attempt to encourage others by saying to them, “The Lord knows your heart.” But for one on whom the Holy Spirit has been doing a deep soul-searching work that is of little comfort. I recall vividly one well-intentioned Christian lady attempting to console a younger lady who was distressed over her sin. “Betty, don’t be so upset. The Lord knows your heart.” Betty immediately responded, “That’s the problem, I know that He knows my heart!” I suspect that Peter was quite grieved because he knew that the

⁵ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/index.htm

⁶ Again, Matthew Henry

Lord knew just how weak his love was for Him how he had been so mistaken about the degree of his love until his own failure had revealed it to him.

But the Lord knew Peter before Peter knew himself. Jesus had warned him, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.” Simon’s love for Jesus was no protection against a foe far more able to cause him to stumble than he was able to stand stable. No, it was not the degree of love for Jesus that would keep Peter, but it was the knowledge of Peter that Jesus possessed and the fact that Jesus had interceded for Peter that Peter was not destroyed by the devil. Again Jesus had said to him, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. ***But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail;*** and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” (Luke 22:31f). But Peter had foolishly thought that his love for Jesus was sufficient for the trial. He had formerly asserted to Jesus, “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.” It was then that Jesus had said to him, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me”

By the way, what was it that distinguished Peter from Judas? Both had in effect denied the Lord. The answer is that the Lord Jesus had prayed for Peter that his faith fail not. There is no word that Jesus had prayed in this way for Judas. Jesus Christ keeps His own by His power through creating and then sustaining the faith of His people unto the full and final salvation of their souls. I wonder if Peter was thinking of this when he wrote these words that all true Christians “are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5).

The fact is that our Lord Jesus is omniscient. He knows all things. And Peter knew and acknowledged this. “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” He knows your heart. He knows if you have a burning affection for Him and His cause. And He knows if you show forth your love for Him in you care and concern, your prayers and assistance of His sheep, of His lambs. Jesus Christ is the Living Word,

For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

This is true of both the written Word, the Bible, but it is most true to the living Word of God, the Lord Jesus. He knows and weighs the hearts. When the apostles were selecting a replacement for Judas they prayed to the Lord for wisdom and direction, saying, “And they prayed and said, ‘You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all’” (Acts 1:24). And one day He will judge us and the condition of our hearts, even the secrets of our hearts, that is, our thoughts and affections. Paul wrote of “the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:16). You can fool me or your friends, or your family, but you cannot fool Jesus Christ. He knows if you truly love Him or if you really have no regard for Him at all. And He knows if you love Him supremely, more than so many other things that view for our attention and affection in a fallen world.

What then are we to do? Well, we should pray that He would guard our hearts, and stir within our hearts affection for Him and His cause. Is this not what the psalmist requested: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa. 51:10). King David prayed,

Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! ⁴Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies! (Psa. 141:3)

And it was Solomon who pronounced this desire:

May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers. (1 Kings 8:57f)

And before we move on, let us underscore that our primary mission is to feed the sheep, to tend to lambs. **Charles Spurgeon** in the 19th century proclaimed a sermon in which he denounced the introducing of entertainment into church services. He had a sermon entitled, *Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats?* Here is a portion of that message:

An evil is in the professed camp of the Lord, so gross in its impudence, that the most shortsighted can hardly fail to notice it during the past few years. It has developed at an abnormal rate, even for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments. The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them.

From speaking out as the Puritans did, the church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she tolerated them in her borders. Now she has adopted them under the plea of reaching the masses.

My first contention is that providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as a function of the church. If it is a Christian work, why did not Christ speak of it? “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). That is clear enough. So it would have been if He had added, “and provide amusement for those who do not relish the gospel.” No such words, however, are to be found. It did not seem to occur to him.

Then again, “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers . . . for the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4:11-12). Where do entertainers come in? The Holy Spirit is silent concerning them. Were the prophets persecuted because they amused the people or because they refused? The concert has no martyr roll.

Again, providing amusement is in direct antagonism to the teaching and life of Christ and all His apostles. What was the attitude of the church to the world? Ye are the salt” (Matt. 5:13), not the sugar candy---something the world will spit out not swallow. Short and sharp was the utterance, “Let the dead bury their dead” (Matt. 8:22). He was in awful earnestness.

Had Christ introduced more of the bright and pleasant elements into His mission, He would have been more popular when they went back, because of the searching nature of His teaching. I do not hear Him say, “Run after these people Peter and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow, something short and attractive with little preaching. We will have a pleasant evening for the people. Tell them they will be sure to enjoy it. Be quick Peter, we must get the people somehow.” Jesus pitied sinners, sighed and wept over them, but never sought to amuse them.

In vain will the Epistles be searched to find any trace of this gospel of amusement! Their message is, “Come out, keep out, keep clean out!” Anything approaching fooling is conspicuous by its absence. They had boundless confidence in the gospel and employed no other weapon.

After Peter and John were locked up for preaching, the church had a prayer meeting but they did not pray, “Lord grant unto Thy servants that by a wise and discriminating use of innocent recreation we may show these people how happy we are.” If they ceased not from preaching Christ, they had not time for arranging entertainments. Scattered by persecution, they went everywhere preaching the gospel. They turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). That is the only difference! Lord, clear the church of all the rot and rubbish the devil has imposed on her, and bring us back to apostolic methods.

Lastly, the mission of amusement fails to effect the end desired. It works havoc among young converts. Let the careless and scoffers, who thank God because the church met them halfway, speak and testify. Let the heavy laden who found peace through the concert not keep silent! Let the drunkard to whom the dramatic entertainment has been God's link in the chain of the conversion, stand up! There are none to answer. The mission of amusement produces no converts. The need of the hour for today's ministry is believing scholarship joined with earnest spirituality, the one springing from the other as fruit from the root. The need is biblical doctrine, so understood and felt, that it sets men on fire.

Jesus had essentially said, “If you love me, then feed my sheep.” We feed the sheep of God by providing the milk and the meat of the Word of God whereby they may grow strong. It is the duty of all churches and the duty of all Christ's ministers to feed His lambs and sheep.

II. Jesus Christ revealed to Peter his future suffering (vs. 18-19)

¹⁸Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” ¹⁹This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”

Most people live with the thought that in their younger years they must labor hard and be controlled by others, laboring and saving until the day that they are “free” in retirement to do what they have always wanted to do, but were unable to do so. It seems that our Lord told Peter the flow up his life would trend in the opposite direction. Early on Peter would have relative freedom to decide for himself where to go and what to do, but the time would come when he would be restricted and controlled by others. But John gave a more insightful explanation of Jesus’ words to Peter. John wrote, “This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.” This explanation of John is why most understand our Lord’s words to have foretold in a rather cryptic way in which church tradition has recounted Peter’s death. Here are the words of the first church historian, **Eusebius**, who penned his chronicle in the early 4th century AD.

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. (Book III, Ch. 1)

When Jesus said to Peter, “but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish”, it (probably?) alludes to Peter stretching his arms on the cross on which he was carried to the place of crucifixion. Tradition also claims that it was at Peter’s request that he be crucified upside down for he did not regard himself worthy to die in the same way as His Savior. It would seem that Peter showed forth his love for Jesus in feeding His people and in the end willing and submitting to die for the glory of Christ.

III. Jesus Christ responded to Peter’s question concerning John’s future (vs. 20-23)

²⁰Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” ²¹Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?”

²²Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”

²³Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”

Peter enquired of Jesus what would fall out for John. Would he also die a martyr’s death? John explains that an unjustified rumor arose because the Lord’s words had not been recalled and published accurately. The Lord basically told Peter, “That is none of your business. If I purpose to have him live until My return, that is, My second coming, that is my decision to make. You be concerned with your own responsibility and the challenges that are ahead of you.” It is enough for us to know what the Lord would have us do, without worrying and thinking that we know what the Lord would have others do or experience.

John indicated that this wrong understanding of our Lord’s words contributed to the wrong notion that Jesus had said that His second coming would be sooner than later. Now it is commonly asserted by many evangelicals, particularly those who believe that there will be a future, sudden, rapture of the church before a future endtime seven year tribulation (which is spurious understanding of Scripture), that the all of the early

Christians expected the imminent (any moment and very soon) return of Jesus for His church. But this is a wrong understanding of Scripture. Jesus told Peter that he would die before His second coming. Peter was not expecting the imminent return of Christ. Now it is true that the early churches did not at first anticipate a prolonged period of history before the second coming of Christ. But to say that they anticipated Him to appear at any moment, is not true. They knew that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple would occur first. They knew that the gospel would be taken to the world before Jesus returned. They knew that there would be an extended period of persecution, a great apostasy, and the man of sin would rise before they were gathered to be with the Lord at His coming (2 Thess. 2). We are always to be ready and watching, but we do not know the day or hour of His return. No one does.

History within church tradition testifies that all of the apostles met with a violent death after having proclaimed the gospel far and wide. John was the one exception. Interestingly, one tradition recounted that John had lived to old age in Ephesus--which was no doubt true—but that he had been arrested and sentenced to be executed by being thrown into a large crock of boiling oil. But in their efforts to do so, John came forth unscathed. That is when they exiled him to the island of Patmos, where the Lord Jesus revealed Himself and the contents of the Revelation. Of course there is no way to assess whether this is a true or apocryphal account of what had actually happened to John.

IV. John concluded his Gospel by glorifying what Jesus had done (vs. 24-25)

²⁴This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

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

The writer of this Gospel never identified himself forthrightly. But he does claim to have been an eyewitness of what he had penned. It is clear to everyone that John the apostle was this writer. He was but a young man when the Lord had called him to the apostolic ministry. He lived long and had given witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ for many decades, dying perhaps in the later 90's AD.

John declared that this Gospel he had written was true to history, but that it was not an exhaustive history. It was just the opposite. It was a very limited recounting of who our lord Jesus was and what He had taught and done. But what is recorded is sufficient to bear witness to the truth of His identity: Jesus is the Son of God, the eternal Son of God who had assumed His human nature, remaining truly God while becoming truly Man. And with that testimony John concluded his Gospel.

“The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.” (Numb. 6:24-26)
