

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #79

John 21:18-25

There is a program that we watch on a relatively regular basis called “I Survived”. It is a program that tells the real life stories of people who should have been dead, but lived to tell about it. There have been stories of people being kidnapped, shot, stabbed, beaten, shipwrecked at sea, lost in the mountains, or attacked by wild animals. Just recently there was a story of a young lady from Utah who went jogging with her dog and fell off a cliff and lay on the ground for three days, not able to move. Her dog stayed by her side and on the last day, that she knew she would die, she looked her dog in the eyes and said, “You need to go get help.” The dog ran five miles back to where her car was and found a search and rescue team and led them back to its master. The girl said, “When I fell off the cliff, a 60 foot freefall, I thought I was dead and when I hit the ground and realized I wasn’t dead, I was shocked.”

The truth is, we don’t know how or when our life on this earth will end. We could be raptured or we could die. That is why it is so important that we believe on Jesus Christ and feed on God’s Word and follow Jesus Christ. That is exactly the point John communicates in this final part of his Gospel.

THE FINAL PASSAGE IN JOHN PROVES JESUS CHRIST IS THE GOD/SAVIOR WHO KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE TO EVERY PERSON, INCLUDING WHETHER ONE WILL DIE OR BE RAPTURED AND IN VIEW OF THIS WE NEED TO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, FEED ON HIS WORD AND FOLLOW HIM EVEN WHEN WE DIE.

We need to follow the Lord all the way through life until we die or are raptured.

Many who have studied this Gospel of John have concluded that a good place for John to have ended the Gospel would have been at the end of chapter 20, especially after verses 30-31. But there is a very important reason for **John 21** in that it gives us critical information about Peter and about John. **Contextually this is important because Peter would learn that he needed to feed God’s sheep and follow Jesus Christ until his life on earth would end. Also Peter would learn that even though he had denied the Lord three times, God was going to give him a tremendous honor; he would die as a martyr for the glory of God.**

At the time John wrote John, he was the last living apostle who was actually living in a city that had been influenced by the Apostle Paul. When Peter and John were apostles during the days of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul was nowhere in the picture. But it is quite clear that two key apostles who were in the picture were Peter and John.

Peter and John had apparently formed a close friendship as apostles. They had followed Jesus Christ as He was being taken to trial (John 18:15-16). They were together after the resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 20:2-4). This great Gospel, which is designed to present Jesus Christ as the God-Savior, concludes with a discussion of Jesus Christ with Peter about himself and about John and it really zeroes in on how their lives will end. **The matter of feeding the sheep and following Jesus Christ was something on which both needed to keep their focus in view of the fact they would leave this world.**

Jesus Christ, who has carried out the entire redemptive plan of God, knows every single individual in His family. He knows you personally. He knows what gifts you have. He knows the day you were born, the day you were born again and the day you will leave this world. He knows the when, the where and the how. He knows if you will be raptured or if you will die. He knows, but we don't. Therefore the best way to invest our lives is to believe on Jesus Christ, feed on His Word and follow Him.

This point becomes the final “truly, truly” point in the Gospel of John. This is dogmatic truth. This is factual reality. Jesus Christ wants us to feed on His Word and follow Him until we leave this world, and you and I do not know when, where or how we are going to leave it.

Now there are seven final facts revealed here about Peter and John:

FINAL FACT #1 – Jesus knows how Peter would live in his younger years. **21:18a**

When this episode actually occurred, most scholars believe Peter was middle-aged. He was about 35 years away from dying. At this time he wasn't real young and he wasn't real old. The word “younger” does not necessarily refer to young in faith or prior to coming to faith in Jesus Christ. It is a comparative word that refers to younger as opposed to older.

Peter would have an apostolic ministry that would take him in many different directions. He would walk through life and minister with a certain freedom to move in a variety of directions as he wished. For example, we just saw in this chapter that he had the freedom to get in a boat and go fishing. He could choose to minister in Jerusalem or he could write an inspired letter to “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (I Peter 1:1). However, Jesus will make it clear that that is not how his ministry and life is going to end. He will lose more and more of his freedoms as he gets older, especially as he nears his death.

In your Christian life you will probably make many decisions about many things. You decide where you work, where you worship, where you learn and where you live. There is actually a silent sovereign hand in all of this, but the truth is when you are younger, you decide this and that. But as we age, and move toward the end of our lives, we will discover that some of those freedoms we had when younger will leave us. This is exactly why it is so critical to invest our lives feeding on God's Word and following Him.

FINAL FACT #2 – Jesus knows how Peter would die in his older years. **21:18b-19a**

Now Jesus specifically tells Peter that when he was younger he girded himself, but when he gets older, someone else will gird him. I think he is revealing to Peter a couple of things; first, he would live to be older and second, when you get older, things change. Someone else has to help you do things you never needed help to do before. Getting older is not easy. You start to lose some of the freedoms you enjoyed as a younger person. Sometimes, when you are older, others have to dress you, drive you and even feed you. In fact, according to history, the Apostle John, who was actually writing this Gospel, actually had to have people carry him to church just so he could be there.

But Jesus is giving Peter more than just a lesson of physiology about aging; Jesus informs Peter that when he gets old, he would suffer the death of crucifixion . Apparently, when Peter wrote II Peter he knew his death was imminent (II Peter 1:14) and according to history, he was crucified in A.D. 67.

Tertullian said in A.D. 212 that Peter's arms were girded by another when they stretched them out to be nailed to a cross. Eusebius said Peter was crucified by Nero at his own request (p. 107) and Gaius claimed he could show the exact spot where Peter and Paul were buried (p. 105). From the moment Peter had this discussion with Jesus, he knew how he was going to die. He would die as a martyr by being crucified. As Dr. Charles Ryrie said this is a prophecy of "martyrdom." **Peter knew as of this moment that he would not be raptured .**

It is also interesting to observe at the end of **verse 18**, that this type of death would not be Peter's choice. In fact, this would not be what he would wish. No one would choose to die the violent death of crucifixion if the choice were left up to the individual. However, as **verse 19** reveals **the purpose of death, just as the purpose of life, is to "glorify God."** The choice of how, when and where is God's and God would be glorified in the manner in which Peter would die.

I believe we are very near the Rapture of the Church. I think we are the terminal generation. However, if the Lord tarries, we may know with certainty that every one of us will die. None of us knows exactly how we will die or when we will die. We may guess or speculate, but the truth is we do not know. The thing we want, however, is to glorify God in our life and in our death. That is why it is so important that we invest our lives feeding on God's Word and following and obeying it.

FINAL FACT #3 – Jesus reveals what Peter is to do as he lives his life. **21:19b**

Jesus has already told Peter that his specific ministry is to feed the sheep, and now He says specifically to Peter, in view of the fact you are going to die, you need to follow Me. These were similar words that Peter had also heard at the beginning of his relationship with Jesus Christ (John 1:42-43), but they have an entirely different meaning here.

Now in Greek, the specific address is made to Peter and it is very emphatic in **verse 22** (συ μοι ακλουθει). Jesus is contextually telling Peter that he is to feed His sheep and follow Him to the end of his life. Jesus is saying to Peter that in your life and in your apostolic ministry and even in your death, "You follow Me." **Now this takes on new special meaning, when we realize that Jesus just informed Peter that he will be crucified .** He would literally be able to follow Jesus Christ by obeying the apostolic mandate and then he would be able to follow Jesus Christ in his manner of death. This was a great honor for Peter and it would truly glorify God.

Now it is one thing to make a nice little spiritual challenge to follow Jesus Christ by obeying the Word of God as a believer. I believe this is a legitimate application to make in view of a text like this. However, to put this in its real context and then to make an application is a much greater challenge. Because the challenge actually is to die like Jesus Christ. Since probably the manner in which we will die will not likely be by crucifixion, the challenge to us would be to die in a manner that would glorify God. Die with our complete and total focus on Jesus Christ and a bold confidence in Him. If we want to "follow" Christ, we will not die as some faithless coward.

We will face our death squarely, with our faith riveted on Jesus Christ. We will commit our soul to Him and we will be absent from the body and present with the Lord.

I can tell you this; if you do not feed on God's Word and get your theology right, you will never die in a manner that glorifies God. Jesus said to Peter, you are going to glorify God in your death so follow me even to your own crucifixion.

FINAL FACT #4 – Peter wants to know what will happen to John. **21:20-21**

Jesus had just told Peter what was going to happen to him and Peter turned around and saw John and said, what about him. Now I don't think this was a jealousy question at all. This was more a question of interest. But the fact remains, this was not Peter's business, this was God's business.

It seems to me that John's reference to what happened in the Upper Room concerning the question of the betrayer is something which shows how the scene had changed at this point. In the Upper Room it was John who asked Jesus a question for Peter (13:23-24) and now here it is Peter who is asking Jesus a question about John.

The truth is, God does not treat every believer the same way. There are various gifts and ministries and callings. Some believers go through life with a seeming ease and some believers go through life with heavy burdens. God determines what believer gets what. The words of the Apostle Paul are worth remembering here - "Each one shall bear his own load" (Galatians 6:5). When heavy things hit us, what we need to remember is that God has hit us with these heavy things. Our response should not be to be jealous or some busybody wondering why things didn't hit them. Our response should be to follow the will of God through whatever He gives to us to do or calls us to bear.

FINAL FACT #5 – Jesus reveals to Peter that his focus needed to be on following Him and not worrying about John. **21:22-23**

Jesus said to Peter that if He wanted John to be alive at the Rapture, it was none of His business. What Peter needed to do was to follow Him with his own life. He had a big job to do - feed God's flock apostolic truth and then die on a cross.

The "if" clause in Greek is third class conditional, which is not the clause of specific reality, but of uncertain possibility (Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, p. 313). Jesus is saying, even if there is an uncertain possibility that I want John to live to the Rapture, it is not your business.

John is very clear to state that Jesus did not say he would factually be alive to the Rapture, just that there was a possibility. According to history, John died a very old age of natural causes.

Now what we may observe from **verse 23** is that unless you very carefully and grammatically interpret the Word of God, you can arrive at some faulty conclusions and beliefs. Most of the believers of the first century interpreted Christ's "if" clause as being first class conditional, not third class conditional, and as a result they formed faulty beliefs and conclusions. **Precision with God's Word including grammatical and syntactical analysis is demanded of a minister who will rightly divide God's Word and actually feed God's flock His truth.**

All believers are individually known by Jesus Christ. He knows the moment of physical birth, of spiritual birth and of physical death. We have different personalities and different interests and different skills, which we are to use in the Church Age. The primary interest in all of us is to "follow Christ," which in this Age means to help build His Church. The way we follow Him is through the Word of God. The third class conditional "if" clause indicates that there is a real uncertainty as to whether we will die or be raptured. There is a good possibility we will be raptured. Truth is we don't know just like John didn't know. So let us purpose to feed on the Word and apply it so that when we face Jesus Christ we may do so with confidence and not shame (I John 2:28).

There is a powerful lesson to learn from this text; don't worry about what someone else is doing or not doing, but you work on following God's Word and will for your life. Other people are out of your control and they are God's business. You be about doing God's business in your life. It is clearly revealed in Scripture that each person is accountable to God, so don't spend your life worrying about someone else; you work on you (Romans 14:10).

FINAL FACT #6 – John reveals that everything he has witnessed is true . **21:24**

Here is a key point that many miss. Biblical Christianity is a faith system that is based on facts, not myths.

In any trial, ascertaining the truth is the goal. It is an attorney's dream come true if you have eyewitnesses who were actually there to see what happened.

This Gospel of John is designed to generate faith in Jesus Christ as the only God/Savior. John wants us to know that he was an eyewitness to every one of these things and that every one of these things is absolutely true.

If a person is going to reject believing truth about Jesus Christ, that person needs to understand that this truth is based on factual eyewitness accounts. John says I saw these things. I was there and I wrote them down.

I want you to notice the emphasis on what is "written" in these final two verses. The Bible is a factual, inspired written document that is designed to produce true, solid faith. If a church neglects feeding their flocks these sixty-six precious books, it is neglecting the only thing that can actually produce real faith. The written Scriptures are to be carefully studied and preached.

FINAL FACT #7 – John reveals that Jesus did so many things that all the books in the world could not contain them. **21:25**

I want you to notice that John says Jesus did “many” things. This is a statement of quantity and variety. But he also says these were things Jesus “did,” which is a statement of reality.

The reference to what is not written means that God has inspired His Word and everything has been written in His Word which is necessary for faith. There are a group of books called the Apocrypha which have bizarre stories in them, which frankly, you don’t need. Don’t waste whatever time in life you have studying goofy storybooks about weird stuff. Study the written Scriptures. You don’t know how your life will end. It could end in death or the Rapture. But if you want to do something that really matters, you come and feed on God’s Word and apply it to your life.

This book was written by the Apostle John who was led of the Holy Spirit to write so that He could generate faith in Jesus Christ. Everything in this Gospel gives you enough evidence so that you may believe in Jesus Christ and be saved from all your sins and have eternal life. The evidence he has presented is exactly what God wants presented for that faith. Nothing is missing and nothing is left out. The question comes down to this - “Will you believe the evidence?”