

The Word Became Flesh

Final Words

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: John 21

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Well, we finally made it. We are at the end of the Gospel of John. This is a series that we have been doing for the last 7 years, but don't fret, we haven't been doing "constantly" for 7 years, all right? We've been jumping to and from it and going through different things, which actually made me think: how many of you actually were here when I started this series 7 years ago? Raise your hand if you were here when I started this series. That's what I thought. Not many of you, so I'm just going to go back and go through it again. I'm just joking. I'm not going to do that. It has been a long journey.

I appreciate you guys sticking with this, but if nothing else, here is my prayer. My prayer is that you and I would all understand why John believes that Jesus is the Messiah. Remember, that's why he's writing this book for us. That's why he's writing the Gospel, because he came to the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah. And so he's clearly laid out, throughout his book, his experiences with Jesus, and we know from history-- what I mean by history is extra-biblical writings, not just from the Bible itself-- that John's life was never the same.

His life before meeting Jesus and his life after meeting Jesus were totally different. As he writes the Gospel of John, he has had many years to process all that had happened, and he is now going to wrap it up. And so he writes this Gospel 20 to 30 years after the experiences. Now, I just want to take a moment, and I want to admit: how amazing it is that you and I have written testimony, which has been preserved for nearly 2,000 years, from someone who walked and talked with this man named Jesus on the soil of the Middle East.

Have you ever even just taken a moment to understand how amazing that is? That we have had this, that it has been kept for us, so that we have firsthand experience of who Jesus was. This is a miracle in and of itself. Now, I know I have had many of the conversations with individuals who want to argue with me about the validity of Scripture and of Jesus, but let me just tell you that the testimonies of John, as well as those from John and Mark and Matthew and Luke and Paul and Peter and James, we owe a debt of gratitude for these men that wrote down their time with Jesus.

The validity of the New Testament, what we have as our Bible, you need to know, is the most validated and trustworthy documents that humans have from that time period and even long after. There are many people that want to debate, and that's another sermon for another time, but I am telling you that we have more proof that what these guys wrote is actually what we still have today, and that the experiences that they were writing down are actually what they experienced.

And so today, you and I will be left with the opportunity to answer the question that John wants us to answer as he was writing this Gospel, and that question is this: Who was Jesus? That's the question he wants us to answer. And so John has shared with us some of the miracles that he saw Jesus perform. John has shared with us some of the words that he heard Jesus say. And John has spent a long amount of time on the final two weeks of Jesus's life here on earth, leading up to his death and his resurrection.

And so now today, in John chapter 21, he is going to conclude his book with one last story. Jesus has been crucified. He has been resurrected. And now, in John chapter 21, the resurrected Jesus is going to share a meal with 7 of his disciples on the shores of the lake of Galilee, and this is going to be in his resurrected body form. So let's pray. You can open your Bibles to John chapter 21. We'll begin in verse 1. The words will be on the screen behind me.

But let's pray and just ask for God's blessing upon our time. Heavenly Father, we come before you today, and we thank you for the book of John. We thank you for his testimony and for his witness that John came to the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah. And Father, you know that I have come to that same conclusion after looking at the evidence, after doing research, after doing study, and certainly not least of which after feeling your presence in my heart and in my life.

And so, God, my prayer today is that everyone would wrestle with the question: Who is Jesus? Because I know John believes, and I believe, that how you answer that question will not only affect and impact your life here on earth, but it will also impact your life for eternity. And so, Lord, would your Spirit speak truth to us today, and would you reveal your truth to us today? We ask this in Jesus's name. Amen.

Starting in John chapter 21, verse 1, John says this: "Afterward, Jesus appeared again to his disciples by the sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas also known as Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee"-- which were James and John --" and two other disciples were together. 'I am going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat.

But John tells us that night they caught nothing. It was not a good experience. They were out fishing all night and did not catch a single fish. So these 7 guys, these 7 disciples, probably go fishing because they don't know what else to do. Maybe this will take their mind off of the hurt or the confusion experiencing and trying to make sense of everything that has just happened with Jesus. Remember, he was crucified. They've already had 2 experiences of him being resurrected, and they're trying to understand: What does this mean?

What are we supposed to do? They were in Galilee because that is where they were from, and that is where Jesus told them to go. He told them that they should go to Galilee and they should wait. And it's also what they know to do. They were fishermen. John tells us they had zero success. This is not unexpected, though. For those of you that like to go fishing, you know that there's many times that you go fishing and you don't catch anything. It was one of my favorite hobbies growing up, was going fishing. I've kind of moved away from that as I've gotten older.

But you know that there's many times that you'll go out and you will keep casting your line in, and you will come back with nothing. This is the experience that the disciples had. And theologian Charles Spurgeon says this, which I think is interesting: "To be a fisherman, a man must expect disappointments." That's great, right? So if you like fishing, expect to be disappointed. "For he must often cast in the net and bring up nothing but weeds." Now he's going to relate this to our faith. "The minister of Christ must also reckon upon being disappointed.

And he must not be weary in well-doing for all his disappointments, but he must continue in faith and in prayer and labor, expecting that at the end he shall receive his reward ." Those of us that have shared our faith with family and with friends, with coworkers, with neighbors, people that we love and care about, and those individuals have said no to the message of Jesus, it is similar to casting your net into the water and trying to catch a fish and being disappointed that you reel in nothing.

We have all had plenty of disappointments in trying to fish for men, haven't we? And that's what Charles Spurgeon is saying. There's a lot we can learn here. We go on in the story in verse 4: "Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. And he called out to them, ' Friends, haven't you any fish?' " No,' they answered. And so he said to them, ' Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you

will find some.' And when they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish ." To me, as I read this story, it is encouraging and neat to me that we see Jesus show up at the sea of Galilee.

This is the disciples' place of work. This is where they grew up. This is what they did. And we see in this experience with Jesus that Jesus cares about all areas of your life, and that Jesus is available in all areas of your life. You and I need to be reminded that Jesus does not need to be relegated to religious services on a Sunday morning, right? You and I can encounter Jesus not just here on Sunday mornings when we gather with other believers, but we can experience Jesus in our workplace. We can experience Jesus at our homes.

We can experience Jesus on the golf course, though that can be hard sometimes. I understand. But we can experience Jesus everywhere. We also see here that Jesus, in his resurrected form, was not bound to the temple area around Jerusalem, that he could go anywhere he wanted. I love that we see the humility of the disciples here because they don't recognize that it's Jesus yet. And so there is some random guy on the shore that is yelling at them, ' Hey, did you catch anything?' And anybody that's ever gone fishing, that's the question people ask you, right?' Did you catch anything?'" No, didn't catch anything.' And then to have this guy, this random guy say, ' Oh, maybe you should throw your net on the other side of the boat.' These were professional fishermen.

This is what they did for a living. They knew the sea of Galilee. They had fished there many times, and it would have been very likely if it was you or I on the boat. Just think. You're a professional. You've been doing something your entire life, and it's not working, and some random person comes up to you and says, ' Hey, have you thought about trying this?' Wouldn't your response be, ' Get lost,' right? Like, ' I know what I'm doing. Don't try to tell me what to do.' But here we see the humility of the disciples. They say, ' Okay, we're going to go ahead and throw our net on the other side of the boat.' And so what happens?

Verse 7: "Then the disciple, whom Jesus loved, said to Peter, ' It is the Lord.' And as soon as Simon Peter heard him say, ' It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him, for he had taken it off, and he jumped into the water. The other disciple followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from the shore, about a hundred yards." John is the first to recognize, ' Hey, this guy on the shore, that has to be Jesus.' They remember things that had happened before, and they say, ' It must be Jesus.' And so he recognizes that.

But yet Peter is the first in devotion. Peter says, ' The boat cannot move quick enough for Peter.' He wants to get to Jesus first. Maybe he didn't want John to beat him again. You guys remember this, right? John beat him to the tomb, and so he's like, ' That's it. I'm going in.' We also see from this that Peter didn't care about the fish. He didn't care about what they had just caught. They threw the net on the other side, and they catch this huge amount of fish. And he doesn't care. He's more concerned about Jesus. We go on in verse 9: "When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it already and some bread.

And Jesus said to them, ' Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, and John tells us the exact number, 153. But even with so many, the net was not torn. Here's some things that are interesting to note as I read this, as I try to picture this scene playing itself out. To me, it's interesting that Jesus already had fish for them before they brought in the catch. Jesus already had the fish. He was already preparing it for them for their meal.

And so we recognize that Jesus can provide. He didn't need them to have the fish. He already had that. But then I ask the question: Why 153 fish? Now, as you read, there's lots of people that have lots of ideas as to why there was 153 fish, but it seems pretty specific to me. And so there's theories out there. But to me, as somebody who is a fisherman, I choose to hold on to the fact that John shares this with us because he wants to prove that he was an eyewitness.

And as a fisherman, he would have remembered the exact number, right? You guys all talk to fishermen. They go out and they say, ' Hey, did you catch anything?' Yeah, I caught something.' And they say, ' Well, how big was it?' And then we even have these phrases, right? Like it's a fish story because it always seems to grow. And John here

is giving us a testimony saying, 'Listen, I counted the fish in the net. There were 153 fish that were in that net.' Now, I want you to think about this. It says that Peter went back and dragged the net ashore with the fish in it.

So although Peter would have probably been in his 40s at this time, although he wasn't faster than John, he may not have been fast. He was still pretty strong, right? 153 fish. Even if everyone weighed 2 pounds, and John says they were large fish. He doesn't hold out his hands, but he says large fish. Even if everyone's 2 pounds, with the weight of the net and the water, you're talking about 350 pounds that Peter dragged back to the shore. We go on in verse 12: 'Jesus asked them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now, John tells us that none of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' For they knew it was the Lord.

Jesus came and took the bread, and he gave it to them, and he did the same with the fish." John says this was now the third time that Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. If you remember back in chapter 20, there was 2 times that Jesus appears in the upper room in Jerusalem while the disciples are there. And so John says this is the third time. But there's something different about this occasion. John doesn't give us all of the details, and so I have lots of questions, but there is obviously this indication that there was something unusual about the appearance of Jesus after his resurrection.

It seems obvious from how John writes this that Jesus didn't look like Jesus, at least how they knew him. It's as if he had a different form. And so there's 2 theories that exist. One is that Jesus just took on a different form, that he actually looked different. He didn't look like the flesh that Jesus had. The other option that I maybe lean more towards is that he probably did look the same as Jesus, but somehow he had clouded the vision of the disciples so that they couldn't recognize him as Jesus.

I also love the details that John shares about them eating fish and eating bread together. It shows that this experience that John and the other disciples had with Jesus wasn't some strange vision. It wasn't a supernatural image that they had in their mind. They actually were there with a man who they believed was Jesus. His body was physical in nature. He could eat and he could drink. It wasn't like in the cartoons where you see a ghost or somebody that comes back to life and they eat and it just flows right through them, you know?

He actually had a body. Another question that I ask about this meeting: John tells us that Peter and Thomas were there. And so I ask the question: How did Peter and Thomas feel in that moment as they are eating breakfast with Jesus? John tells us that there was a pile of burning coals there on the beach over which he cooked the fish. I want you to remember that just a short while earlier, Peter had denied who Jesus was while standing around a similar pile of burning coals in the courtyard of the high priest.

It would have been impossible for him not to make that connection. Thomas was also there. Now, looking upon this new body of Jesus, knowing that only a few days earlier he said to his disciples, 'I refuse to believe that Jesus is resurrected unless I can touch the holes in his hand and put my hand in his side.' How did they feel now that they were standing there before the resurrected Jesus? I am sure that they were grateful for his grace and his mercy.

To recognize that Jesus hadn't shown up to them to condemn them, to refute them, to make them look silly in front of their friends. Instead, I am sure they were grateful for his grace and his mercy. And just so you know, I also am grateful for his grace and for his mercy. I am grateful that God extends that to me, that he doesn't want a relationship with me so he can condemn me and point out all of the wrong things that I am doing and make me feel bad. But instead, he offers his love through his grace and his mercy.

Going on to verse 15: John tells us that when they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.' And so Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.' Again, Jesus said, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' And he answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' And so Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'" After the meal, John tells us that Jesus asked Peter the same question 3 separate times and in 3 really different ways and in front of all of those that were sitting there.

And his question was, 'Do you love me more than these?' Again, this is a time in Scriptures where I wish we had a picture of what was taking place because the question, 'Do you love me more than these?' leads to who or what was Jesus pointing to when he said, 'Do you love me more than these?' There's really 2 options that Jesus could have been talking about. He could have been comparing Peter's love for Jesus to the love of the other disciples. So he could have pointed at John and James and the others and said, 'Peter, do you love me more than these?

These brothers of yours?' That's an option. Either way, Peter said, 'Yes, I do.' Or was Jesus pointing to the fishing gear and wondering if Peter loved him more than his earlier way of life? Maybe he pointed to the fish that were there with the fishing gear and said, 'Peter, do you love me more than the wealth that this type of thing could bring? Do you love me more than your old way of life?' We don't know what he pointed at, but of course, no matter what he would have pointed at, Peter's answer was, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' And it was important in this moment for Jesus to restore Peter to his position of authority amongst the other disciples.

Remember, the last they had seen, Peter had denied Jesus. But Jesus wants them to know that Peter had not lost his place amongst the group. Another interesting thing for me, at least when I read this, is that when Jesus answers him and Peter says, 'Yes, of course I do,' Jesus commands Peter not just to feed the sheep, but also to take care of them and to attend to them. And this command would go to all who would follow in Peter's footsteps, who would take on the responsibility of loving God's people, which would become the church.

He was called to watch after the people of God. Some of you that maybe grew up in the Catholic tradition, of course, they would look at this section of Scripture and believe that this is Jesus affirming Peter as the first pope. Anybody grow up Catholic? You know what I'm talking about, some of you? All right. So they believed that. And whether that's true or not, I mean, obviously Peter was to be a leader of the church. But I would say all those that came after Peter that are going to look after the sheep are called not just to feed them, but to care for them.

It is a responsibility of a pastor to shepherd and to love and to care for the sheep to the best of his ability. We go on in verse 17: "The third time John says, Jesus said to him, 'Simon, son of John.'" I also want you to notice that he calls him Simon because he had changed his name to Peter. But now he calls him Simon. "Do you love me?" John says Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" And so he said, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." And so Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." Why did Jesus ask Peter 3 times?

Remember, Peter had denied the Lord 3 times. And now Jesus gives Peter the opportunity in front of the other disciples to confess his faith 3 times. And Peter understands the significance of being asked the third time. That's why John says that when he asked him the third time, he was hurt. But yet he was grateful because God had given him a second chance. Notice that Jesus, again, did not confront Peter in front of everybody. He didn't ask Peter to be sorry or to promise to do better next time.

Instead, his command to Peter was simply, "Love, feed my sheep. Take care of my sheep." Great theologian McClaren says it this way: "Jesus Christ asks each one of us not for obedience primarily, not for repentance, not for vows, not for conduct, but for a heart, and that being given that heart, all the rest will follow." That is really important to catch what he is saying there. What he is saying is the number 1 thing that God wants is your heart.

Knowing that if he has your heart, all of those other things will naturally follow: obedience, vows, promises, repentance. That all comes once you give your heart. And so many people try to get all of that taken care of before they give Jesus their heart. We go on in verse 18: "Very truly I tell you," Jesus is saying, "when you were younger, you dressed yourself and you went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." And John tells us Jesus said this to Peter to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

And then he said to him, "Follow me." Jesus starts off by looking at Peter and asking him to reminisce. "Peter, do you remember when you were younger? Do you remember when you would just put on your clothes and you would go out and you would play by the lake? You would have fun. There was no responsibilities. There were no

bills to pay. You didn't wake up in the morning sore from the way you had slept the night before. And as I get older, I often will reminisce. I will think back to those times when life seemed a lot simpler, right? You didn't have responsibilities. You didn't have a care in the world.

Summer days seemed to go on forever and you would just go outside and play and have a great time. There wasn't a worry in the world. Jesus says to Peter, "Remember those times? Don't you ever think about those younger years when life was much simpler?" But that reminiscing doesn't last long because Jesus then informs Peter of what his future holds. I asked the question. John tells us that, of course, Jesus was sharing this with Peter because he knew the kind of death that Peter was going to have. But the question is, did Peter know that Jesus was telling him that his life would end on a cross?

Again, John is writing this years later, and so he's writing from his perspective. But if Peter did understand, and I feel that he did, it would have sent a chill down his spine. It would yours as well. "What do you mean I'm going to die on the cross?" But along with that chill would have come the assurance that Peter would die a faithful follower of Jesus, that he knows that he will remain faithful to the end, to his very dying day.

And in fact, Jerome tells us that that's exactly what would happen, that Peter would be crucified under the Emperor Nero, but instead he would be crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord Jesus. And so this comes true. Emperor Nero does crucify Peter, but on an upside-down cross. Now, here is why I believe Peter knew what Jesus was talking about. Let's wrap this up in verse 20: "Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them." This is the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?" We know this is John.

I actually think it would have been more appropriate if John had said, "This is the one who beat him to the tomb." That would have made more sense, right? Just to get that in one more time. But when Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" And Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple, John, would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die.

He only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" Now, assuming that Peter knew what Jesus was talking about concerning the type of death he would have, Peter's first response was to turn around and point to John and say, "What about him?" Now, any parent who has multiple kids, you fully understand what's going on here, don't you? You have multiple kids. Anytime you tell one of your kids that you want them to do something, whether it's a chore or to help you out or to go get something, their first response is always, "What about them?"

What are you going to have them do?" Peter is doing the same thing. "Okay, Jesus, you're telling me I need to die on the cross. This guy better too, right?" John has to go through that as well. But Peter had to consider that what Jesus required of him, Jesus might require something different from John or the other disciples. God doesn't require the same thing from all of us. And so we need to learn the truth that we need to be obedient regardless of what is required of others.

You and I, as part of our human nature, want to point to other people, and we long for the good things that they have. Every single one of us has done that. Maybe you have given your life to Christ and you expected one thing because you knew believers that were blessed and their marriage looked great and their kids were great and their life was great and everything was awesome. And so you give your life to Christ and your life doesn't go that way. And you look at them and say, "God, what am I doing wrong?" Right? "Why do I have to go through the trouble and the heartache and the pain? Why do I have to experience what I am experiencing?" And this was a powerful and pointed challenge to Peter, but it's also a challenge to us.

Will you follow Jesus without regard to how Jesus will deal with other people? The path that he has for each one of us is different. John also tells us that a rumor had started amongst the disciples because of what he had said, that John wasn't going to die before Jesus returned. But John knows this wasn't what Jesus was saying. He

understands that Jesus was simply looking at Peter and say, "What I require of John is different from you, and I can do whatever I want to do. But for me, it helps me realize just how often and easily people misunderstand things," right?

They misunderstood what Jesus was saying. And even God - fearing individuals can misunderstand, which is why I think it's so important for us to read Scripture in community so that we have all of these different perspectives and we can help interpret it and learn from each other. Let's wrap this up, verses 24 and 25. John says, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true." John tells us that Jesus did many other things as well.

"For if every one of them were written down, I suppose that not even the whole world would have room for the books that would be written." John says, "Listen, I am writing to you about who I believe Jesus is. This is from my perspective and what I feel led to share. This is certainly not everything that I could share with you because it's impossible for me or anyone else to write the whole truth about Jesus. There's many other things that we could talk about. But these were the important things so that you and I could answer the question that John wants us to answer: Who do you believe Jesus is?"

Who do you believe Jesus is? Was he just a man who walked the streets of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago and taught about interesting things? Or was he just a crazy man who had psychological issues that were never diagnosed and so he came up with all of this crazy stuff? Or do you agree with John and do you agree with me that this man, Jesus, truly was the Son of God who came to die on a cross to take away the sins of the world?" Again, I believe and John believes that how you answer this question not only decides the direction of your life while here on earth, but it will also decide where you spend eternity in the next one.

And if Jesus truly is the Son of God, then he clearly said over and over, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And if you have come to that conclusion, it requires our prayers. It requires our very lives. And so if you're here today and you're still on the fence of who Jesus was or who Jesus is, whether you're watching us online, I encourage you, go through the Gospel of John. Read what John wrote about Jesus and what he said.

And if you are here today and you are watching and you've already accepted, you already say, "Yes, I have put my faith and my trust in Jesus Christ," can I just encourage you to share the good news? Share it with somebody. Share the good news of Jesus while walking through John with them. So many people will say to me, "I can't talk to so - and - so about Jesus. I didn't go to school for it. I don't know if they're going to ask me questions that I don't have answers for." Well, I can just tell you, you don't have an excuse anymore because all of these series on John are archived, okay? You can go through John with somebody.

And if they ask questions, you know what? Let me just tell you, if somebody asks you a question and you don't have the answer, do you know the best thing you can do? You can look at them and say, "You know what? That's a great question. I don't know. Let me go find out." I know that there's this misconception that as a pastor, I know all of the answers to all of the questions that anybody's ever asked me about faith. That is not even close to the truth. I often have to say, "You know what? That's a good question. Let me look into that." And some of those come from my children when they were 8 or 9 years old. They ask a question that I go, "That's a good question."

I don't know." That will actually gain you more trust than trying to make up something. I encourage you, if you have confessed Jesus as your Savior, I hope that this series has helped you understand that you can leave this place with confidence. Your faith, my faith is not based on nonsense. It's not based on some make-believe story. Your faith is based on pretty solid evidence. And so you and I can rejoice in our salvation. We're going to close the service today. The altar is always open. I want to encourage you to come and do your business with God.

But I want you to know here, if you come to the altar, out of respect and privacy, we intentionally don't come up to you and pray with you unless you seek us out. And so for that reason, we have people that are on the sides of

the sanctuary that if you want prayer and you want somebody to meet with you, you can go talk with them. They would love to pray with you. Or if you come to the altar but you want somebody to come with you, make sure you let us know because otherwise, we will just let you do your business with God. But the altars are always open for you to do your business with God. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for our salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. Thank you that you have promised us that if we confess with our mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and we believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, that we can have eternal life with you. And so it is my prayer, it is my desire that every single person here and everybody watching online or listening on the radio that is wrestling with that question would at least take the time to do the research, that they would pray to you and ask you, if you're real, that you would reveal yourself to them.

For I believe you are faithful. Continue to call people to you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.