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Breakfast with the Saviour

Radio Sermons



by
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Introduction

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” John 20:30-31.

The Gospel of John closes with a reference to the purpose of the book — that men might come to faith in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. But John 21 records a significant event in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his third post-resurrection appearance before a group of His apostles, the Lord prepared breakfast for seven of them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The theme of John 21 is the public restoration of Peter. He had failed the Lord in the hour of need and definitely thought he would never again be recognized as one of the apostles. But the evidence in John 21 is that Peter was just as tenderly loved by the Lord after his failure as he was before it.

Many of the Lord's own have suffered much heartache because they didn't understand the extent of the love of God. In some way or another, all Christians fail to stand the test at some critical point in their walk with the Saviour. Many, when conscious of having sinned against Him, though truly repentant, feel that everything is over for them. They feel that the Lord has given them up and that they are once again hopelessly lost.

In John 21, however, we have evidence contrary to this belief. The Word of God tells us that “if we confess

our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. That is the witness of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. No matter who the sinner is or what the nature of the sin is, when the guilty one comes to God confessing his failure, acknowledging and judging it, he may be certain that God will never go back on His declaration that the sin is put away. The believer who has confessed his sins to God is cleansed from all unrighteousness, and communion (fellowship) is restored.

There is another theme running through this chapter. The reader is given a prophetic view of the Lord's purpose and ministry during the church age. We see the Lord empowering His disciples to preach the Gospel. And we see His power to draw men from all nations, tongues and kindreds of the earth to Himself. We see that the Lord Himself orders the life, ministry and destiny of those who are His called servants. He empowers them to do His work in the earth and instructs them daily in the accomplishment of this work. The life of each disciple is ordered according to His plan, and all are to follow Him in all things.

Our Lord's coming at the end of this age is a prominent theme in this post-resurrection incident. In the Father's own time, Christ will return to receive His own to Himself. Earlier He said, *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."* John 14:2-3. In this closing chapter, He verifies that promise in a most convincing way.

Let's carefully consider what John has recorded for the child of God here in John 21. And let's join those seven who had "Breakfast with the Saviour."

1.

A Return to Fishing

“After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.” John 21:1-3.

Verse 1 describes another manifestation of the risen Saviour. In verse 14 we are told that this is the third time He showed Himself to His disciples. This means it is the third time He showed Himself to His disciples as a group. It does not rule out that He may have manifested Himself to others at other times.

There's little doubt that the Lord had actually restored Peter to fellowship before the event recorded here took place. Luke says that the disciples who came from Emmaus on that first Lord's day evening told the other disciples gathered together that “the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon.” Luke 24:34. Just where this meeting took place, we do not know. But God's Word verifies that there had been a private meeting between Peter and his Lord whom he had denied. As a result of this meeting, we can be sure that Peter had already been restored to fellowship.

There were only two previous manifestations of the risen Lord to a group of His disciples. The first one was when Thomas was absent. That appearance took place on the resurrection day. The second appearance was one week later, and that is recorded at the close of John 20.

The scene is the Sea of Tiberias, or as it is also called, the Lake of Gennesaret, the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Tiberias is the Roman name. The use of this name is evidence that John's Gospel was written late in the first century. He used the name that was in current use at that time.

Scene of Many Miracles

The Gospels record many events that occurred near this lake. The disciples toiled hard in rowing across this sea, with the wind contrary to their efforts. Jesus walked on this sea, and Peter, leaving the little ship, attempted to walk on it to meet Him. Jesus stilled the waves and the wind of this often stormy sea by His commanding Word of Power.

On another occasion there was a miraculous catch of fishes from this sea, when the net broke. Here also Peter caught the fish, which at the Lord's direction, supplied the coin to pay the tribute money. Sitting in a boat at the sea shore, the Lord Jesus delivered the first of the seven parables in Matthew 13. On its shore, He fed the multitudes; and in this sea the 2,000 swine rushed to destruction, when the demons entered into them.

This sea frequently was the site of the display of our Lord's divine power and glory, and once more it is about to witness His gracious power, His lovingkindness, His mercy and His Lordship.

Seven disciples had made their way back from Judea

to Galilee. Verse 2 lists them as Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, and John (the two sons of Zebedee) and two unnamed disciples. Bible teachers believe the seven disciples were in Galilee following the instruction of the angel outside the empty tomb. See Matt. 28:7,10. Perhaps their presence was in obedience to this command, but it does not appear that the command was the motivating factor behind their journey.

It is quite evident that these disciples were restless. They were still unclear as to the meaning of the events of the past few days. True, the appearances of the Lord in the upper room in Jerusalem and to the women had already taken place. Yet, the apostles were still unaware of their place in the evangelization of the world, in carrying to all men the story of the risen Christ. They were confused and felt helpless.

Simon Peter, in his restlessness and confusion, turned his attention to his old occupation. He said to his companions, "I go a fishing." There is certainly nothing wrong in being a fisherman. It is an honorable occupation. However, our English translation does not fully bring out what Peter said. His statement is literally "I am returning to my occupation of fishing."

Return to a Secular Occupation

His companions said, "We also go with thee." They were abandoning the work of the Lord and trying to pick up the threads of their former life. They were returning to a secular occupation. To return to fishing at the time when they should have been waiting for the manifestation of the Lord certainly implies an activity of the flesh. They were occupying themselves with something other than the work of the Lord.

We all know that it is so much easier to "go fishing"

than to give ourselves to spiritual activities. At those times when the Spirit of God calls us to a season of waiting on the Lord to act in His chosen time, we tend to get impatient. It's so much easier to get up and do something in the flesh. As a result, we usually do the wrong thing. We would rather do most anything than wait quietly on God to show us His way. The flesh, the old carnal nature, takes over and drives us to the wrong place.

It was the flesh that led Peter to say, "I go back to my occupation of fishing." It had been a long time since Peter had paid a visit to his old haunts. This may have been the first time such an opportunity had presented itself since he had been called to be a "fisher of men." Despite being forgiven by the Lord, Peter's thoughts were probably something like this: "There is not much chance of me being a fisher of men now! It might have been different had I proven true when the time of testing came! I can hardly expect anyone to trust me now after I denied the Lord. I had better go back to my old occupation of fishing and fish while I still can."

The sad thing is that Peter had already taken the position of leadership among the apostles. When he made his statement, the others spoke up and said, "Okay, we'll go with you." We should take careful note of something here. Others can be led from the will of God by our actions. Our failures can have widespread results.

No Results

The seven disciples followed their decision of the flesh. "They went forth (that is, they went up to Galilee), and entered into a ship immediately." They wasted no time. They went back to the Sea of Tiberias and entered a boat immediately. They wanted to be on hand for the

big catch on that very night. They went fishing, "and that night they caught nothing."

Fishing in the flesh produces no results. The labors of the seven men were in vain. Though they were excellent fishermen and fished all night, they caught nothing. There is a lesson here. Toil without the Lord goes for nothing. Unless He directs there is no success.

In type, fishing in the sea pictures the preaching of the Gospel among the nations. If preaching is done in the flesh without the power of the Lord, the efforts are in vain. The work will produce no results. There will be no fruit of that labor. We cannot go out and evangelize the world without the empowerment and the authority of the Lord Himself. The Holy Spirit had not yet come to empower these servants of the Lord. Their fishing was in vain.

This is the situation that existed prior to the third manifestation of the risen Saviour. The stage was set for His appearance.

2.

The Risen Saviour

“But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.” John 21:4-8.

The long, empty night finally came to an end. The seven disciples had toiled throughout the night, but their efforts were not rewarded with so much as a single fish. They caught nothing. Much labor had been expended, but there was no fruit.

When morning came, the risen Lord appeared suddenly on the shore. This appearance was as sudden as the two previous ones to the disciples behind closed doors had been. As they were drawing near the shore with their empty nets, they suddenly saw a “strange” figure emerging from the morning mist.

One of the characteristics of the resurrection body seems to be the ability to appear or disappear at will.

Our Lord's resurrection body was not subject to the physical limitations of our present bodies. He was able to pass through closed doors; yet his body was solid and real to the touch. He told His disciples that His body was of flesh and bones. His resurrection body was able to consume food; yet food was unnecessary for its sustenance.

The Lord's resurrection body is the model of the resurrection bodies that all believers will some day possess. The Apostle John wrote, *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."* 1 John 3:2.

The disciples saw a figure standing on the shore, but they did not know it was Jesus, their Lord and Master. Apparently they did not recognize Him, just as the two disciples going to Emmaus did not know Him during the early part of their encounter. Perhaps He had a different appearance in resurrection life. There were similarities to His former appearance, but there were also differences. He had been "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Now, in resurrection life, He was "the glorified One." He could be recognized by His resemblance to His former appearance, but such recognition was not immediate.

A Pointed Question

While the fishermen were still a little way from land, the figure on the shore called to them, "Children, have ye any meat?" The Greek word translated "children" actually means "children under instruction." The Lord's actual words were "Children under instruction, you do not have any fish, do you?"

They answered him, "No." Notice that the Lord made them confess how utterly empty they really were,

and how the night's fishing had been wasted. He wanted to demonstrate to these disciples that activity of the flesh does not produce fruit. That's why He put the question to them in this precise way.

After He had received their negative answer, the Lord called to them again. This time it was a command. "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find." This instruction must have given the disciples the first hint that the speaker might be the Lord. Would they have followed the command of a total stranger?

Probably those words electrified Peter. He most likely remembered that same voice over three years before saying, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." Luke 5:4. On that other occasion, also, he had toiled all night and taken nothing.

In obedience to this "stranger's" command, "they cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." The net was cast at once, following the directions given. When the multitude of fishes were caught, the identity of the stranger at the shore was no longer unknown to these men.

It was "that disciple, whom Jesus loved" who first voiced his recognition. "It is the Lord!" That "disciple whom Jesus loved" was none other than the Apostle John, the human author of this Scripture.

John never designated himself by name in his Gospel. All personal references are by designations similar to this. He did not call himself "that disciple who loved Jesus." Rather, it is "that disciple whom Jesus loved." John was awed by the fact that the Saviour's great love was poured out upon him.

John Recognized the Lord First

With a heart filled with love that made him keen sighted, John recognized the Lord ahead of his six companions. John was also the one who had outrun Peter to the empty tomb, and he was the first to believe that Christ had risen. John knew that the Lord Jesus Christ was the only One who could command fish into their nets. He was the Creator of the fish they had taken, and as the "last Adam" He had dominion over them. And so John said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"

Peter was once again close behind the beloved disciple. Impetuous, impulsive, yet affectionate, Peter rushed into action. "Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was not fully clothed), and did cast himself into the sea."

There was nothing on earth that could hold Peter back from rushing to the feet of Jesus. Peter, who was not fully prepared for the appearance of the Lord, had taken off his outer coat and was clad only in undergarments. (The Greek word translated "naked" can mean this.) In this, Peter pictures those who belong to the Lord but will not be fully prepared for Him when He comes for His church. Many of the saved will have unconfessed sin upon them. They will be walking in a worldly way. Their spiritual condition will not be what it should be. But in spite of this, they will be caught up to meet Him in the air!

Peter made hurried preparations. Not waiting for the ship to reach the shore, he quickly threw on his outer garments and jumped into the sea. There on the shore was the Lord and Saviour he had denied.

The Net Was Not Broken

The other disciples remained in the ship, bringing it

to shore and dragging the overloaded net behind it. Unlike the other net when there was a miraculous catch of fishes, this one was not broken. All the catch safely reached the shore; not a single fish was lost.

What a difference there is between fishing in the flesh and fishing in the power of the risen Saviour! While fishing in the flesh, the disciples toiled all night and caught nothing. But when fishing in obedience to the Lord's command, a single lowering of the net resulted in an abundant catch. "Fishers of men" must cast the Gospel net in accordance with the Lord's instructions. They must be empowered by the Holy Spirit of God as they take the Gospel to the nations of the world. They must use the Lord's methods and they must preach the truth in accordance with His Word. Only this kind of fishing produces results. "Fish" are not taken from the sea when the methods of the world are used. Ministers of the Word must understand this principle.

What took place if and when Peter reached the Lord first is not recorded. What is significant is Peter's eagerness to bring himself into the presence of the Lord whom he had denied. He truly loved the Lord and truly intended to serve Him. But the flesh was weak. When he felt strong, he was at his point of greatest weakness. He failed at a crucial time. But he did desire the Lord's fellowship. He wanted to be in His presence and wanted to serve Him.

The disciples fishing on the Sea of Tiberias picture this age of God's grace. The sea pictures the restless humanity of the Gentile nations. The fishing net is God's message of grace. Men, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, are casting this net into the sea of humanity. The net is effective in drawing to the Saviour all who put their faith in Him. Not a single one who responds to the "net" is lost. All will reach the shore to have breakfast with the Saviour.

There is a great spiritual lesson here: service without the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ is barren. Service that is self-willed, or under the leadership of a man, is in vain. But if we take our "fishing" directions from our Lord and are obedient to His words and follow His directions, His power will accompany our toil.

3.

Breakfast by the Sea

"As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead." John 21:9-14.

It was not only the Lord's presence on the shore that caught the attention of the disciples. There was also a fire of coals and a breakfast thereon. The seven disciples witnessed another miracle.

How did this fire of coals, the broiling fish and the bread get there? Only a short while before, these disciples had said that they had nothing to eat. Yet here was a refreshing breakfast prepared for them. There was *only one* source for these things. The pierced hands of the risen Saviour had prepared this meal. He had formed the coal and had started the fire. His divine power produced the fish and the bread.

The Lord Cares for His Own

At this third appearance to His disciples, the Lord

showed once more (as He did here earlier in His ministry when He fed the multitude with bread and fish) that He is a compassionate Lord who cares for the temporal needs of His own just as He cares for their spiritual needs. Such a Lord He still is! He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is interested even in breakfast for those who are His own. And we should remember that He is still the same, the Lord changeth not, and we should take new courage to come to Him and tell Him all our needs. He wants to be trusted and show forth His lovingkindness and tender mercy, just as He did when He prepared that breakfast by the sea.

There is something significant about the "fire of coals" as it applies to Peter. When Peter had denied his Lord, we find in John 18:18 that *"the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself."*

That earlier fire of coals was the world's fire. Peter was in the wrong place. He put himself in the place of temptation. When one starts on the downward path, he continues downward. Peter had reached the point where three times he had denied his Lord with threats and cursing!

But this fire on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias was the fire that the Lord Himself had kindled. At this fire Peter is publicly restored to fellowship and service. What a contrast!

This miracle by the sea is an outstanding example of the grace of Christ. There He was, the Firstfruits of the resurrection, cooking breakfast for Peter and the other apostles! There was never anything that the Lord Jesus thought too humiliating to do for His own. He came to serve. He is the "Servant of Jehovah" who fulfilled the

prophecy of Isaiah 53. The entire Gospel of Mark presents Him as the laboring Servant, the patient "Ox," who came to serve. He expects us to serve also as we walk with Him.

Here the Lord cooked breakfast, not only for Peter who had denied Him so vehemently, but also for the other six. Christ's first words to them when they arrived on the beach were "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught." In addition to the food He had provided, He would also use what they had brought. Simon Peter "went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes." He expended that final effort of labor needed to bring the net ashore. He brought the overloaded net up out of the water, but it did not break. Not one of the fishes caught within its folds was lost.

Scripture records the exact number of fish brought ashore — 153. Scripture never includes superfluous information so there must be a reason for the inclusion of this number.

Significance in Numbers

The scene of the disciples fishing in the Sea of Tiberias is a picture of the "fishers of men" in this age of grace. Seven disciples were fishing, and seven is the number of completion. This pictures God's ministers of the Gospel preaching the Word during His absence. The restless sea pictures the nations of the world that are to receive the Gospel. The little ship dragging the catch to shore at the feet of the Lord represents the gathering of those saved through the power of the Gospel to the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes for His church at the end of this age. Each "fish" represents the saved from a particular nation. The number 153 anticipates the number of nations that will exist at the time the Lord appears in the air to catch away His church. As a point of interest, today there are 153 recognized nations in the world.

“Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine.” The food was prepared. The Lord gathered His disciples about Him, and they enjoyed the repast together. On the sandy beach, the disciples had breakfast with the Saviour. Picturing this scene in our minds we see the fire of coals there on the sand and Jesus in the midst of the group. The disciples were enjoying the fish and bread the Lord had prepared. This is a beautiful picture of things as they are today. Christ is in the midst of His church, supplying spiritual food to His own.

“And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.” The Lord had not identified Himself by word of mouth to any of the disciples. He expected them to recognize Him. However, there were differences in His appearance, and these differences did sometimes delay recognition. It was the very same Lord Jesus these men had known before His crucifixion and burial. Nevertheless, His appearance in resurrection was different from that prior to His death. He had been “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Now He was in that resurrection body that would never know pain or weariness again. This, in itself, would produce a difference in His appearance.

The seven disciples were probably asking themselves, “Could it be He? Are we making a mistake?” But deep in their hearts, they knew it really was the Lord. None dared ask Him His identity, because they *did* recognize Him.

He Serves Us Spiritual Food

The Lord Jesus Christ not only prepared breakfast for the disciples, He also served them. “Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.” There was no servant to minister to them at that breakfast. So the Lord Himself became the servant. Just

as He had taken this role in washing the disciples' feet at that Passover not too many days earlier, He now took the role a second time. The food for refreshing those physical bodies of the disciples was given to them by their Lord. Similarly, the spiritual food that refreshes our spirit, the Word of God, is served to us by the same Lord Jesus. He came to minister and minister He does to those who are His own.

What a blessed gathering this must have been! The risen Saviour had fellowship with His disciples while He served them food to refresh their physical bodies. Their weariness was the result of a night's fishing in the power of the flesh. They were not serving Him as they expended their energies. But just the same, in His grace He restored those energies and prepared them for the service they were to render in the future.

4.

“Feed My Sheep”

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.” John 21:15-17.

The morning meal had ended; it was time for the business of the day. The risen Saviour turned to Peter. There was a matter that must be attended to before the Lord's work for this age could begin.

Peter's denial of his Lord on the night of the arrest and trial had led him to the depths of repentance and self-judgment. Before Peter ever denied his Lord, he had been warned of what was coming. Satan anticipated that Peter was a man marked for an important service. Satan had heard those words the Lord spoke to Peter in Matthew 16:17-19.

“And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jo-na: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon

this rock (the Rock of Peter's confession, the Lord Jesus Christ) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The prince of this world wanted to snatch Peter away from the Lord. Therefore, Satan asked permission to sift Peter (just as he had asked for Job centuries earlier). The Lord told Peter this and assured him of His intercession in his behalf. Because of this, Peter's faith could not fail.

When the prophesied denial actually took place, the Lord "looked upon Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord." Luke 22:61. What a look that must have been! Then Peter went out and wept bitterly — tears of repentance and self-judgment.

Early in the morning of that first day of the week, the risen Saviour had sent a special message to Peter through the women who had come to the empty tomb. "Tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee." Mark 16:7. But in addition to this, He had appeared privately to Peter. "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Luke 24:33. "He was seen of Cephas." 1 Cor. 15:5. Scripture does not reveal what happened at this private meeting between Peter and the risen Lord. However, we can be assured that, as a result of this meeting Peter's fellowship had been restored. Perhaps the Lord had other direct dealings with Peter that he was not permitted to reveal.

A Public Restoration

Now, at the scene of the breakfast by the sea, Peter is publicly restored to what he had lost by his denial. The

meal the eight had just enjoyed together had been a time of fellowship. During this time not a word of rebuke had come from the lips of the Lord. It could have been otherwise. The Lord could have pointed to the fire of coals and asked Peter whether he remembered that earlier fire of coals, the one before which he had warmed himself a number of days ago in the palace of the high priest. The Lord might have asked Peter to repeat those words of denial he had spoken, but He did not.

The Lord opened His conversation with Peter by simply asking, "Simon Peter, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" What the Lord asked Peter was exactly what the outspoken apostle had professed. On the night of the betrayal, just before the disciples went out to the garden, Peter had said, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." Matt. 26:33. Peter was in essence saying he loved Jesus more than the other disciples did.

The Lord's question "Lovest thou me more than these?" was designed to recall this to Peter's mind. And with these words, the Saviour pointed to John, James, Thomas and the rest of the group. "Peter, do you really have more of a deep, unselfish, abiding love for me than these other apostles?"

Earlier, Peter had been loud mouthed in his profession of devotion to Jesus. Peter had said, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death." Luke 22:33. With great confidence Peter had spoken of his strength. Then he denied his Lord three times! When the Lord asked this disciple the same question three times, He touched the sore spot of Peter's conscience. He reminded Peter of his past profession of devotion and his three denials.

Commissioned A Pastor-Teacher

This business had to be done, not in secret, but before the six witnesses. The Lord's forgiveness of Peter was not involved in this exchange. The Lord had already forgiven him in private. But in this public meeting, the Lord restored him to service. In the presence of these witnesses, He gave Peter another great commission. The Lord had commissioned Peter as an evangelist at Caesarea Philippi after Peter had confessed Him as the Son of God. Now He commissioned him as a shepherd over the flock, a pastor-teacher to feed the flock of God.

If such a public restoration and new commission had not taken place, others could have pointed to Peter and charged him with having forfeited his apostleship by his denial of the Lord. The validity of Peter's ministry would have been in great uncertainty.

There is something very interesting in this exchange between the Lord and Peter. There are two different Greek words for "love" used in this conversation. One is the strongest Greek word for love that we have in our Bible. It is *agapao*, and it is a word used to describe love that is absolutely unselfish. It is used throughout the New Testament to express the love of God Himself ("God is love" and "for God so loved the world"). This word refers to devotional love, worshipful love. It is even used for the love that men sometimes put in place of God. When used this way, it means "worshipful love."

Then there is another word for love here, and it means affection such as exists between good friends. This word is *phileo*. It means "brotherly love" with no thought of deep devotion. This word is used for the love of one friend to another and for family affection. It suggests a lower quality of love than *agapao*.

When the Lord put His question to Peter, *agapao* was used: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (*agapas*) thou me more than these?" He was asking, "Peter, do you have an absolutely pure, unselfish, love for me beyond that possessed by these other disciples?"

Now if Peter had not judged himself, if he had still adhered to the same self-confidence he exhibited before, he would have answered enthusiastically by using the same word the Lord had used. But that word challenged Peter. He saw himself as he really was. He could not rise to that higher word; so he answered, "Thou knowest that I love (*philo*, 'have affection for') thee."

Peter did not dare use the word that expresses the highest affection. This is the evidence that he had learned the lesson and had judged himself. The Lord responded to Peter by saying, "Very well, Peter, if you have affection for me, be caring for my lambs."

Then the Saviour said to Peter the second time, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest (*agapas*) thou me?" Again, He used the word for devotional love, but Peter answered with the word for affectionate love. Peter said, "Lord thou knowest that I have affection for thee." And the Lord Jesus replied, "Very well, Peter, be shepherding my flock."

A Change in the Greek Word

The change came when the Lord questioned Peter the third time. He now used the same word that Peter had used. "Peter, lovest (*phileis*) thou me?" Peter was grieved because the Lord had asked him the third time and had used this lesser word. How many times had Peter denied Him? That is why the Lord questioned him three times. Remember, we are accountable for every careless action and word except for the grace of God!

Peter broke down at this point. His reply appealed to the Lord's divine omniscience. "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I have affection for (*philo*) thee." This is as much as to say, "Oh Lord, I do not deserve Your confidence. You know all about me. But You know that in spite of my failure and denial, I have affection for You still."

The wound had been probed to the very bottom, though not a word of blame or reproach had come from the lips of the Lord. Peter had revealed in his three answers that his old self had been judged and broken. The Lord's third reply was "Be feeding my sheep."

Peter was restored publicly to his special work as an apostle of the Lord. Further, he was commissioned to go beyond the work of evangelism. He was commissioned as a pastor-teacher. From this point on we find Peter as a tower of strength, the leader of the apostles at the dawning of the church age. No longer was he the weak, headstrong character of the Gospels. Now he was Peter, the "big fisherman" of the early church of Jesus Christ.

Feed the New Believers

The Lord is indeed omniscient: He knows all things. He knew the state of Peter's soul. He knew that Peter really loved Him. With the very first question He commissioned this man anew with the words "Feed my lambs." By the use of the term "lambs," He did not mean little children in the physical sense. He meant believers who are young in the faith and who lack deep spiritual experience. They are the "recently born ones" in the spiritual sense, the "babes and sucklings" of Psalm 8, the "little children" of the Epistle of John. As the weak ones, they always have the Lord's first and tenderest care.

This blessed work, to feed those who are weak with the bread of life, our Lord committed to Peter. This is the

commission of the pastor-teacher. It is a higher work than the use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Those keys were first exercised by Peter when he preached to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. He used them again in the house of Cornelius, when he first preached the Gospel to the Gentiles. With these two usages, the "keys of the kingdom" had their power exhausted. Feeding the Lord's lambs is the more permanent work.

How does one feed the Lord's lambs? Lambs are fed by giving them spiritual food, and the spiritual food for both lambs and sheep is the Word of God. Lambs are to be fed the "milk" of the Word. Sheep are to be fed the "meat" of the Word. The job of the pastor is to feed the Lord's flock on the Word of God. He is to be a teacher.

Feed the Mature in Christ

The second reply to Peter is the Lord's commission to him to "shepherd His sheep." The "sheep" are those John's epistle designates as "young men and fathers." These are the mature believers. Peter's teaching of the "meat" of the Word is to be for the mature in Christ.

The Lord's third statement of commission to Peter was "Feed my sheep," or as some manuscripts record it, "Feed my little sheep." The expression "little sheep" is a term of endearment, i.e., "Feed my dear little sheep."

What the Lord told Peter, He tells all He calls to be pastor-teachers to His flock. Notice, it is "His" flock. The Lord never refers to those who are to be fed as Peter's flock. The flock belongs only to Christ. It is incorrect for preachers and ministers to speak of "my flock" or "my people." The flock does not belong to the under-shepherd; it belongs to the Good Shepherd.

Feed My Flock

Later, when Peter wrote his first epistle, he passed his commission on to the elders of the church: *“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock.”* 1 Peter 5:2-3.

An elder is a pastor-teacher to the local assembly. In effect, the Lord was speaking to all elders down through the church age when He said, “Feed my dear little sheep.” A pastor-teacher should not fail to teach the whole Word of God to those over whom the Saviour has made him an undershepherd.

5.

Follow the Master

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” John 21:18-23.

After the Lord had said to him the third time, “Feed my sheep,” Peter was restored publicly to his special work as an apostle. Christ’s servant had failed, but he had also been restored.

However, the Lord was not through with Peter. He had more to say to him. What He said was also linked to Peter’s former conduct. *“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whither thou wouldest, but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee,*

and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And, when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me."

A Solemn Prophecy

The Lord opened His statement to Peter with the solemn "Verily, verily" that is used so many times in the Gospel of John. These words mean "truly, truly," and they announce a solemn prophecy that will certainly come to pass. "So be it, so be it." What the Lord had to say of Peter's future was already decided in heaven, and it would come to pass.

Before his denial of the Lord, Peter had been the epitome of self-confidence. He had boastfully said, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." Luke 22:33. But Peter failed miserably. There was no strength in his self confidence or in his flesh.

What Peter had offered to do, the risen Christ would now make possible. In these prophetic words pronounced to Peter, the Lord told him not only the manner but also the time of his death. By this statement, the Lord proved that He is in control of the departure of His servants out of this life.

What the Lord actually said to Peter is this: "Peter, you said you were willing to go to prison and to death for me, and you are going to do it. When you were young, you went your own way; but when you are old, you are going to be bound with chains and taken to prison and death for me."

Peter was not yet an old man. He was in his prime of natural vigor. In his younger days Peter had walked in self-will and self-confidence. He ventured to go exactly where he would, just as he did when he walked into the

palace of the high priest after boasting that he would die with Christ. But that self-will was not to extend into Peter's new life.

The Lord told Peter that when he would be older, what he as a young man in fullest vigor failed to do, the Lord's grace and power would enable him to do. The Lord also told Peter that his death would be by crucifixion, as his Saviour's was.

When Peter wrote his second epistle, as an old man, he referred to these words spoken to him by the Lord: "*Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has showed me.*" II Peter 1:14.

Crucified Head Downward

According to the records of the early church, Peter did die by crucifixion around A.D. 69 or 70. Peter was in prison for Christ's sake, and he was taken out to be put to death. As he was about to be nailed to a cross, Peter said, "No! My Lord died like that; I am not worthy to die as He did!" Then he said, "Hang me on that cross head downward."

There is an early piece of art work that purports to show Peter's crucifixion. The painting depicts Peter in an inverted position, crucified on a cross shaped like the broken cross of the antichrist. The symbol of that broken cross is used by the world today as a "peace" sign!

Peter did love his Lord. He really intended to be true to Him. But his flesh was weak and he failed the first crucial test. But in later years Peter was given grace to do as he had — in the confidence of the flesh — promised.

When the risen Saviour had spoken this prophecy, He said, "Follow me." Peter took that command literally,

for the Lord began to walk along the shore and Peter followed. The Lord's command again reminds us of Peter's former words: "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now?" This was in answer to the Lord's statement: "*Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterward.*" John 13:36-37. At that morning on the beach, the time for this following had come. And it came more fully when Peter died on the cross.

Follow in Close Fellowship

The Lord's command "Follow me" may also be looked upon as a renewed call for Peter to follow Him, not afar off as he had done, but in closest fellowship. Peter's literally following the Lord along the beach showed his fullest intent to follow the Lord's command. This commandment was not only for Peter but for all His own in this world.

The Apostle John, who refers to himself as "that disciple whom Jesus loved," also followed. Peter noticed John following them and asked, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" By this question Peter showed loving concern for the beloved disciple whom he had been more closely associated with than he had with his own brother, Andrew. The Lord had revealed to Peter his future destiny, and Peter's close association with John made him curious to know the destiny of this youngest of the apostles.

The Lord answered Peter with a gracious rebuke. "*Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.*"

This is as much as to say, "Peter, it is not your responsibility as to what my other disciples do. I will order the path for each one. You are to die for me; but if

I choose that John live till I come back again, what is that to thee? Follow thou me!" The Lord rebuked the curious anxiety of Peter and gave him to understand that He, as the Lord and Master of John, would order everything in John's life as He had in the life of Peter. "What is that to thee?" means "What good will it do you to have this kind of information?"

The words "If I will that he tarry till I come" have been differently interpreted. Most likely the Lord meant that John should be the last of His apostles to pass from this earth. John makes it clear in verse 23 that the Lord did *not* say that he should not die. John was to die a physical death. John was not to have his life extended indefinitely. That was not the Lord's meaning.

However, there is a sense in which John did "tarry" to see the Lord's return. John was the chosen one through whom the Lord was to reveal the things concerning His return in power and glory. Over 60 years after that breakfast with the Saviour, John was in exile on the isle of Patmos. There the Lord appeared to him and gave him a vision of the end of the age. While still in his earthly life, John saw the Lord's return in judgment and the establishment of His kingdom. In that sense, John did tarry till the Lord's second coming.

Some have considered the Lord's words as simply setting forth a hypothetical expression. That is, they have assumed that the Lord was just supposing to have John tarry till He comes. In the context of what the Lord was teaching Peter, there is truth to this interpretation also. The Lord was demonstrating to Peter that He was in total control of the destinies of all. If it were His will that John live a supernaturally prolonged life that would extend unto the time of His revelation, then such a destiny would be fulfilled.

Two Separate Destinies

There is a broad meaning to the Lord's two prophecies that bear upon the lives of all Christians. There are two separate destinies. Many Christians will and have died during this church age. Their souls and spirits go into the presence of the Lord in the third heaven, awaiting the time of the resurrection and the rapture. Other Christians will still be living when that time comes. These will never die. At the Lord's appearance in the air, they shall be changed. In immortal, resurrection bodies they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. And with the resurrected dead, they will be forever with Him. As a result of the Lord's words, the disciples understood the difference in these two destinies.

"Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, he shall not die; but, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Thus John himself tells us that a tradition was started among the brethren that he should not die. This tradition started because they failed to heed one little word in the Lord's statement — the word "if." The Lord did not say, "I will that he tarry till I come." Neither did He say that John should not die.

The tradition that John would not die did not end with the apostolic age. As late as the 16th century, there were still persons making public claims to being the Apostle John, who had never died. There will probably be others who make this claim before the end of the age comes.

The Lord's words to Peter were "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me." He says the same thing to each of us. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" We are each to serve in

the place He has put us and leave everyone else to serve where He puts them. If some of us should be living when He does come, we will rejoice together with those who have died in His service when we all stand in His presence. Our commandment is to follow the Master.

The Lord's final words to Peter — "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" — significantly speak of Christ's second coming. This is the great expectation of the church. Christians are not looking for the tribulation or the beginning of the millennium. They are looking for the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ in the air.

6.

John's Witness

"This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, that which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen." John 21:24-25.

John places his seal upon the testimony of this magnificent Gospel in the closing two verses. The "apostle whom Jesus loved" solemnly declares that he is the author of all this document contains. This is sufficient evidence to seal his great witness.

John selected just eight miracles and a number of our Lord's discourses and grouped them together in this Gospel. What he recorded were only a few of the things Jesus said and did. This is not intended to be an exhaustive record of the earthly life of the Saviour.

This book has a most definite purpose. John stated that purpose in the closing two verses of chapter 20. *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."*

The last verse penned by the aging apostle provides us with God's evaluation of the quantity and value of His

only begotten Son's works and words. These were so wonderful, so vast in their meaning and so deep, that the world could not contain the books that might be written concerning them.

If one attempted to prepare an exhaustive record of all that the Saviour said and did, the libraries of the world could not contain all the books that would be written. Only the books of eternity have the potential to tell all there is of that wondrous life of the Word who became flesh, secured our redemption and showed the Father to us.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." John 1:14.

The End