

Live: Gospel Hope – Now and Forever

Following the Resurrected Jesus

John 20:30-21:25

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Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep" (John 20:30–21:17).

One of the reasons I love preaching through books of the Bible is not only because of the breadth of learning that we receive but also because I cherish the final sermon as we bid farewell to a book that now feels like a helpful friend.

We began this sermon series on September 9, 2018, and I believe this is the fifty-fourth message on the book of John. It has been a glorious and helpful journey. I have come to deeply love this book.

In my first sermon on John, I said this: “There are some books of the Bible which are foundational and essential because of their simplicity, their clarity, and their thoroughness. The Gospel of John is this kind of book. It is a masterful account of the life of Jesus, his teaching, his miracles, and the response of people. It is a wonderful book to study whether you have been a follower of Jesus for years or if you are a relatively new believer. It is especially important if you are not yet a Christian.”

This Gospel began at the beginning—the very beginning.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:1-4).

John’s aim from beginning to end is to show you who Jesus is.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

John wants you to see something in the twenty-one chapters of his book. And for those of you who’ve joined us over the last eighteen months, I hope that you’ve seen new glimpses of “glory.” I hope there have been moments when you’ve stopped and said, “Wow!” as you saw something new in the text.

The Gospel of John is different than the other Gospels. I’ve taught through the Gospel of Matthew. It’s a great account of the life of Jesus as King. But I’ve loved John’s earthiness. It’s a book that personalizes the life of Jesus. It’s a gospel account that almost bleeds, sings, and weeps.

John writes this Gospel aiming to reach everyone. Remember this verse?

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

John’s passion is for everyone to know about the life and teaching of Jesus so that they too will come to believe that he really is the Son of God. John intends to convince you so that you will believe.

In this final message in John, I want to help you understand how John ends his account of the life of Jesus. And I want to draw out some conclusions based upon the entire book.

It seems to me that this book ends with three “charges.” As John concludes his book, let’s examine three final exhortations:

- 1) Believe that you may live
- 2) Serve Jesus faithfully
- 3) Follow God’s sovereign plan

1. Believe That You May Live

There are two bookends when it comes to the word “believe” in John’s Gospel. The first one I already read to you from John 3:16. The other one, a passage I’ve quoted often through this series, is found in John 20:30-31.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30–31).

John’s book does not record every single miracle that Jesus performed or every word that he taught. There were other things that happened during the earthly ministry of Jesus. John’s intent was not to exhaustively cover every detail of Jesus’s ministry. Rather, he’s writing an account that is designed to persuade you that Jesus really is the Son of God.

In other words, John’s goal is for you to believe. He wants you to read about the miracles, what Jesus said, and what others said about him so that you will conclude, “Yes. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is my Savior.”

The word “believe” appears often throughout the Gospel. Here are a few examples:

*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who **believed** in his name, he gave the right to become children of God... (John 1:11–12)*

*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and **believes** him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24).*

*Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever **believes** in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).*

*“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and **believes** in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40).*

*So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have **believed**, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:67–69).*

*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever **believes** in me, though he die, yet shall he live...” (John 11:25)*

*“Let not your hearts be troubled. **Believe** in God; believe also in me” (John 14:1).*

Obviously, the word “believe” is very important. Do you know what it means? In the Bible, “believe” (pisteuo) is closely tied to words like to trust, to rely upon, to accept, and to put one’s faith in. All these descriptors are meant to emphasize several important truths:

- You accept what Jesus said and what the Bible says to be true. For instance, you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he died for our sins and that he was raised from the dead.
- You accept what the Bible says about us—that we are sinners and have fallen short of God’s glory.
- We stop believing in our narrative and in our own righteousness to balance the scales of comparison.
- We trust in Christ—that his death and resurrection provide a way for sinners to be forgiven. We take refuge “in Christ.” We run to him from the storm of our sin.
- We trust in him, not ourselves. We confess our allegiance to Christ, and we renounce our sins. We turn from self-confidence to Jesus-confidence.

John doesn’t commend faith and belief alone. The real issue for him and for salvation is belief **in Christ**. Yet, belief alone isn’t commendable. James tells us that even the demons believe (James 2:19). It’s faith **in Christ**—as Savior, as King, and as Lord—that matters.

But for what? Verse 31 tells us. Believing in him is the only way that everlasting life is offered to mankind. Here’s how Jesus said it:

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

John writes so that you can know forgiveness now but also so that you can face your future with hope. The gospel is such good news because, through Christ, it offers reconciliation between God and those who trust in Jesus. It’s how the entire Bible ends—with this glorious promise:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev. 21:3).

The Gospel of John is designed to show you the way to eternal life.

As we conclude this book, I want to make one last appeal from John’s Gospel. If you have not turned from your sins and trusted in Christ, why not receive him today? This Gospel is good news, and it’s why this is in the Bible—for you to believe. That’s the primary calling from John.

But there’s more.

2. Serve Jesus Faithfully

In chapter 21, we have a final story of Jesus and the disciples. We are not told how long after the resurrection this particular story happened; but, we do know that it is back in Galilee, the place where Jesus’s ministry began.

Seven of the disciples went fishing on the Sea of Galilee. We are not sure why Peter feels compelled to do this. Some commentators think this represents another low moment in Peter’s life—that he’s gone

back to his former profession. But I don't think so. The disciples are back in Galilee according to Jesus's command (see Mark 14:28). Nothing about the story indicates that Peter is turning away from Jesus to head back into fishing. Regardless of why they were fishing, they were not successful. They fished all night but caught nothing.

According to verse 4, at the break of day, Jesus is on the shore. For some reason, they didn't know it was Jesus. He addresses them as "children," which is a generic greeting—like "friends" or "guys." After asking about their catch, he tells them to cast their nets on the other side. This was a familiar moment for Peter, James, and John. According to Luke 5, Jesus called them to be his disciples in a similar manner.

Suddenly their nets teem with fish. John tells Peter it is Jesus, and Peter jumps into the water to swim to the shore (v. 7). After they drag their nets onto shore, Jesus offers them breakfast—another personal and practical example of Jesus serving the disciples.

Now we get to the meat of the passage. It's the exchange between Peter and Jesus. This is probably not the first time that Peter and Jesus talked after his denial. Other passages, like 1 Corinthians 15:5 and Luke 24:34, indicate a previous, more personal interaction. This conversation, however, is more about a public commissioning of Peter in light of his previous denials.

Jesus asks him three questions all connected to his love for Jesus:

- v. 15 – "...do you love me more than these?"
- v. 16 – "...do you love me?"
- v. 17 – "...do you love me?"

The first question relates to Peter's love in comparison to the other disciples. In Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 26:33), Peter boasted that he would be different than the other disciples. The other two questions are more personal and repeated which grieves Peter (v. 17).

And after each time that Peter affirms his love, Jesus commissions him to a shepherding role:

- v. 15 - "*Feed my lambs.*"
- v. 16 - "*Tend my sheep.*"
- v. 17 - "*Feed my sheep.*"

Peter's love for Jesus is directly linked to his care for Jesus's sheep. It's no wonder that Peter writes the following in 1 Peter 5:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Jesus provides Peter with a threefold opportunity to reaffirm his love for him, but the application directly applies to the way Peter loves Jesus's sheep. This is how much Jesus loves his church. John wants us to see the commission. Matthew's Gospel ends with "go into all the world and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19-20). But John's Gospel ends with a mission to care for the sheep—to take care of them and to feed them.

Faithful churches must do both. We need to evangelize, but we also need to shepherd the flock that God has entrusted to us. This was one of the reasons that we adjusted our model of Elder governance, about five years ago, to be more oriented toward shepherding people individually. And we recently added deacons into the mix just in time for this COVID-19 crisis.

But elders and deacons are not the only ones called to care for the church. That's a calling upon every Christian. It's what John said in 1 John.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:7-11).

If we love Jesus, we will love one another. We will care for one another. We will sacrifice for one another.

Jesus calls Peter to love him and serve him by loving and serving the church. Elders and deacons, keep at it. Small Group leaders, Sunday School teachers—let's not lose heart. Technology support people and communications people—what you do matters! It's all part of shepherding the flock of God. And it's the way we love Jesus together.

Faithfully following Jesus means that we find new and creative ways to shepherd the flock of God.

3. Follow God's Sovereign Plan

This book ends with Jesus talking to Peter about the end of his life and the end of John's life.

In verse 18, Jesus tells Peter the kind of death that he will die. The key phrase is, "...when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you to where you do not want to go." To be sure we know the context, John adds in verse 19, "This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God."

Commentators tell us two things about this statement. First, it was fulfilled when Peter was martyred about thirty years later, likely being crucified by Emperor Nero. Secondly, by the time John writes his account of the gospel, Peter had already been killed.

For those of you who know the book of Acts, consider all the things that Peter does and how often he is imprisoned. It would seem through all of this he knows the plan of God is unfolding, but he doesn't know exactly when the end will come.

And then, at the end of verse 19, Jesus simply tells Peter, *"Follow me."*

It seems that Peter and Jesus get up and begin to walk. John, according to verse 20, is following behind them. Peter then inquires about the fate of John (v. 21), *"What about this man?"* And Jesus mildly rebukes Peter, telling him, *"If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"* (v. 22).

Jesus calls Peter to follow the plan God has for him. He's inviting Peter to follow him with single-minded devotion. He's not to worry about the plan of God for other people, including John. His singular focus is simply this: You need to follow Jesus.

I trust that if you are a follower of Jesus, you know that your mission is the same. Each of us, in our lifetime, must determine what it looks like to follow Jesus faithfully. God has sovereignly placed each of us in this season that we're in. He's not surprised. God is right on plan.

Emperors would change. Some cities would receive them. Others would hate them. Some religious leaders loved them. Others wanted to see them killed. These disciples dealt with healthy and dysfunctional churches. They trained up new leaders, and they confronted false teachers. And, yet, through it all, their mission remained the same: **believe and follow Jesus.**

Christian, that's your mission today. Right now. Believe and follow Jesus.

And with that, John's book concludes with these words:

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written (John 21:24–25).

Believe and follow Jesus!