



The Gospel of John - Chapter Twenty One

Summary of Chapter Twenty One

As recorded in the Synoptics, Jesus had instructed his disciples to meet him in Galilee and this chapter shows that seven of them decided to spend the night fishing but without success. At dawn, Jesus appears on the beach, although they did not immediately recognise him. He instructs them to drop their nets again and this time they have a very large catch. John realises it is Jesus and tells Peter, who swims ashore to be with his Lord.

The group then share a breakfast on the beach together, but the focus of the account is a remarkable portrayal of Jesus' love, grace and forgiveness as he indicates that Peter has been reconciled despite his earlier denial of Christ and is commissioned as a leader of the church. However, Jesus also indicates that Peter will eventually be martyred for his service to Jesus.

The chapter, and indeed this Gospel account, concludes with Peter and Jesus walking along the beach and John trailing behind. When Peter asks about John, Jesus says, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!' This led to rumours that John would not die but John explains this is not what Jesus meant. John then reiterates that his testimony is true.

IV. John 21:1-25 - Epilogue: The Roles of Peter and of the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

Chapter 21 narrates Jesus' third and final resurrection appearance recorded in this Gospel while also comparing the respective callings of Peter and 'the disciple John whom Jesus loved'.

Some scholars and commentators believe that this chapter was a later addition to the Gospel probably written by John but possibly by another author based on an account given by John. However, the use of a summary statement at the end of the previous chapter, followed by the account here is not unusual and there are examples in John's other writings of summary conclusions occurring before the actual end of the material, i.e. John 12:36-37, 1 John 5:13 and Revelation 22:5.

IV.a John 21:1-14 - Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

The disciples have travelled back to Galilee from Jerusalem and Peter decides to go fishing, with six others going with him. They fish all night without any success. In the morning Jesus appears on the shore although they did not recognise who it was. He instructed them to cast their nets to the right side of the boat and immediately they caught a large number of fish. John told Peter it was Jesus and immediately Peter jumped into the water to go ashore to see his Lord.

Jesus had a charcoal fire going and was cooking fish and bread. He told Peter to fetch some of the fish that the others had now brought in near to shore, inviting the whole group to join him for breakfast. John records this as the third post-resurrection meeting between Jesus and his disciples.

¹ After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.

John 21:1

After these things is John's way of saying that an undefined period of time has passed, as he did in 5:1 and 6:1. With the weeklong festival of Unleavened Bread now past, refer to the comments on Luke 2:43-44 and John 20:26, the disciples had left Jerusalem and returned to Galilee, for Jesus had instructed them he would meet them there: <<*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them*>> (Matthew 28:16).

Jesus showed himself again to the disciples. After his appearances in Jerusalem that established the faith of the disciples, Jesus now appears in Galilee to some of his disciples.

The Sea of Tiberias is more commonly referenced as the Sea of Galilee. This lake, also known as the Kinneret and the Lake of Gennesaret, is fed from the Jordan to the north and spills out again to the Jordan in the south. It currently measures approximately 7 miles or 11.3km wide, and 13 miles or 21km long. Archaeological discoveries in and around this lake include a 1st Century boat and excavations in various coastal cities, including Capernaum and Tiberias.

He showed himself in this way seems to indicate that John wishes to highlight this meeting as something quite different to the others.

² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples.

John 21:2

Gathered there together. The seven disciples mentioned may be symbolic of the entire group, although John may draw attention to the number as it represented perfection in Jewish thinking and John's writing often involves either explicit or implicit groups of seven. More important is the simple fact that they are together. Jesus had formed the nucleus of the new community during his ministry and had further established it at the Cross and in the breathing of the Spirit. Now he

reminds them of his lordship and their dependency upon him in the fulfilment of the commission he has given them (20:21-23). He will do this by focusing on two of the leaders among the disciples, Simon Peter and John.

Thomas called the Twin was prominent in the account recorded in 20:24-29, while Nathanael of Cana in Galilee was a key character in 1:43-51.

The names of the sons of Zebedee are given in the Synoptics as James and John, e.g. Matthew 4:21; Luke 5:10 mentions that they were <<*partners with Simon*>> in fishing prior to being called by Jesus.

Two others of his disciples. Why John chose to name some but not all the disciples is unclear but it could be to make up the number to seven as commented on above.

³ 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.

John 21:3

Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' The disciples seem to have been sitting around, unsure of what to do, until Peter decides to go fishing and the others come along. Peter is taking the lead again, but what sort of lead is it? Some see this act as aimless activity undertaken in desperation or even apostasy; that is, abandoning their Lord and returning to their former life. Others think they went fishing simply because they needed to eat or earn a living. The latter is probably true enough, but there is also a sense that Peter and the others, while not necessarily aimless and certainly not apostate, are doing what is right in their own eyes, reminiscent of: <<*In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes*>> (Judges 17:6 and 21:25). The stories in this chapter reveal Jesus' bringing his disciples, especially Peter, more completely under his lordship. The disciples do not know what to do, so they do that which is necessary, and in taking this initiative they put themselves in a place where Christ meets them.

They went out and got into the boat. The boat was probably the one that Peter and Andrew had abandoned three years earlier in order to follow Jesus: <<*When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him*>> (Luke 5:11).

A boat, dating from around or before the 1st Century AD by radiocarbon analysis and associated pottery, was found in the Sea of Galilee south of Kibbutz Ginnosar in 1986. It is consistent with boat representations in mosaics from Migdal or Magdala, also on the Sea of Galilee. At approximately 26.5 feet long and 7.5 feet wide, or 8 by 2.3m, it could hold about 15 people, including four rowers and a helmsman. It probably had both fore and aft decks, a central mast and sail, with positions for two sets of oars on both sides. See the image.



A 1st Century Galilæan Fishing Boat

Night was the preferred time of day for fishing in ancient times as indicated by: <<*Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets'*>> (Luke 5:5). Fish caught during the night could be sold fresh the following morning at the markets that were held along the shoreline of the lake.

But that night they caught nothing. Jesus had said: <<*I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing*>> (John 15:5).

Although these were successful fishermen, in the Gospel accounts they never catch a single fish without either instruction from or the presence of Jesus; a true lesson in discipleship.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

John 21:4

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach. Just as the light has dawned Jesus appears, providing imagery that is a reminder that Jesus is the Light of the World, a spiritual dawning.

The disciples did not know that it was Jesus. As in this and other Gospel accounts, people are not able to immediately recognise Jesus at first: <<*And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?'*>> (Luke 24:17-18), and: <<*When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus*>> (John 20:14). Although some scholars take this as evidence that this chapter does not fit well after Chapter 20, in fact this inability fits well with the theme running throughout these chapters that there was something different about Jesus' body. John stresses in these descriptions both the continuity and discontinuity of Jesus' body.

⁵ Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' ⁶ He said to them, 'Cast the net to 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 there were so many fish.

John 21:5-6

Children, you have no fish, have you? The word for children, Greek *paidiai*, is often translated as friends but this translation gives a more literal reflection of its meaning, although some like the colloquial term 'lads'. There is no support in classical Greek to support this but it fits well with John's portrayal of Jesus' affection for his followers. The question is phrased in a way where the answer can only be in the negative: They answered him, 'No.'

Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some. This is not offered as a polite suggestion from a casual bystander but is stated as a command with a promise.

So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. When they obey they cannot even get the net into the boat because there are so many fish enclosed in it. Such abundance echoes the enormous provision of wine at the wedding in Cana (2:1-11), and of bread and fish at the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-13). Most commentators see these fish as symbolic of the missionary work of the disciples, similar to Jesus' original call: <<***And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people'***>> (Mark 1:17), which is not recorded by John. Such symbolism may be included, but the primary point seems to be Jesus' lordship and the need to be obedient to him for any labour to be fruitful.

⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake.

John 21:7

That disciple whom Jesus loved, the one who had sat close to Jesus at the Last Supper: <<***One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved – was reclining next to him***>> (John 13:23), must be one of the seven mentioned in v.2 above, which includes the sons of Zebedee, and is generally accepted as John the son of Zebedee and the author of this Gospel.

It is the Lord! Mary had recognised Jesus by his voice and the disciples by the scars on his body. John now recognises Jesus by the abundance of his provision. In keeping with the theme of a close relationship between the two, John tells Peter, who is the one to respond first. Had Peter recognised Jesus before John it would have been in keeping with his exuberant nature to dive into the sea without saying anything to anyone else.

He put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. Other accounts say Peter was working in his undergarments and he then tied his outer garment on before swimming ashore. However, there is evidence that working naked, the literal translation of the Greek *en gar gymnos*, was quite normal for such fishermen.

⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

John 21:8

But the other disciples came in the boat. No mention is made of Peter arriving on shore or if any dialogue then took place. John wants to focus on the scene that will unfold once they are all together.

Dragging the net full of fish. While not as dramatic as the catch three years earlier: <<*When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink*>> (Luke 5:6-7), the imagery is still that this was a remarkable amount of fish for a single catch. The disciples seem to have made no complaint against Peter deserting them instead of helping with this heavy task. They knew Peter well and probably understood his enthusiasm to drop everything to be with his Lord and teacher.

One point worthy of reflection is that the men had been out all night, working hard and suffering the frustration of their unfruitful labours. Jesus turned up at dawn and immediately they had a net full of fish. Why did Jesus not turn up the previous evening and save them the hours of apparent fruitless work? This seems to be part of the Christian life. It is not meant to be easy but requires hard work, many fruitless hours of discipleship and finally the rewards that come when the time is right. It is all part of the trials and testing that disciples seem to have to go through in order to grow in their personal maturity. For these men, their minds would surely have been taken back to the previous great catch, which had brought them to the place where they had made a commitment to follow Jesus. Now was the time to cement that commitment.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.

John 21:9

A charcoal fire. This same Greek word is used only twice in the NT: here and in: <<*Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself*>> (John 18:18). This would have been part of Peter's painful memory, for it was a direct reminder of his denial of even knowing Jesus just a few weeks earlier.

With fish on it, and bread. The Lord has breakfast ready for them, another sign of his grace and provision, like the catch they have just taken. There is no indication of where Jesus got the bread and fish; the appearance of the food is as mysterious as his own.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn.

John 21:10-11

Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' It seems that Jesus is the first one to speak. Having left the others to drag the catch towards the edge of the lake, Simon Peter now takes it on himself to go back aboard and haul the net ashore. Peter's recent enthusiasm to swim ashore to meet Jesus is now apparently matched by his enthusiasm to obey Jesus' command to fetch the fish ashore.

Various attempts have been made to interpret the number a hundred and fifty-three symbolically, but more likely it simply represents the number of fish counted. Fishermen routinely counted the number of fish prior to selling them fresh at the market. The emphasis here is not on the actual number but on the fact that the net was full of large fish and the fact that the net was not torn, a normal occupational hazard: <<*As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets*>> (Mark 1:19).

On the simplest level, these details speak of the abundance that the gracious God so frequently provides and how he also enables the abundance to be received. If more specific symbolism is present, perhaps the fish represent a large influx of converts from various nations and the unbroken net represents the intended unity of the church.

¹² Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord.

John 21:12

Come and have breakfast. Whether this was an invitation or a command matters little. What is important is that Jesus is with them and he wants them to be with him: <<*Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world*>> (John 17:24).

Throughout this encounter with Jesus the disciples have not said anything. The scene is one of great awe, with none of them daring to ask him: Who are you? There was something different about him, yet they were able to recognise him: they knew it was the Lord. The Lord Jesus is the focus of this story.

¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

John 21:13

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. Except for a reference to Jesus giving thanks to his Father, and the fact that Jesus directly served the meal, his actions are very similar to those when he fed the five thousand: <<*Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all*>> (Mark

6:41). His actions here answer their unasked question: ‘Who are you?’ in v.12. He is recognised by his breaking of the bread: <<*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight*>> (Luke 24:30-31), and his servant heart.

This shared meal is not itself the Lord’s Supper but it is symbolic of it for the whole purpose of it is to be in communion with the Risen Lord Jesus, as well as to: <<*proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes*>> (1 Corinthians 11:26b).

¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

John 21:14

This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. This is actually the fourth appearance recorded by John and there were other appearances, as Paul confirms: <<*For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles*>> (1 Corinthians 15:3-7). However, John is focusing of the appearances of Jesus to the apostles as a group, for this is symbolic of his commissioning of them to take the Gospel out to the world: <<*Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you’*>> (John 20:21).

IV.b John 21:15-19 - Jesus and Peter

So far this chapter has focused on Jesus’ love and lordship, a reflection of his life and death as a whole. There is now a transition as the focus of the love and lordship is revealed in the life of Peter, who is shown to be fully reconciled with Jesus despite his earlier denials and is now further commissioned as a shepherd of Jesus’ flock, the church.

¹⁵ 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.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’

¹⁶ A second time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter felt hurt 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 21:15-17

Jesus used this title for Peter, Simon, son of John, when he was first introduced in 1:42. This was his name before Jesus had called him and many see this as an indication that Jesus wanted to show Peter that there was still unfinished business between them before Peter would be sent out to represent his Lord.

Do you love me? Peter had denied Jesus three times (18:15-18 and 18:25-27); now Jesus asks him three times to reaffirm his love for him and recommissions him.

Jesus' question: do you love me more than these? may mean either: 'Do you love me more than these other disciples do?'; or 'Do you love me more than these fish?' referring to Peter's former profession; or 'Do you love me more than you love other people?' The opinion of scholars and commentators is divided on this, although all three senses are, of course, important. In these three questions and answers, Peter uses the same verb for love each time, Greek *phileō*, perhaps not wanting to over promise as he did in: <<**Peter said to him, 'Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you'**>> (John 13:37), then denied knowing him a few hours later. However, Jesus uses a different verb for love in the first two questions, Greek *agapaō*, and then switches to Peter's word *phileō* in the third question. There may be a slight difference in nuance between the verbs. Peter seems to see a difference in the related nouns in: <<**For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love**>> (2 Peter 1:7), where 'mutual affection' is *phileō* and love is *agapaō*. Many earlier commentators have argued for a difference, often seeing *agapaō* as representing a higher and purer form of love. However, most modern commentators are not persuaded that there is any clearly intended difference of meaning here because the two words are often used interchangeably in similar contexts and because John frequently uses different words where little discernible difference in meaning can be determined, perhaps for stylistic reasons. In fact, Paul uses *agapaō* to refer to the false love of the world: <<**Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia**>> (2 Timothy 4:10). However the reader may interpret this passage it is the ultimate in searching questions as to whether any disciple truly loves Jesus more than anything else in their life.

Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' While there may be no difference in the meanings of the two verbs, Peter is nevertheless deeply grieved, Greek *elypethe*, because Jesus kept asking him if he loved him. Peter, like many disciples since, needed to get over one of the greatest of all sins - pride. Peter had boasted that he would not fall away even if others did: <<**Peter said to him, 'Even though all become deserters, I will not'**>> (Mark 14:29), only for his world to come crashing down when he denied even knowing Jesus. He may have believed this to be true or perhaps his prideful nature hoped it would be true. He was not going to make the same mistake again.

You know everything, taken in its fullest sense, is an affirmation of Christ's omniscience, consistent with his deity. If he knows everything, then of course he

knows Peter's heart. Two different words for know are used here. However, as with the two words for love, these words are in a pattern. Each time Peter has responded you know, Greek *sy oidas*, but now he adds you know that I love you, using Greek *sy ginoskeis* for you know. The pattern here suggests that there is a distinction between *oida* and *ginosko*, with the latter perhaps meaning 'you must be able to see'. This shift of vocabulary, along with the reference to everything, reflects a view of the Lord that is more exalted and suggests that Peter's humility is deeper.

Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Jesus, as the true shepherd (John 10:11-14), appoints Peter and other apostles to be subordinate shepherds to pastor the flock that would be the church: <<*Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away*>> (1 Peter 5:1-4). Peter will demonstrate his love for Jesus by loving God's people and feeding them with his Word.

This is a role that King David had undertaken in his day: <<*For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel*>> (2 Samuel 5:2), and a similar warning was given by the prophet to that given by Peter in his first epistle: <<*Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel: prophesy, and say to them – to the shepherds: Thus says the Lord God: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?*>> (Ezekiel 34:2).

¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

John 21:18-19

Stretch out your hands was a way to convey the notion of crucifixion. Early evidence shortly after the NT mentions Peter's martyrdom without telling how it happened. There are some later accounts that say Peter was crucified upside down, refusing to die the same kind of death as his Lord, but some of these are overlaid with legendary material that many scholars consider unreliable, so this tradition is uncertain. Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God, which he most certainly did!

To go wherever you wished; someone else will take you where you do not wish to go. Jesus contrasts Peter's youth, his life up to this point, with what is still to come. Here is an explicit contrast between Peter's life of self will and his coming

under the will of another. He has just submitted to Jesus and his will, and now Jesus says such submission is going to include being led to a place of death that will not be of his choosing. Peter wrote of the impending event from his Roman prison: *<<I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me>>* (2 Peter 1:13-14). It is generally accepted that Nero had Peter imprisoned and then crucified in Rome during the mid-60's AD (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 2.25.5).

The Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep, and this shepherd will have to do likewise, although his death will not, of course, take away the sins of the world. He has submitted his will to God, and his death, like Jesus' death, will be in accordance with God's will and thereby glorify him. Furthermore, in the death of Jesus the glory of God is revealed since God is love: *<<Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love>>* (1 John 4:8), and love is the laying down of one's life: *<<We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another>>* (1 John 3:16). So now Jesus predicts that Peter also will glorify God by his death.

After this he said to him, 'Follow me.' All the Gospel accounts indicate that Peter had from the start of Jesus' ministry, promised to follow him. Jesus had predicted Peter's denials after Peter had said he was willing to die with him (13:37-38). Jesus had told him: *<<Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterwards>>* (John 13:36b). Here now is the call to follow.

IV.c John 21:20-25 - Jesus and the Beloved Disciple

Up until now, Peter's focus had been on Jesus. Now, as they walk along the beach together, Peter notices John following them and asks what is to become of his friend. Jesus basically instructs Peter that it is none of his business; his role is to follow Jesus and undertake whatever role that will entail for him. It is up to Jesus what mission he will apportion to John.

²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?'

John 21:20

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them is again accepted as referring to John the son of Zebedee.

Lord, who is it that is going to betray you? This is the question asked by this disciple at the Last Supper when Jesus had announced his betrayal (13:24-25). He was prompted by Peter to do so, thus providing continuity with what had gone before and what was yet to come: *<<One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon>>* (Acts 3:1), *<<Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them>>* (Acts 8:14), *<<and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognised the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand*

of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised>> (Galatians 2:9).

²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about him?’

²² Jesus said to him, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!’

John 21:22

Lord, what about him? If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? The words of Jesus may appear to be harsh but he wants Peter to fully understand what it is he has just agreed to in his own dialogue with his Lord. Jesus is indeed Lord, and his will shall be accomplished in the other disciple’s life, but that is none of Peter’s business. Peter can trust Jesus with the life of his friend.

Until I come again. Jesus makes a direct reference to his Second Coming as he did on other occasions: <<*For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done*>> (Matthew 16:27), and: <<*Jesus said, ‘I am; and “you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power”, and “coming with the clouds of heaven”’*>> (Mark 14:62).

Follow me! Jesus once again repeats his earlier command to Peter (v.19) in order to reinforce Peter’s own responsibilities as a disciple of Christ. He does not need to be distracted by what is going on in the lives of others.

²³ So the rumour spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’

John 21:23

So the rumour spread in the community that this disciple would not die. The community here refers to the other disciples, who clearly believed this reference to refer to John remaining alive until Jesus returned and therefore that he would never physically die. John immediately refutes this interpretation: Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’ The word used for remain, Greek *menein*, is the same word used when Jesus had instructed them to remain in him as the branches remain in the vine (15:1-4), and thus the reference is spiritual and not physical. What is now known is that John received a vision of Christ when he was given Revelation and thus he also did live physically until Jesus reappeared to him.

²⁴ This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.

John 21:24

This is the disciple is typical of the way in which John, as the author of the Gospel, refers to himself indirectly or in the third person, as Jesus also did in 17:3.

Hence the author is identified as the apostle John, who refers to himself by the modest epithet 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'.

Who is testifying to these things and has written them should not be taken to mean that John actually wrote the Gospel himself. However, he does testify that what is written is accurate and valid for he was an eyewitness to them, as Jesus had said they must emphasise in their testimonies about him: <<***You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning***>> (John 15:27). One tradition of the early church names his scribe as Prochorus and others believe that it was written by several other disciples under the authority of John.

Like the third person singular self-reference earlier in the verse, and the phrase 'I suppose' in v.25, we know represents a self-reference on the part of the author, most likely including his readers and the associates who wrote it down for him in the affirmation that John's testimony is true: <<***He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth***>> (John 19:35).

²⁵ But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

John 21:25

I suppose, a switch from the first person plural in v.24 to the singular, is a statement that has caused further debate among scholars. While many see this as a final personal comment by John as the primary witness to Jesus in this Gospel, others see it as the scribe making a personal comment regarding the number of books that would be produced if every one of the many other things that Jesus did were written down, although it is a similar comment to the opening of the purpose statement: <<***Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book***>> (John 20:30).

John's closing observation, the world itself could not contain the books, emphasises the limitless magnitude of all that Jesus accomplished for mankind's salvation as the eternal Son of God through his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension.

This final voice adds one last witness to the greatness of Jesus. Such hyperbole may be a literary convention, but in this case it is quite literally true, for there is no limit to the riches that are in Christ Jesus. Jesus is the very presence of God come into human midst. All authority has been given to him, and judgment is in his hands. He is quite strict regarding obedience, but he is full of mercy. He has revealed the Father, overcome the prince of this world and taken away the sin of the world. He also washed his disciples' feet and served them breakfast. No human being has ever dreamed up such a God. Believers in Christ have a hard enough time remaining true to the witness Jesus has left them through his servants, especially through John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. However, their example is exemplary and can be followed faithfully, just as they followed Christ faithfully.