

JOHN 21

What's Love Got to do with It?

Although chapter 20 ends with a fitting conclusion, John seems to have added an appendix to his narrative. In this sense, John offers the longest post-resurrection account of the Four Gospels. Although it provides ample insight into the physical resurrection (Jesus eats with his disciples, for example) and the launching of the church, ultimately John writes it to show us the beauty and importance of love.

After providing breakfast (in abundance) by helping the Disciples catch fish, Jesus turns his attention to final instructions to them. Between verses 15-19, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him (vs. 15 twice, 17). Peter affirms his love all three times (vs. 15, 16, 17). Although much is debated regarding the variety of Greek words for “love,” (*agape* vs. *phileo*) the emphasis should be more on love itself. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, reaffirms his love three times. That is no mere coincidence. Jesus extends to Peter the love of forgiveness and reconciliation and then moves him to leadership. Peter will be the primary leader in the early church especially at its conception. Having received Christ’s forgiveness (procured at the cross), Peter is ready to lead.

The story then takes an interesting turn. Having been restored, Peter turns his attention to his greatest rival among the Disciples. Throughout the Gospel, Peter and John are competitors as much as brothers as the race to the tomb demonstrated. Here, Peter wants to know what Jesus has to say about John and Jesus misdirects the question to focus on Peter again.

Jesus informs Peter that the day will come when he will be executed. According to tradition, Jesus was crucified upside down in Rome under Nero’s persecution. John, on the other hand, outlived the Twelve and the rumor spread that he would not die until Jesus returned. Verses 21-23 seems to have been written to dispel this myth. John lived a long life, yet he suffered greatly for Christ.

Regardless, the theme of love comes through. When asked if he loved Jesus, Peter was forced to consider what that sort of love meant. It requires more than regular worship attendance (though that is part of it) or a robust prayer life. It may require genuine sacrifice. Will Peter, and the reader, love Jesus to the point of death? For many around the world, that is precisely what it means.

John’s conclusion is my favorite. “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. ²⁵Now 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.” (vs. 24-25)