

## John 21, By the Sea of Galilee

### Overview

We have already discerned a twofold emphasis in the first two appearances of the Lord to the disciples. In both cases he first shows himself to them (20:19-20, 26-28) and then charges them with a mission (20:21-23, 29). Ch. 21 follows the same pattern. John tells us explicitly that it is “the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples” (21:14, cf. v. 1), and this revelation is followed by a charge to Peter concerning his mission (15-23). Thus ch. 21 is not an appendix, but an integral part of the appearances.

The strongest argument against such an interpretation would appear to be the apparent concluding nature of 20:30-31 (cf. Mlakuzhyil 138-143). But the third appearance has its own conclusion (21:24-25). Both conclusions are testimonies by John to what he has seen and heard of Jesus. They are his attempt to carry out the mission emphasized in the second section of each appearance section. On closer inspection, we realize that the first appearance section also has not only the revelation of the Lord and the charge of the disciples, but a testimony section (20:24-25), addressed not directly to the reader, but to Thomas: “We have seen the Lord.”

Thus we should read 20:19-21:25 as an alternation with three panels:

	20:19-25	20:26-31	21:1-25
<b>Appearance of Jesus</b>	19-20, to ten and others, in the closed room in Jerusalem	26-28, to the eleven, in the closed room in Jerusalem	1-14, to the seven, in Galilee
<b>Charge</b>	21-23, The terms of their mission: sending, Spirit, remission and retention of sin	29, need to convey what they have seen to those who have not seen Focus on Thomas as prototypical of evangelistic outreach	15-23, feed my sheep Focus on Peter as prototypical of pastoral care
<b>Execution</b>	24-25 the disciples to Thomas: the resurrection, “we have seen the Lord”	30-31 John to the reader: other miracles, “many other signs did Jesus”	24-25 John to the reader: all of the Lord's deeds, “many other things did Jesus”

But there is an important shift between the second and the third panel—from Jerusalem (or its environs) to Galilee. The risen Lord appears not only in Jerusalem (“his own place”), but also away from it, where increasingly the true disciples will be found. This shift is particularly significant, given the emphasis of all three appearances on the church's responsibility to bear witness.

### 1-14, Third Appearance

The section is marked by the inclusio in vv. 1, 14, referring to the Lord's showing of himself to his disciples. This notice explicitly connects ch. 21 with the previous two appearances and leads us to the extensive parallel across them.

The section has three scenes: at night on the sea, the next morning on the sea, the next morning on the shore.

### **1-3, At night on the sea**

**1 After these things Jesus shewed himself again ... and on this wise shewed he *himself*.**--As so often in the resurrection accounts, the Lord must reveal himself. People cannot find or recognize him on their own terms. This situation conforms to the Lord's teaching both to the Jews (7:34) and to the disciples (13:33), "ye shall seek me, and shall not find me." He must first open our eyes.

The Lord's self-revelation is an important theme of this account—the verb appears 3x (2x in v. 1, once in v. 14).

**to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias;**--Recall the geographical rhythm of the entire book, an alternation between "his own place" (1:11), Jerusalem, where "his own people received him not," and the rest of the land, where those who did receive him were more commonly found. The first two appearances were in or near Jerusalem. Both the church's mission (Acts 1:8) and the animosity of the Jews (Acts 8:1; 11:19) will drive the disciples out of the city. This final appearance assures them that the risen Lord does not restrict his activity to the capital, but watches over his people wherever they may be.

**2 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.**--This makes seven in all, out of the eleven. The Lord summoned all of them to Galilee (Matt 28:16), and all of them went there, but apparently independently. Perhaps they were to converge on Bethsaida (the town of Andrew, Philip, and Peter), and we see here the ones who got there first.

**3 Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing.**--Perhaps we ought not to fault him. He is employing his time profitably, and since the other four aren't there yet, perhaps the time of their appointment with the Lord has not come. If (as the sequel suggests) they were staying with one of the fishing families in the area, it would be commendable for them to seek to contribute to the family's sustenance.

But he is clearly passive with regard to the mission the Lord gave them in 20:21 ("as the Father hath sent me, so send I you") and 15:27 ("ye also shall bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning"). They had been with the Lord previously while he traveled throughout Galilee preaching and healing. They themselves had been sent out two by two, during his earthly ministry. Did no one think of returning to these towns and villages with the news of the resurrection?

Hendriksen suggests that Peter may still be laboring under a sense of unworthiness from his denial of the Lord. It would be wonderful to go throughout the villages and towns telling of the events of the Passover recently past, but those events would necessarily include the Lord's arrest, and Peter's unfaithfulness. So perhaps we should think of him as more discouraged than delinquent.

**They say unto him, We also go with thee.**--Whatever his motives, the charismatic nature of his personality attracted the others. If he had said, "Let's go visit Chorazin and tell them of the resurrection," they would probably have come along there too.

**They went forth,**--From the house where they were gathered

**and entered into a ship immediately;**--Literally, "the ship." This, and the adverb "immediately," suggest that they were either with the family of Zebedee, or in the home of Andrew and Peter (1:44), where they had access to the family's fishing boat.

**and that night they caught nothing.**--Whether their intentions were right or wrong, they were unsuccessful. Calvin:

God permitted them to toil to no purpose during the whole night, in order to prove the truth of the miracle; for if they had caught any thing what followed immediately afterwards would not have so clearly manifested the power of Christ, but when, after having toiled ineffectually during the whole night, they are suddenly favored with a large take of fishes, they have good reason for acknowledging the goodness of the Lord. In the same manner, also, God often tries believers, that he may lead them the more highly to value his blessing.

#### **4-8, The next morning at sea**

**4 But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.**--As with the two going to Emmaus (Luke 24), or Mary at the tomb (20:14). In addition, the boat was 200 cubits, or a hundred yards, from shore, and in the early dawn light they would only see a human form and barely hear the voice coming over the water.

We will see an interesting development in their awareness of who he is, a development that reflects how we recognize him when he encounters us in our daily lives.

**5 Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.** --The negative particle used indicates that he expects a negative answer to the question. "Boys, you haven't caught anything, have you?" He isn't just asking for information, but calling their attention to their failure.

So, before blessing us, the Lord often brings us face to face with our limitations. This is the first step in his revelation of himself to us.

**6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.**--The command he gives doesn't seem to make any sense. The issue is not that he had an added insight that they, though experienced fishermen, had missed. Rather, it is their willingness to obey him.

**They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.**--They obey before John identifies him verbally. The similarity of the situation to Luke 5 may have aroused suspicions in their minds, which made them willing to do what he suggested.

This suggestion of an action we should take is the second step in his revelation of himself. Throughout the gospel, the Lord engages people by challenging them to obey, often before he presents them with the need to believe:

- to the woman at the well, "go, call thy husband, and come hither" (4:16; only in v.26 does he present himself as the Messiah)
- to the lame man at Bethesda, "rise, take up thy bed, and walk" (5:8)
- to the blind man, "go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (9:7; only in v. 35, does the issue of belief come up)

Recognition of Jesus as Lord is integral with reception of him as Savior, and often he starts the process by challenging us to action. After we are saved, successive steps of growth are often based, not on

mental belief of abstract truths, but on concrete steps of obedience.

**7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.**--The episode must have called to mind a similar incident three years earlier (Luke 5), when after a fruitless night of toil, they followed the Lord's command, and were rewarded with with a bountiful catch. John verbalizes the identification that they have all been suspecting.

This is the third step in recognizing Jesus—when our personal experience leads us to share with one another our conviction that he has come to us.

**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.**--How different from his behavior in Luke 5, where he said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (v. 8). Surely, after his denial, he still knows that he is a sinful man. But the Lord already appeared to him on resurrection day—cf. Luke 24:34 and 1 Cor 15:5, and now he is eager to be with the Lord. His experience mirrors that of Mary Magdalene in Luke 7:47,

Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little.

Of all the disciples, he had most completely abandoned the Lord during the betrayal. The Lord had sought him out to restore him, and now he feels most strongly a desire to be with the Lord.

**8 And the other disciples came in a little ship;**--“The” again, the one they've been using.

**(for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,)**--That is, three hundred feet, or a hundred yards. Contrast Luke 5:4, where the Lord told them to “launch out into the deep” in order to deploy their nets.

**dragging the net with fishes.**--They will not abandon the bounty that the Lord has given them.

### **9-14, The next morning on the shore**

**9 As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there,**--The parallel with the fire at which Peter denied the Lord is unavoidable. As he brought Jonah back to Joppa after his disobedient flight, so he brings Peter back to the fire of coals after his denial.

**and fish laid thereon, and bread.**--The Lord shows them that he can provide for them even apart from their fishing. He already has fish, apart from what they have caught.

At this point the progress of the scene has to do with getting the disciples, at the water's edge, and the food, some way inland, together.

**10 Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.**--“Bring” has two elements.

1. Movement: come to the fire.
2. Contribute the fruit of their labor to the breakfast. Though he already has fish, he invites them to bring the result of their labor, itself only fruitful through his intervention. This is a picture of his grace to us, allowing us to participate in work that he could do very well without us, and that we cannot accomplish in our own strength but only by his intervention.

**11 Simon Peter went up.**--Probably into the boat, which had now grounded on the beach, to help with the physical labor of drawing the net.

**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.**--Many suggestions have been made concerning the number, but there appears to be no way to validate any of them objectively. It is best to see the number as a touch of historical realism, and a reminder of the unusually large size of the catch.

**12 Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine.**--The second time, the Lord invites them to come to the fire and enjoy what he has provided for them.

The Lord has spiritual business with them, but first he cares for their hunger. This is consistent with the emphasis in the next section on the pastoral care of the flock.

**And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord**—Three points are of note.

1. The statement assumes that they wanted to ask him. As with Mary in the garden and the two on the way to Emmaus, he was not immediately recognizable by his appearance.
2. “Knowing” contrasts with “knew not” in v. 4. His actions, both in filling their nets and in caring for their hunger, revealed his identity as his appearance did not.
3. “Durst” (“dared”) shows a sense of fear on their part. Perhaps they are ashamed that they did not recognize him at first. We see this fear also in the fact that after two invitations from the Lord, they still do not approach the fire.

This is the fourth step in their recognition of the Lord. After their failure, a command that recalls his earlier instruction, and the spoken recognition of one of the group, they now recognize together that he is among them. But they are strangely uneasy in his presence.

**13 Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.**--He comes to them. They are holding back, reluctant to approach him too closely. He reaches out to them, bringing them bread and fish.

The dynamic of this Galilean breakfast anticipates the Lord's patient dealing with us. When we are fatigued with our labor, so often fruitless, he always has breakfast ready for us. Even then, when we are sometimes reluctant to come to him, he brings us what we need. His patience in dealing with us is an example of how we are to deal with one another.

His action in giving them bread and fish must have reminded them of 6:11, where “he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.” The last time they received bread and fish from the Lord, they turned around and gave it to others. Now they are alone with the Lord, and there is no one else to whom to give it. But as his exhortation to Peter will make clear, the point of this third appearance is to emphasize their pastoral ministry to the flock, just as the first emphasized the message of sin and the second their witness to the resurrection. To this end, his action recalls a previous episode when they cared for peoples' bodies as well as their souls.

**14 This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.**--As though to guard against those who would make this chapter an appendix or epilog,

John emphasizes the continuity with the previous two appearances.

## 15-23, Peter's Mission

The second component of each resurrection appearance is a commission of some sort. Here, it is focused on Peter, and has two parts. In the first, the Lord charges Peter. In the second, Peter compares his responsibility to that of others.

### 15-19, The Lord's Charge to Peter

Three times the Lord challenges Peter's commitment, and entrusts his sheep to him. Then he foretells his coming martyrdom.

### 15-17, The Threefold Challenge

The repeated interrogation embodies several shifts in Greek vocabulary that are not always obvious in English.

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, <i>son of Jonas</i> , lovest <i>agapaw</i> thou me more than these?	16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, <i>son of Jonas</i> , lovest <i>agapaw</i> thou me?	17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, <i>son of Jonas</i> , lovest <i>filew</i> thou me?
He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest <i>oida</i> that I love <i>filew</i> thee.	He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest <i>oida</i> that I love <i>filew</i> thee.	Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest <i>oida</i> all things; thou knowest <i>ginwskw</i> that I love <i>filew</i> thee.
He saith unto him, Feed <i>boskw</i> my lambs <i>arnion</i>	He saith unto him, Feed <i>poimanw</i> my sheep <i>probaton</i> .	<b>Jesus</b> saith unto him, Feed <i>boskw</i> my sheep <i>probaton</i> .

- There are two words for “love,” *agapaw* in the Lord's first two questions and *filew* in the Lord's third question and all of Peter's responses
- There are two words for “know,” *oida* in all of Peter's responses, with the addition of *ginwskw* in his third
- There are two words for feeding sheep, *boskw* in the first and third charge and *poimanw* in the second
- There are two words for the flock, *arnia* in the first charge and *probaton* in the second and third (the only one of the changes marked in English).

The changes among these lend a sense of progress to the repetition.

### 15, First Challenge

**15 So when they had dined,**--Never try to do spiritual business on an empty stomach. Wise wives know that if they have something important to discuss with their husbands, they should feed them first.



## John 21, By Galilee

Otherwise the weakness of the flesh gets in the way of clear thinking. So the Lord first cares for Peter's hunger, and then engages him on the ministry that awaits him.

**Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?**--The comparative phrase may be understood as either objective (more than you love these men, or these fish, or these accoutrements of your old trade), or subjective (more than these other disciples do). The latter is almost certainly the case. John is again showing his knowledge of the Synoptics: when the Lord told the disciples that they would be scattered (Matt 26:31; Mark 14:27), Peter insisted, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matt 26:33; Mark 14:29). He had claimed a greater faithfulness to the Lord than that of the other disciples, and the Lord now recalls that boast.

This same theme of comparisons among the disciples comes up at the conclusion of the section, in 20-23. It is unprofitable for believers to compare themselves with one another. What really matters is our relation with the Lord.

**He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest.**--Peter does not simply reply, "I love thee," but suggests that the Lord should already know this, and that the question should therefore be unnecessary. He is hurt at the suggestion that he might not love the Lord. But it is the Lord's way with us to provoke self-examination. Paul exhorts the Corinthians (2 Cor 13:5), "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." And when we come to the Lord's table, we are instructed (1 Cor 11:28), "let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup." Do not resent the probings of the Lord through his Spirit. If we yield to them, we will come to a higher level of spiritual maturity.

**that I love thee.**--Peter's response uses a different word for "love" than the Lord's question. The difference is important.

Peter's word, *filew*, describes a deep emotional attachment. It emphasizes warmth of personal affection, but in Trench's words, "give[s] less account of itself to itself; is more instinctive, is more of the feelings or natural affections, implies more passion." The Lord's word, *agapaw*, "expresses a more reasoning attachment, of choice and selection." *Filew* can be a passive response to something stirring and attractive, but *agapaw* results from a decision to devote ourselves to the object of our affection.

We can see this (Hendriksen) grammatically. Commands to love always use *agapaw*, never *filew*.<sup>1</sup> Because *agapaw* is deliberate, it can be commanded. *Filew* is spontaneous, passive, and so cannot be commanded.

In fact, I have been unable to find any place where the Scriptures<sup>2</sup> speak of our loving God using *filéw*. They invariably use *agapáw*. *Filew* loves with the heart, but we are commanded to love God with all our soul, and mind, and strength, as well (Mark 12:30).

This difference is significant. The Lord is asking Peter to reverence, esteem, and worship him, to dedicate himself to the Lord's service. Peter responds by confessing his deep emotional attachment to the Lord. In our day, much emphasis is placed on achieving an emotional response to the Lord. Many contemporary Christian songs express the kinds of sentiments one would expect in romantic ballads. It

1 The LXX has two instances of *filew* imperative, Gen 27:26 and Cant 1:2, but in these cases the word means "kiss," not "love," and what is being commanded is an action, not an emotion.

2 BDAG does cite non-scriptural authors that speak of loving God with *filew*.

is not wrong for us to love the Lord in this way (John 16:27), but we must also love him deliberately.

**He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.**--In this verse, “lambs” refers to the youngest of the sheep, the new believers. Newborn babes require special feeding if they are to thrive and grow. Peter is to give special attention to this need.

It is interesting that the Lord gives this teaching charge to one who is defective in his own love, and whose defect is in the reflectiveness and deliberate nature of his love. Teachers always learn more than their students in the act of teaching. Perhaps the Lord is suggesting that if Peter teaches the youngest lambs, he himself will learn what he needs to turn *filh* into *agáph*.

It may seem strange that the Lord would ask someone whose own faith is defective to teach the youngest believers. But consider:

- Peter, as one of the faithful disciples, must bear witness for the Lord.
- Though his faith is imperfect, so is the faith of each of us.
- We cannot bring people beyond the point that we have reached ourselves. The weaker we are, the simpler the pupils must be that we are to teach.

Every Christian parent, no matter how immature in the faith, is qualified to teach their children. As the children grow, so will the parents, and those parents whose children have become believers, and who meet other qualifications, may receive an expanded teaching ministry in the church. An immature Christian ought not to have such a responsibility, but can “feed the lambs” in his or her own home.

## **16, Second Challenge**

**16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?**--This time, the Lord's question omits “more than these.” Since Peter refused to acknowledge *agaph* toward the Lord, it is no longer a question of whether he loves him more than the other disciples do, but whether he loves him in this sense at all. The question lowers the threshold for Peter.

**He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.**--Peter's answer is identical with his first response. He cannot admit to having even the lower level of love that the Lord here invites.

**He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.**--Our translation reflects the shift from “lambs,” the littlest members of the flock, to “sheep.” In addition, the verb “feed” is different. It is no longer the specific word for feeding the flock, but refers more generally to tending the sheep in every aspect of their need.

It is a mistake to think that the pastors-elders-overseers are only responsible for the instruction of God's people. As overseers, they are responsible for their entire well-being. Heb 13:17 tells the flock,

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.

Recall that “soul” means “life experience.” It is true that deacons focus on the physical needs of the flock, but they were established (Acts 6) at the instigation and under the authority of the elders, who recognized the need for this care.

If the teaching of lambs may give Peter the reflection he needs to turn *filh* into *agaph*, tending the flock



is likely to give him the motivation for that change, as he sees the needs of God's people. If the prototype for teaching the lambs is Christian parenthood, the prototype for providing for the other needs of the flock may be the deaconate, younger men occupied with the physical needs of the believers.

### **17, Third Challenge**

**17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?**--This time the Lord changes to Peter's verb. Peter cannot honestly confess to a reflective, purposeful love of the Lord that exceeds that of other, or indeed to such a love at all. So now the Lord asks him if he is really sure that he has the emotional attachment that he professes to have.

While *filh* may be more intense than *agaph*, it is also more less secure. *Agaph* rests on a reasoned commitment; *filh*, on emotion alone. When our feelings change, *filh* may wane, but *agaph* will endure. Those whose love for the Lord is only *filh* may find that love fading.

**Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?**--Peter recognizes the change, and the gentle rebuke that it implies.

**And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.**--See McKay NT v. 23 for analysis of the aspectual importance of the change from *oida* to *ginwskw*. *Oida* refers to a state of knowledge without reference to how it was acquired; *ginwskw*, particularly in the imperfective aspect (as here) emphasizes precisely the process. "You know all things; surely you must be able to see that I love you."

**Jesus saith unto him,**--Note the repetition of the Lord's name. This, and the explicit naming of Peter in the previous clauses, slows down the narrative and marks the peak.

**Feed my sheep.**--The Lord continues to focus on the *probata*, the full flock, but returns to the charge to feed rather than to shepherd. Trench, article xxv:

Whatever else of discipline and rule may be superadded thereto, still, the feeding of the flock, the finding for them of spiritual food, is the first and last; nothing else will supply the room of this, nor may be allowed to put this out of that foremost place which by right it should occupy. How often, in a false ecclesiastical system, the preaching of the Word loses its preeminence; the *boskein* falls into the background, is swallowed up in the *poimainein*, which presently becomes no true *poimainein*, because it is not a *boskein* as well ...

It is not only the little lambs who need feeding, but the mature sheep as well. In terms of roles in the church, here we progress from parents, through deacons, to elders, those whose love for the Lord has matured to the point that they can feed all the sheep.

Peter is not yet at this level. Throughout most of the NT, it is Paul, not Peter, whom the Lord uses to "feed the flock," visiting the growing churches and writing epistles that instruct not only them but the church in later ages. But Peter would grow to this point. In his first epistle (1:7-8), he comforts his readers in persecution with the prospect of the Lord's return, anticipating

the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love *agapaw*; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

If he is able to encourage his readers of their *agaph* for the Lord, it seems clear that by now he has learned to treasure the Lord in this way as well. His letters, written toward the end of his life (2 Pet 1:14), finally reach the point of feeding the flock, and the Spirit has attested this by preserving them for us in the canon.

## 18-19, Coming Martyrdom

**18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.**--The description has been explained in terms of crucifixion, with the hands stretched out and tied to the cross-beam. If this is so, the order of the clauses suggests that the condemned was tied to the beam before being led to his death, a practice attested by the first century writer Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiquities 7.69.1-2.

**19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.**--John explains that this is an explicit prophecy of martyrdom.

**And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.**--An echo of 1:43, his words to Philip.

This is an amazing way to invite people to service—by promising suffering and martyrdom. Yet it serves an important purpose, preparing them not to be disillusioned. The Lord in the upper room told the disciples (16:1-2, 33), “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. 2 They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. ... In the world ye shall have tribulation...” He did not want them to be taken by surprise when the world's hatred reared its head against them.

Nor is this warning something that applied only to the original apostles. The NT teachers regularly remind their broader circle of listeners of this fact of Christian life.

Paul and Barnabas, in confirming the churches of Asia Minor, warn them (Acts 14:22), “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” Paul reminded the Thesalonians (1 Thes 3:4), “when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation.” He wrote to Timothy (2 Tim 3:12), “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

The Lord warns the church at Smyrna in Rev 2:10, “behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

Peter himself, who ministered the rest of his life with the knowledge of his coming martyrdom based on this verse, encourages his readers (1 Pet 4:12-13),

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

Those who serve Christ only out of *filh*, an emotional attachment, will fall away in time of testing. The Lord wants us to understand the opposition we will face, and to be prepared for it. If our love for him is a deliberate commitment of heart, mind, soul, and strength, the Holy Spirit will empower us to stand fast against the opposition we know is coming.

## **20-23, Peter Compares Himself to Others**

The Lord has charged Peter to ministry, patience in tribulation, and obedience. This is in the first instance a private charge, but the structural parallel with the Lord's other two appearances to the group, and the history of the NT, show that this charge is a prototype for the rest of us as well.

Peter's response is also prototypical.

**20 ... the disciple whom Jesus loved ... which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?**--John never names himself, but here he heaps together descriptions, to prepare for his final testimony in v. 24.

**20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple ... following.**--There is a double meaning here. The Lord has just commanded Peter, "follow me" (v. 19), surely referring primarily to his responsibility to serve the Lord. But in this verse the verb appears to have a physical sense: the Lord and Peter have stepped away from the others for their private conversation, and now Peter notices that John has followed them.

Yet John's physical following reflects his spiritual commitment as well. The events since the resurrection show that the Lord will not be visibly present on a constant basis, but will appear and disappear. John wants to make the most of this appearance, and stays close to the Lord so that when he is done with his private discussion with Peter, John can enjoy his fellowship. So when Peter sees John physically following them on the beach, he is observing an outward sign of John's inward commitment to follow the Lord.

John's devotion challenges us to stay close to the Lord. When we have a choice to remain with the others by the fire or to draw aside with the Lord, which do we prefer?

**21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?**--Peter has been given a solemn task and a sober expectation. Under such circumstances, the flesh naturally asks, "Is this fair? Am I the only one who must do the shepherd's work, and bear the martyr's pain?" John's proximity offers a natural way for him to raise this question with the Lord.

The question is a natural one, but it is of the flesh, and the Lord squelches it with uncharacteristic abruptness.

**22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?**--Briefly, "Peter, it's none of your business what I do with him." You will die a martyr. If I preserve him, so what?

The important detail in the Lord's statement is how it begins. He does not say, "If he tarry till I come," but, "If **I will** that he tarry till I come." What matters is not equity between the two disciples, but their relation to the Lord's will. It is up to the Lord to dispose his servants as he chooses. Their place is not to question his decision, but to fulfill it with all their might. So the Lord repeats,

**follow thou me.**--The pronoun is emphatic, and in contrast with "he" in the previous clauses: "If his role is to tarry, what is that to thee? As for thee, follow me." Peter must get his eyes off of other believers and onto the Lord.

And so must we all. Rom 14:1-8 develops this principle and applies it to questions of conduct that divided the Jewish and Gentile factions in the church over dietary and calendrical laws.

## John 21, By Galilee

Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. ... Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Each of us stands or falls independently to the Lord. What matters is not what others think of us, but whether we are fully persuaded in our own mind that we are serving him.

Earthly managers hold up their employees to one another: “Why can't you be as productive as Sally?” “Jim outsold you last month two to one.”

But the standard for us is the Lord himself, and the charge that he gives each of us. This principle imparts a rugged individualism to personal piety. Each of us is individually responsible to discern the Lord's will for us and then to carry it out.

**23 Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die:**--The growth of this rumor was probably aided by the Lord's similar promise in the synoptics (Matt 16:28, “there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom,” cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). That was an actual promise, but referred to **seeing** the coming, e.g., in the transfiguration, or the visions of John in the Revelation, which may have had parallels with other disciples.

The confusion illustrates that the disciples' raw memories, unaided by the Holy Spirit, were not infallible. The Lord promised that they would be enabled to produce an accurate record of his teaching by means of the Spirit (14:26), and we have that record in the canonical gospels. But, as with the prophets of old (cf. 2 Sam 7:1-3 vs. 4-17), they could also have thoughts that were not guided by the Spirit, like this one.

This observation is particularly important with regard to the issue of whether or not the oral traditions of the church have equal authority with the written Scripture. Later NT passages (e.g., Acts 20:35) show that there were accurate oral traditions of dominical sayings not recorded in the gospels. This passage cautions us that there were also inaccurate traditions in circulation. Any claims for the authority of oral tradition must also tell us how we are to tell the two kinds apart.

**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 wants us to realize that he has no promise of immortality.

Perhaps he also wants to emphasize the Lord's reference to his return. All the promises of the Lord's return up to this point in John are before the resurrection (e.g., 14:3, 18, 28), and might be understood to refer to his resurrection. Now it is clear that he will return again.

As in so many other ways, John's record supplements rather than repeats the Synoptics. In this case, they earlier record (Matt 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 9:26) the Lord's promise to return in the glory of his Father for judgment.

## 24-25, John's Final Testimony

Like the previous two appearances, this one also ends with a word of testimony, anticipating the church's exercise of the mission that the Lord has committed to it.

**24 This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things.**--John contrasts the accuracy of his record with the oral recollections of others.

**we know that his testimony is true.**--John is probably still speaking. Compare the usage in 3:2, 11; 4:22; and 11x in his first epistle. He is not just insisting personally on his veracity (as in 19:35), but claiming the support of the broader community as well.

**25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the 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.**--This final testimony broadens 20:30. Not just Jesus' signs, but all of his works, were much more extensive than what he has recorded here. This notice has two functions.

1. Like 20:30, it acknowledges that he is supplementing the synoptics. He doesn't pretend to give everything; there is a place for their books as well as his. (Or perhaps we should say, he insists that there is room for his book as well as theirs.)
2. This broadening from signs to all of the Lord's works is consistent with the shift in the charge in the third panel, from evangelism to pastoral care. Everything that the Lord did now becomes the example for the care of the church.

## Notes

### **Vocabulary distinctions in vv. 15-17**

**Filew vs. agapaw.**--Trench (xii) sees *filew* as warmer and more personal, *agapaw* as more reasoned, "to esteem, regard highly." *agapaw* includes a notion of respect and reverence that is not present in *filew*. Throughout scripture, the command to love God is always *agapaw*, never *filew*. In fact, the only commands to *filew* are in the sense "to kiss," Gen 27:26; Cant 1:2.

Trench feels that Peter is upset that the Lord uses *agapaw* toward him, desiring the more intimate *filew*, and that Peter has triumphed when the Lord moves to his word. But the reference to Peter's grief when the Lord changes the term (v. 17) suggests that it is Peter's love, not the Lord's, that is defective.

See Hendriksen for an excellent discussion of the point.

**oida vs. ginwskw.**--See McKay *Novum Testamentum* 1981 (23) p. 304 for analysis. *Oida* is the state of having knowledge with no reference to how it is acquired; *ginwskw* emphasizes the process of acquiring knowledge. So Peter, in the face of the Lord's questions, not only asserts the Lord's knowledge, but emphasizes, "surely you can see."

**boskw vs. poimanw.**--Trench xxv: the first is simply to feed, the second, the broader responsibility of the shepherd to care for all aspects of the flock's need.

**arnion vs. probaton.**--The first word is a diminutive, and suggests a lamb. BDAG deny the age distinction, but three of the four LXX uses of the word single it out as a particularly weak member of the *probatwn* (Ps 114:4,6; Jer 50:45).