

John 21

Acts 1:1 – 3

There are not a lot of details known about these forty days. Each of the four Gospels tells of resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ. Most of these incidents take place within a short time after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mostly, they fall into what verse 3 calls “shewing himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs”. There is much less recorded about the “speaking of things pertaining to the kingdom of God”. We can read that Jesus did speak to them about the coming gift of holy spirit and he did give them a commission to go and preach the gospel, but the records do not contain much detail other than that. All of which makes chapter 21 of the Gospel of John quite interesting. It is the most detailed record of a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ. And when we read it the spiritual perception and awareness, we find that there are some wonderful applications for us today.

John 21:1

The sea of Tiberias was also known as the lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1) and as the sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:18). We should mention that, prior to his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus had told the twelve that after he was risen again, he would go before them into Galilee (Matthew 26:32). This was repeated to the disciples by an angel at the empty tomb after he had risen (Matthew 28:7; Mark 16:7). So now, here they are in Galilee, and we are going to read about Jesus showing himself to them again. When we get to verse 14, we will find out that this is the third time he showed himself, so this incident is early on in those forty days mentioned in Acts.

John 21:2,3

The record begins and it is plain that Jesus has not yet arrived. I have tried to imagine the emotional stress and turmoil that the disciples must have gone through as they witnessed the arrest, the abuse and trial of Jesus, the horror of the crucifixion, his death and burial, the three days and nights in the grave and then his resurrection. There must have been unbelievable “lows”, fears, questions. The elation when they saw or heard that he had risen. It must have been an emotional “roller coaster” for them. No wonder Peter said, “I’m going fishing”. He was a fisherman; this was something he knew and was comfortable with.

John 21:4 – 6

Incidentally, this is not the first time that Jesus has inserted himself into the fishing business. You will remember the record in Luke 5, when Jesus instructed Peter to let out his nets and Peter responded by letting out one net. There was also the incident where they needed money to pay their taxes and Jesus sent Peter out to fish, telling him that the first one you catch will have a coin in its’ mouth.

John 21:7 – 11, 12 – 14

Overall, what a tender and loving picture is painted here of the Lord Jesus Christ. At a time when the disciples must have been dealing with at least some questions and emotional turmoil, he simply took care of them.

John 21:15 – 17

In verse 15, when Jesus says “lovest me more than these?”, some have said that the word “these” is referring to the other disciples present. That idea does not fit with the context (as we will see) nor with the rest of the four Gospels. There really is no record of Jesus promoting rivalry

and competition among his disciples. Quite the contrary; he repeatedly emphasized love and service. The word “these” must refer to the fish and the fishing equipment that they had.

In these verses, Jesus is constraining Peter to take care of God’s people, young and old, to feed them God’s Word and to lead them diligently.

John 21:18

The words “verily, verily” are unique to John in the four Gospels and it is a figure of speech to draw attention to what is said, something significant. Jesus here is still constraining Peter to walk and serve God’s people. We can see that when a person is young (less mature), life can be all about them. They do what they want to do and they go where they want to go. But when they get old (mature), life is not just about their own desires. They begin to live for others and do things they may never have considered doing. In the Book of Acts, we see this illustrated with Ananias in Acts 9. Because he had grown to a level of maturity spiritually, he was willing to go and minister to Saul (Paul). This was something he never would have done on his own. We see something similar with Peter. He had matured spiritually to the point that God could send him to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10. This is something that Peter would never have done on his own.

John 21:19

Here in this verse, we have a problem. Read in the KJV (and in most versions), it seems to say that Peter’s death would glorify God. But that contradicts other scriptures. We are not going to look these up, but I will give them to you for reference and you can read them later.

I Corinthians 15:26 states that death is an enemy.

Hebrews 2:14 says that the devil has the power of death.

Psalm 116:15 says that the death of a saint is precious (costly).

Romans 12:1 states that we are to be living sacrifices.

When we have apparent contradictions, we first look to our understanding, to make sure we understand what the verse says. If we do understand it and still have the contradiction, then we look to the texts to see if the problem is in translation. There are some manuscripts that omit the word “death” and there are others that omit the entire first half of the verse. Death does not glorify God.

Jesus is still constraining Peter to be committed to serving God’s people and to following him. Incidentally, Peter is not the only one who is constrained by Jesus Christ.

II Corinthians 5:14, 15

We are constrained by the love of Christ to not live for ourselves but to live for him.

John 21:20 – 22

Peter’s response to Jesus is so typical of humans - “What about this other guy? What is he supposed to be doing?”. And in Jesus’ response, there is great freedom for us. Applying this to myself, I don’t need to be overly concerned about what Charlie is doing for the Lord or what Deb is doing for the Lord. I need to follow him myself.

John 21:23 - 25