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## John 21:1-25

### The Resurrected Lord Meets Us in Our Failures

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#### DAY ONE Observation

John 1-12 record Jesus' **public ministry** to Israel. John 13-17 record Jesus' **private ministry** with His disciples. John 18-21 record Jesus' **universal ministry** to all humanity through His death and resurrection.

*The average reader would conclude that John completed his book with the dramatic testimony of Thomas, and the reader would wonder why John added another chapter. The main reason is the Apostle Peter, John's close associate in ministry. John did not want to end his Gospel without telling his readers that Peter was restored to his apostleship. Apart from the information in this chapter, we would wonder why Peter was so prominent in the first twelve chapters of Acts.*

—Warren Wiersbe

**Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read John 21:1-25. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Record the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed *Himself*: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.

<sup>4</sup> But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No." <sup>6</sup> And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find *some*." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. <sup>8</sup> But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about

two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. <sup>9</sup> Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.”

<sup>11</sup> Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, “Come *and* eat breakfast.” Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are You?”—knowing that it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. <sup>14</sup> This *is* now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

<sup>15</sup> So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, 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.”

<sup>16</sup> He said to him again a second time, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

<sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, 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 all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep. <sup>18</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish.” <sup>19</sup> This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”

<sup>20</sup> Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” <sup>21</sup> Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what *about* this man?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me.” <sup>23</sup> Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you?”

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

<sup>25</sup> And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. (NKJV)

What stands out to you after reading this passage? Why?

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Highlight or mark the name "Simon" and/or "Peter" in this passage. Notice his personality, words, and actions. What observations can you make about Peter from this passage?

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Fill out the following chart based on John 21:15-17.

	Jesus' Question	Peter's Response	Jesus' Command
21:15			
21:16			
21:17			

What was Jesus' final command to Peter (21:19)? \_\_\_\_\_

Seeing John following behind them, Peter asks the Lord what His future plan is for John. Write out Jesus' response to Peter (21:22)

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**DAY THREE**  
**Interpretation**

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the passage in order to better understand its meaning. A word study on a key word and/or looking up parallel passages can help you in your understanding.

**Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type “John 21:16” into the “Search the Bible” box. Next click on John 21:16 to bring up the verse in the Greek (or select “Interlinear” from the Tools menu). Find the word translated as “feed” and click on the Strong’s number (G4165) to bring up the Greek word, its definition, and its usage in other passages in the New Testament.**

What is the Greek word for “feed”? \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

Summarize its meaning and definition. (See Outline of Biblical Usage.)

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**Look up the following passages and write down what you learn about shepherding.**

John 10:11-14 \_\_\_\_\_  
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Acts 20:28-29 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1 Peter 5:2-4 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Revelation 7:16-17 \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Based on what you have read, how would you define a “good shepherd” in one sentence?**

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## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from J.C. Ryle's *Expository Thoughts on John*.

**21:1-14.** We should observe, for one thing, in these verses, **the poverty of the first disciples of Christ.** We find them working with their own hands, in order to supply their temporal needs, and working at one of the humblest of callings--the calling of a fisherman. Silver and gold they had none, lands and revenues they had none, and therefore they were not ashamed to return to the business to which they had, most of them, been trained. Striking is the fact, that some of the seven here named were fishing, when our Lord first called them to be Apostles, and again fishing, when He appeared to them almost the last time. We need not doubt that to the minds of Peter, James, and John, the coincidence would come home with peculiar power.

...These were they who went forth from an obscure corner of the earth, and turned the world upside down. These were the unlearned and ignorant men, who boldly confronted the subtle systems of ancient philosophy, and silenced its advocates by the preaching of the cross. These were the men who at Ephesus, and Athens, and Rome, emptied the heathen temples of their worshippers, and turned away multitudes to a new and better faith. He that can explain these facts, except by admitting that Christianity came down from God, must be a strangely incredulous man. Reason and common sense lead us to only one conclusion in the matter. Nothing can account for the rise and progress of Christianity but the direct interposition of God.

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, **the different characters of different disciples of Christ.** Once more, on this deeply interesting occasion, we see Peter and John side by side in the same boat, and once more, as at the sepulcher, we see

these two good men behaving in different ways. When Jesus stood on the shore, in the dim twilight of the morning, John was the first to perceive who it was, and to say, "It is the Lord;" but Peter was the first to spring into the water, and to struggle to get close to his Master. In a word, John was the first to see; but Peter was the first to act. John's gentle loving spirit was quickest to discern; but Peter's fiery, impulsive nature was quickest to stir and move. And yet both were believers, both were true-hearted disciples, both loved the Lord in life, and were faithful to Him unto death. But their natural temperaments were not the same.

Let us never forget the practical lesson before us. ...Some have more of one gift, and some have more of another. Some have gifts which shine more in public, and some which shine more in private. Some are more bright in a passive life, and some are more bright in an active one. Yet each and all the members of God's family, in their own way and in their own season, bring glory to God.

...We should observe, lastly, in these verses, **the abundant evidence which Scripture supplies of our Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection.** ...Let us all thank God that we have such a cloud of witnesses to prove that our Lord rose again. The resurrection of Christ is the grand proof of Christ's divine mission. ...The resurrection of Christ is the top-stone of the work of redemption. It proved that He finished the work He came to do, and, as our Substitute, had overcome the grave. The resurrection of Christ is a miracle that no infidel can explain away. Men may carp and cavil at Balaam's donkey, and Jonah in the whale's belly, if they please, but until they can prove that Christ did not rise again we need not be moved. Above all, the resurrection of Christ is the pledge of our

own. As the grave could not detain the Head, so it shall not detain the members. Well may we say with Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3.)

**21:15-25.** ...We should notice first, in these verses, **Christ's question to Peter**--"Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Three times we find the same inquiry made. It seems most probable that this three-fold repetition was meant to remind the Apostle of his own thrice-repeated denial. Once we find a remarkable addition to the inquiry--"do you love Me more than these?" It is a reasonable supposition that those three words "more than these," were meant to remind Peter of his over-confident assertion--"Though all men deny You, yet I will not." It is just as if our Lord would say, "Will you now exalt yourself above others? Have you yet learned your own weakness?"

"Do you love Me" may seem at first sight a simple question. In one sense it is so. Even a child can understand love, and can say whether he loves another or not. Yet "Do you love Me" is, in reality, a very searching question. We may know much, and do much, and profess much, and talk much, and work much, and give much, and go through much, and make much show in our religion, and yet be dead before God, from lack of love, and at last go down to the pit. Do we love Christ? That is the great question. Without this there is no vitality about our Christianity. We are no better than painted wax figures, lifeless stuffed beasts in a museum, sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. There is no life where there is no love.

...We should notice, secondly, in these verses, **Peter's answer to Christ's**

**question.** Three times we find the Apostle saying, "You know that I love You." Once we are told that he said, "You know all things." Once we have the touching remark made, that he was "grieved to be asked the third time." We need not doubt that our Lord, like a skillful physician, stirred up this grief intentionally. He intended to pierce the Apostle's conscience, and to teach him a solemn lesson.

...What, after all, is the great secret of loving Christ? It is an inward sense of having received from Him pardon and forgiveness of sins. Those love much who feel much forgiven. He who has come to Christ with his sins, and tasted the blessedness of free and full absolution, he is the man whose heart will be full of love towards his Savior. The more we realize that Christ has suffered for us, and paid our debt to God, and that we are washed and justified through His blood, the more we shall love Him for having loved us, and given Himself for us. Our knowledge of doctrines may be defective. Our ability to defend our views in argument may be small. But we cannot be prevented feeling. And our feeling will be like that of the Apostle Peter--"You, Lord, who know all things, You know my heart; and You know that I love You."

We should notice, lastly, in these verses, **Christ's command to Peter.** Three times we find Him saying, "Feed my flock." Once, "Feed my lambs;" and twice, "Feed my sheep." Can we doubt for a moment that this thrice-repeated charge was full of deep meaning? It was meant to commission Peter once more to do the work of an Apostle. ...It is steady, patient, laborious effort to do good to Christ's sheep scattered throughout this sinful world, which is the best evidence of being a true-hearted disciple. This is the real secret of Christian greatness.

What stands out to you from Ryle’s words? Why?

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**DAY FIVE**  
**Application**

Re-read John 21:1-25 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your daily life.

What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of John 21:1-25? Why?

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Being a strong, bold, confident man, Peter must have struggled mightily to come to grips with his threefold denial of the Lord in a time of weakness. Thinking through your own life, in what areas do you feel like you have failed or fallen short of God’s expectations or your own?

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How do you tend to respond to your failures? Give up and go back to “fishing” (only doing those things you are comfortable with)? Beat yourself up? Compare yourself to others?

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Jesus comes to Peter in his failures and doesn’t rebuke him. Instead He makes him breakfast and gently, yet probingly, calls him back to what really matters. In our failures, we need to realize our weakness, remember Jesus’ faithful love, embrace His forgiveness, and focus on the simplicity of what He calls us to—to love Him, to follow Him, and to care for others. Imagine Jesus fixing you breakfast and speaking to you in your failures. What do you hear Him say?

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