



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

John's Concluding Testimony

John 21:20-25

December 10, 2006

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I. **The Lord's Purpose for John the Apostle**

- Peter has just been restored by Christ; however, as it will be clear, he still has not 'got it.' His question to Jesus will indicate this. Yet, there is certainly no doubt that both Peter and John were used mightily by God in the apostolic age.
- John concludes Verse 19 with the words by Jesus, 'Follow Me!'
 - It seems rather clear that Jesus is primarily speaking of following Him in a life marked with obedience to His Word as a devoted disciple. However, it is also

possible that Jesus is inviting Jesus to follow Him and walk with Him on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. This would adequately explain the events of Verses 20-23.

a. Peter Questions Christ

- Although Peter has been restored by Christ, and restored with a purpose, it is also clear what Peter's ultimate fate will be: death.
- So, as Peter is walking with Christ, he looks back at 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' who was 'following them,' and he asked Christ, 'Lord, what about this man?'
 - How human this question truly is!
 - We, as Christians, so often worry more about what others are doing; what God has called them to do, rather than ourselves. Peter seems no different.

b. Christ Rebukes Peter

- In Verse 22, Jesus replies, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!'
 - Basically, Jesus is telling John, 'It is none of your business!'
 - It is certainly worth noting that Jesus' words were misunderstood by some in the Early Church. John says that [Verse 23] some of the early Christians believed that John would not die [but he would remain alive until Jesus returned]. This correction by John, in Verse 23, would have been quite significant **after** the death of John; for, this could have shaken the faith of those Christians who thought Jesus has said this would never happen [which He did not].
- Christ's response, in Verse 22, 'demonstrates several powerful truths.'
 - **First** of all, it is within the scope God's authority and providence to determine the plans of each believer. It is not the job of Peter, or anyone else, to worry about such things.
 - **Secondly**, God's plan is not the same for every believer.
 - As D.A. Carson correctly states, here, 'One of them [Peter] may be called to strategic pastoral ministry (vv. 15-17) and a martyr's crown (vv. 18-19), and the other to a long life (v. 22) and to strategic historical-theological witness, in written form (v. 24).'
 - Herman Ridderbos writes, '[The Evangelist] suggests that, while Peter's destiny lay in the God-glorifying significance of his death,

Jesus' purpose with the other disciple lay rather in his *continuing*, though not in the sense – as the Evangelist expressly states – that this disciple could not die before the coming of Jesus. Instead, by continuing, he would serve Jesus as his disciple throughout his life...What applies to both disciples is the call to follow Jesus, each with his own destiny.'

- Andreas Kostenberger states, 'For Peter, Christlikeness is found in martyrdom; for the beloved disciple, Christlikeness manifests itself in witness grounded in unparalleled intimacy with Jesus.'
- It seems far too common today that well-meaning Christians simply assume that God has the same 'prosperous' plan for every Christian, it is simply our responsibility to discover it. Often times, such a belief involves taking certain Scriptures, such as Jeremiah 29:11 ['For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' NIV], grossly out of their original context and as a result, misinterpret and misapply them.
- Modern Christian self-help books are often based upon this fundamentally flawed principle: that it is God's desire to 'prosper' you, typically in a material way.
- Yet, the life of Peter, and nearly all of the disciples [not to mention Christ Himself!] proves this understanding of God's purpose for His people inaccurate.
- As with Peter, it may be God's purpose for a certain believer to die a martyr's death; however, for another individual it may be God's purpose to ensure they have a long earthly life that includes a long ministry [as was the case with John].
- Further, as the Apostle Paul writes, 'For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ' (1 Corinthians 12:12).
ALL parts of the Body of Christ are necessary!
- Paul continues by stating, 'But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired' (1 Corinthians 12:18)
- In other words, it is the determination of God and God alone as to the purpose of each believer. It is our responsibility to simply **obey**.

- **NOTE: God Himself is no different!**
- **God is ONE yet THREE – The ONE true and living God exists as three [eternally distinct] coequal, coeternal Persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**
- **In other words, the three Persons of the Godhead are distinct in FUNCTIONS or ROLES. For example, the Son died on the Cross – NOT the Father or the Holy Spirit – and the Son did so willingly and joyfully!**
- **So, we too, are ONE Body, yet many parts...each playing a necessary role!**
- **Thirdly**, each of us is to follow Christ and not worry about comparing our ‘calling’ with another believer’s.
 - Each one of us is called to act ‘according to the measure of faith’ (Romans 12:3) given us.
 - Different individuals have often said to me, ‘There are many very Godly individuals who disagree with you on this [some theological/doctrinal issue].’ **Yet, I [and every believer] am responsible for what God has revealed to me.**
 - Consider the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20).
 - As Jesus, in effect, said to Peter, ‘It is none of your business what my plan is for John...YOU follow Me!’

II. **John’s Qualification as an Apostle**

- Not only does John record Jesus’ rebuke of Peter, but he concludes his Gospel with an explanation of his own qualifications as an Apostle.

a. John’ Intimacy with Christ

- First of all, in accordance with divine providence, John had a unique level of intimacy with Christ that qualified him as a first century Apostle.
 - First of all, John refers to himself as ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’ [Of course, this assumes that John is the ‘beloved disciple.’ I have attempted to establish this understanding earlier in the Gospel.]

- Second, John identifies himself as ‘the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, ‘Lord, who is the one who betrays You?’
 - This statement further establishes the intimacy between both Jesus and John [as well as between John and Peter].
 - D.A. Carson writes, ‘...the reminder that this disciple leaned his head on Jesus’ breast at the last supper establishes his credentials as an intimate of the Lord Jesus – especially significant intimacy in light of the beloved disciple’s distinctive role.’
 - Carson continues, ‘It may not be too far-fetched to think of John leaning on Jesus’ breast as a kind of lesser intimacy to that of the Son with the Father, in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18).’

b. John’s Eyewitness Account

- Further proof of John’s qualification as an Apostle is the fact that he was an eyewitness to Christ and His works.
- As John states in Verse 24, ‘This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things.’
 - The ‘these things’ here likely refers to the entire Gospel of John.
- He also writes, ‘And there are also many other things which Jesus did’ which assume a degree of personal knowledge of these works.
- Once again, we read in 1 John 1:1-3:

‘What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.’

c. John’s Authentication by Witnesses

- Finally, Verse 24 states, ‘we know that his testimony is true.’
 - Throughout the centuries, there has been a great deal of debate as to the identity of the ‘we’ here.

- It certainly may be that the ‘we’ refers to the early church elders, likely in the Church at Ephesus.
- C.K. Barrett writes, ‘The ‘we’ is to be taken with full seriousness; there exists an apostolic church whose very existence is a confirmation and affirmation of the apostolic witness [of John].’
- It is also possible that the ‘we’ is an ‘editorial ‘we.’ John sometimes puts the plural form ‘on the lips of’ individual people (John 3:2, 11; 20:2; 1 John 1:2, 4-7).

III. John’s Testimony as an Apostle

- It is appropriate, here, to look back at the beginning of John’s Gospel in order to view it in light of this final Verse (John 21:25).
- John begins his Gospel with one of the most profound statements, with respect to identity of Christ, in all of Scripture: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’
- Here, John ends with another powerful statement; yet, it does not explicitly refer to Christ’s identity, but His works.
- Thus, this truth demonstrates that the works of Christ are directly related to His identity. His works reveal His true identity [Of course the same truth pertains to people: our works reveal our identity]. Of course this truth pertains to ALL of Christ’s work; however, it especially relates to His signs throughout this Gospel.
- This pattern of WORKS revealing IDENTITY is woven throughout this fourth Gospel.

a. The Identity of Christ

- In order to understand John’s final statement with respect to the works of Christ, one must first understand the basis of these works: Christ’s identity.
- Again, in the first Verse John establishes that Jesus is, indeed, **fully God**.
- Throughout the entire Gospel John demonstrates that Jesus is clearly:
 - The Christ, the Messiah [John 1:41; 20:30-31].
 - The Lamb of God – the perfect sin-bearer [John 1:29]
 - The Unique, one-of-a-kind Son of God [John 1:14; 3:16]
 - The Eternal Word [John 1:1].

- The ONLY Way to the Father [John 3:16]
- The Substitute for His people [John 10]
- The Great I AM [Yahweh in essence] ('Before Abraham was, I AM' John 8:58) (through the 'I AM' Statements):
 - The Bread of Life (6:35; 41, 48, 51)
 - The Light of the World (8:12)
 - The Door of the Sheep (10:7,9)
 - The Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (10:11, 14)
 - The Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
 - The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)
 - The True Vine (15:1,5)

b. The Work of Christ

- Not only does Jesus reveal the identity of Christ, but demonstrates His identity **through His works**.
- **The Seven Signs in John's Gospel are likely the most powerful evidence for Jesus' identity:**

- Jesus turns water into wine (John 2:1-12)
Significance: Jesus is the source of life.
- Jesus heals a nobleman's son [from a distance] (John 4:46-54)
Significance: Jesus is the master over distance.
- Jesus heals a lame man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-17)
Significance: Jesus is master over time.
- Jesus feeds 5,000 (John 6:1-14)
Significance: Jesus is the bread of life.
- Jesus walks on water, stills a storm (John 6:15-21)
Significance: Jesus is master over nature.

- Jesus heals a man blind from birth (John 9:1-41)
Significance: Jesus is the light of the world.
- Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (John 11:17-45)
Significance: Jesus has power over death.
[Jesus has the authority and ability to create life, for He has *life in Himself.*]

❖ **Yet, John does not simply end his Gospel attesting to the divine, qualitative nature of Jesus' works; but, to the divine quantity as well.**

c. The Supremacy of Christ

- John concludes his Gospel by writing, 'Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that h world itself could not contain the books that would be written.'
- John's point is quite clear: **Just as the finite mind can never fully comprehend the divine nature of an infinite God, so too the finite mind cannot grasp the innumerable works of the author of the universe!**
- Scholars often refer to this truth as the incomprehensibility of God.

D.A. Carson asserts, 'If in v. 24 the Evangelist has already alluded to the Prologue, it is best to think he is doing so again. The Jesus to whom he bears witness is not only the obedient Son and the risen Lord, he is the incarnate Word, the one through whom the universe was created. If all his deeds were described, the world would be a very small and inadequate library indeed...[John] must close by saying his own work is only a minute part of all the honors due the Son.'

Leon Morris writes, 'It is fitting for us to bring our study of the Gospel to a close with the reminder of the limitations of our knowledge. It is well for us to be appreciative of the knowledge we have and to show a due gratitude to God for what he has revealed. But we should not exaggerate. Our knowledge of the truth is at best partial. The reader who appreciates the significance of these final words is kept humble.'

*We worship Almighty God for who He is and what He has done.
Yet, we stand in awe of Him, as well, for we will never fully grasp either one!*