

February 21, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from John 21:20-25.

1. How do we know that the “mystery” disciple is John?
2. Why was it wrong for Peter to be concerned about the Lord’s will for John?
3. How does our interest in other people’s business detract us from following Jesus?
4. Explain why inspiration of Scripture is important to you.
5. What do you know about Jesus from the Bible?
6. Do you believe it?

WHAT ABOUT JOHN? John 21:20-25

Possibly, but not very likely, someone might have responded to your question about what he or she was doing by saying, “I’m making a wigwam for a goose’s bridle.” That sounds a bit absurd, doesn’t it? In fact, the original saying was more absurd: “A whim-wham for a goose’s bridle.” A whim-wham was an imaginary object. So is a bridle for a goose. The saying originated in Australia and simply meant, “Mind your own business.”

Americans, on the other hand, are a bit more bold and plainly tell nosy people to mind their own business. But in an effort to soften

the blow of such a rebuke, the phrase has sometimes been rendered, “Mind your own bees’ wax.” That sounds about as useful as a whim-wham for a goose’s bridle. The saying came from groups of women sitting around the fireplace making candles out of bees’ wax. If someone got too nosy, a peer would remind her to pay attention to her own project.

Isn’t it great that Christians, followers of Jesus who try to be like Jesus, never need correcting like that? Actually, Paul ran into a situation where some professing believers did need such a reminder. He admonished Christians in Thessalonica to love each other, “*and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you*” (1 Thessalonians 4:11). Possibly those Christians were slow learners because a few months later, Paul wrote a second letter in which he warned, “*For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living*” (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12).

Even Saint Peter gave evidence of being overly concerned about others when he should have been learning the Lord’s will for his own life. John ended this wonderful account of Jesus’ life and ministry by telling the story of Peter’s unedifying interest in his life. He reminded us that edification is found in knowing Jesus through the words recorded in this Bible, not by knowing other people’s business.

Peter Wondered (vv.20-23).

Peter wondered what Jesus had planned for John. Wait. The text doesn’t mention John. It simply refers to *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, which title we have seen before. *Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”* (v.20). Who is this mysterious disciple?

This person shows up frequently in John’s gospel. For example, the writer told us that the *disciple whom Jesus loved* was reclining at table close to Jesus (13:23). He told us that the *disciple whom Jesus loved* was standing nearby at the cross (19:26). Mary Magdalene ran to tell Peter and the *disciple whom Jesus loved* that Jesus’ body was

missing (20:2). *That disciple* and Peter ran to the tomb and that disciple looked into it (20:3, 5). *The disciple whom Jesus loved* identified Jesus as the stranger on the shore (21:7). And now the *disciple whom Jesus loved* was following Jesus and Peter (v.20). In a few moments, we will read that *this disciple* is eyewitness to Jesus' ministry (v.24).

Obviously this disciple was John. We don't need to go to Leonardo da Vinci's "facebook" page, find the picture of the Last Supper, run the mouse over the picture and discover that when the cursor is on the face of the man leaning on Jesus' breast a little box comes up that says, "Saint John." Often in the setting where we find the mystery disciple, we can deduce whose name is not mentioned but yet who should be in that setting. It's always John.

So why the cryptic references to himself? John was not trying to be mysterious. He was humble. Probably John wrote this account not long before Emperor Domitian sentenced him to the Isle of Patmos while he was ministering in the church at Ephesus. By then he was an older, wiser, humble man who had fought many spiritual battles. Some people suggest that it is possible that John also had to deal with the kind of sectarianism Paul dealt with 40 years earlier in Corinth where Christians claimed, "I am of Peter, I am of Apollos" and such. John didn't want any part of that.

No doubt John was a pretty important disciple. Therefore, another important disciple, Peter, wondered what Jesus' plan was for John. *When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"* (v.21). In this setting, Peter was painfully aware of what his future held. Jesus had just told Peter that at some point in the future authorities would crucify him. If Peter took Jesus' promise seriously (and he did), it probably caused a whirlwind of conflicting thoughts in his mind. How would you respond if someone you trusted implicitly told you that at an unknown time in the future authorities would cut off your head? Would you hope he was mistaken? Peter didn't think Jesus was mistaken.

It was not surprising that in comparison Peter only wanted to know what the Lord planned for John. "In comparison" seems to have been a problem for Peter. Remember how he compared himself with the other disciples and concluded, "though all of them forsake You

Lord, I will never forsake You!" Now Peter did the comparison thing again with John.

John was a close peer to Peter. They both were part of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples along with John's brother James. They were privy to situations and information the others did not know (Transfiguration, raising of Jairus' daughter). Peter trusted John to get information from Jesus about who the betrayer was at the last supper. Since they were good friends, and since they were in similar relationship with Jesus, and since they were from similar backgrounds . . . Peter wondered. "If I'm to be crucified, what will happen to John my peer?"

This is so human nature. During the period of the Judges, when the tribe of Ephraim felt slighted, the assurance that no other tribe compared with their greatness satisfied them (Judges 8:2). God promised that no king would compare with Solomon's riches and honor (1 Kings 3:13). That is what we want to know. Who is like us? Are we better or worse? If such and such happened to a person like me, will the same happen to me? If you read a news report telling that a healthy man who was only 45 years old suddenly fell dead from a heart attack, do you, Mr. Healthy 45-year-old, begin to think that maybe you should visit your doctor?

Worse is when we compare ourselves seeking for the lowest common denominator spiritually. This was a problem Paul dealt with. False teachers who claimed to be apostles compared themselves to Paul and concluded that he was odd and they were the real leaders of Christianity. In reality, because they were comparing themselves with fellow deceivers, they were deceived. Paul warned, *But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding* (2 Corinthians 10:12). We all have a tendency to compare ourselves against others to somehow decide that we are okay.

Why compare ourselves to a faulty standard when we should be comparing ourselves to the principles, precepts, and measure of the Bible? That is like trying to build a cabinet by using a tape measure that has several increment markings missing. If you use that measure and conclude, "Oh, that's close enough," you are going to build one ugly, useless cabinet. If you weigh yourself on a scale that is ten pounds off on the light side, you are going to be pleasantly deceived

and quite shocked at your next visit at the doctor's office. If you are satisfied with a speedometer that reads 15 miles per hour slow, don't whine when the police officer pulls you over for speeding and gives you a \$150 ticket. Peter looking back at John was looking at the wrong measurement!

Jesus made it clear to "little faith" Peter that John's work was none of Peter's business (vv.22-23). In our lingo, Jesus would have asked, "What's it to you?" In the story, *Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"* (v.22). Okay, let's think about it. What good would it have done for Peter to know that John would languish for years in lonely exile on Patmos? What good would be accomplished by Peter knowing that John would outlive the other ten apostles? What good could come of even John knowing that all his co-workers would be in heaven with Christ before he would be?

And for us, what does other people's future or lives have to do with me following Jesus? "*Follow me*" was not Jesus' order for Peter at the moment. It appears that Peter and Jesus were walking away from the rest of the group when John also began to follow them. "*Follow me*" is the same thing Jesus said to Peter and other disciples that meant, walk away from everything and everyone and pursue Me to become like Me. It is what Jesus had said to Peter, Andrew, James, and John who responded by leaving everything (Matthew 4:18). It is what Jesus said to Matthew who walked away from the tax booth (Mark 2:14).

Follow Me is what Jesus requires of all of us who would have eternal life and learn to become like Him. *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (Luke 9:23)*. It is what the rich young ruler could not do. That successful young man came to Jesus to ask what he needed to do to gain eternal life. *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."* Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Mark 10:21-22). That young man had compared himself to the Pharisees and the doers of human traditions and thought he came out pretty good. When Jesus

compared the man with divine righteousness, he was a loser. And the man knew it.

We must be satisfied to check the accuracy of our following Jesus instead of worry about others. Often this is a matter of plucking the log out of our own eye before looking for specks in our brother's eye. Before we pray verbosely for God to bless the missionaries, we need to lay ourselves open before His Word and pray with David: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*" (Psalm 139:23-24).

Checking our own condition, motives, plans, and purposes first is critical because sayings tend to spread. Yep. That happened even with the apostles. *So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"* (v.23) So how did the world find out about a statement Jesus made to Peter, possibly within earshot of ten other apostles? Was this saying spread abroad as gossip or slander? No, because no one was hurt by it. There is no malice in the saying. It just seemed on the surface that Jesus indicated that John would not die.

What else could Jesus have meant by "If he remains until I return?" Obviously, the disciples concluded that Jesus was going back to heaven and then at some point He would return. We believe that. However long it would be, they concluded, John would still be alive. Therefore, it must be that those early followers of Jesus expected Him to return in a relatively short time. No, it is not possible that John is not still miraculously alive hiding somewhere in the Middle East. If you believe that, you might as well assume that he is in some well-protected tomb guarding the Ark of the Covenant. But we are reminded that the Lord's return is imminent—it could happen at any moment.

This is also a reminder for us to carefully weigh human traditions against the clear teaching of God's Word. We easily adopt applications of Bible principles as tradition that somehow becomes exalted to the level of Bible authority. The Bible does not address a person's preference of Bible translations, only the issue of a translation's accuracy. Maybe your grandmother truly believed that a woman should never wear anything other than a dress. While that

might be a good principle to follow in some situations and a strongly held preference, it is not equal to Bible doctrine. Some people believe that the computer is of the devil because so much wickedness prevails on the internet. But that tradition cannot be enforced with the authority of Scripture to preclude listening to sermons on the internet. It is possible for thoughtless traditions to actually hinder us from following Jesus.

Jesus said, “Follow Me.” Don’t worry about John, and don’t worry about human conspiracy theories.

John Bore Witness (vv.24-25).

John closed out this wonderful account of Jesus’ life and ministry by writing that *this is the disciple*. And we quickly add that John was an eyewitness. He wrote, *This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things (v.24a)*. The fact that “this disciple” bore witness about these things is very important. On one hand, we have a human eyewitness account of all that is written in this book. Because it coincides with and reaffirms similar accounts in the Bible, it must be accepted as credible testimony.

On the other hand, this disciple was being carried along by the Holy Spirit to write the truth and facts God breathed out. Speaking of all Scripture writers, including John and himself, Peter wrote: *Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21)*. Paul explained, *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*.

What John gave us is the authoritative witness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit about God’s work through Jesus Christ, God the Son. John was the inspired writer *who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true (v.24b)*. Do we really know his testimony is true? Yes. First we know because John’s character stands behind all that he wrote. Second, because we understand in retrospect that he wrote what God desired

for him to write. Therefore, we have come to perceive based on evidence that John wrote truth.

The word translated “know” (*oida*) means to perceive or come to a conclusion after careful study. The verb speaks of an action in the past that has continuing results in life. We concluded in the past that John wrote truth and it continues to impact our lives. The Holy Spirit, the Encourager who Jesus promised, indwells believers and convinces us that what we read is true. Therefore, we should not expect people who are devoid of the Holy Spirit, people who refuse to deny themselves and follow Jesus, to know. No amount of arguing will convince an unbeliever that John’s message, as well as the whole message of the Bible, is true. When God showers His grace upon that doubter, he or she will gladly conclude that John wrote truth.

But who is “we”? It is possible that John simply used the pronoun in an editorial sense like he did in his first letter. There he wrote, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life (1 John 1:1)*.

But if this is the editorial “we,” John argued that he knew that he was telling the truth. That is okay, but not very convincing. Others are of the opinion that “we” was the leaders and fellow Christians who made up the church in Ephesus where John most likely was when he wrote. Tradition holds that from a human standpoint John wrote this account because church leaders and Christians asked him to write it. Or do we agree that it is true because God inspired this writing for all Christians?

Is it really true? What then shall we do with this truth? Because of this truth, this disciple challenges us to believe Jesus. He concluded that there is abundant evidence that tells about Jesus. *Now 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 (v.25)*.

Talk about the writing being true? Is John’s statement here hyperbole? All the bookshelves in the world would amount to an awful lot of information. Jesus was not on earth long enough to do and say that much truth. Therefore, some people conclude that John used hyperbole – exaggerated statements not to be taken literally. But if this is an exaggeration not to be taken literally, what about the

resurrection, what about all the miracles, or what about the born again statements of chapter three?

It seems better to take this statement at face value. But concluding that the world could not contain the books if all of Jesus' works and sayings were recorded is impossible! Really? Consider how John introduced Jesus. He told us that Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Word, co-equal of God, the Creator of all things. He wrote, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3)*. Do you have any idea all that was involved when Jesus created all things? We cannot even imagine the extreme amount of information that could be written about God's eternal plans. Frankly, it seems impossible that this little ball of dirt called earth could contain all that our Creator does and says.

That is true even regarding the one great promise from God. We sing it, but do we believe that *the love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell*? One of the main themes of John's Gospel account expresses the love of God. His love drove Him to come to earth in the person of God the Son. His love is compressed into that one astonishing statement: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16)*. This book is so full of the proof of God's love for a fallen creation that we cannot begin to plumb its depths. We must conclude with the song writer, Frederick Lehman:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

— Frederick Martin Lehman (1923)

Do you know God's love because you have found it and read about it in the Bible? If you spent as much time communicating with the Lord through His Word as you do on social media, would there

be any noticeable difference in your life? People who are vaguely familiar with the Bible will be vaguely familiar with the extent of God's love for us. People who love the Lord so much that they desire to learn more and more about Him through His Word will be growing in His love, becoming more like Him. Knowing everyone else's business is not nearly as edifying as knowing Jesus. Do you know Jesus?