

# You Must Follow Me

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, well this morning we come at last to the final chapter of the Gospel of John and our final sermon in this book. We began this series on December 22nd, 2019, so that's about three and a half years ago.

And if I got the count right, this morning's message is my 106th message in the Gospel of John. And what a journey it's been. I really do hope and pray that you have been blessed to see and to hear things about Jesus that you've maybe never heard before, never thought of, and I hope those things have touched you.

This is the good news according to John. Let's hear how John ends his telling of the story of Jesus. Last Sunday we heard about how Jesus appeared to the disciples on two different occasions.

The first was on the evening of the day that Jesus rose from the dead. He appeared that evening to all the apostles minus Thomas. And then John told us about how one week later he appeared to them another time, this time including Thomas.

Let's pick up the story in John chapter 21. Afterward, Jesus appeared again to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee.

[ 1 : 15 ] Now some of you may have a different translation which says the Sea of Tiberias. The one on the screen has a footnote that says, yeah, it is Tiberias in the original language, but that's just another name for the Sea of Galilee in case anyone's wondering.

So if you recall, what the other Gospels record for us is that the morning that Jesus rose from the dead, the angels appeared to the women and they told them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee and that they would see Jesus there.

Now Jesus appeared to the disciples before they went to Galilee. He appeared to them in Jerusalem on the night that he rose from the dead, the night of the day that he rose from the dead. And we don't know for sure exactly when the disciples left to go to Galilee, but shortly after Jesus rose from the dead, they head back up north to the region of Galilee where Jesus' hometown of Nazareth was and where many of the disciples' hometowns were there as well.

And much of the story of Jesus took place in that region. And the sense that we get from this is that with these resurrection appearances of Jesus, Jesus would often appear, but then he would leave. Leave. And then he would appear again on another occasion and then leave. He didn't just stay with them and walk from place to place with them. So you can imagine that the disciples are pretty excited having seen Jesus alive as they make this three or four day journey back up towards home in Galilee.

[ 2 : 49 ] But we also imagine that they wondered, how will we meet up with Jesus when we get there? Where will we find him? Well, John tells us that it happened this way.

Simon Peter, Thomas, also known as Didymus, Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

That's seven in total. I'm going out to fish, Simon Peter told them. And they said, we'll go with you. So they went out and got into the boat. But that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, friends, haven't you any fish?

No, they answered. He said, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you'll find some. When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

[ 3 : 55 ] Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, it's the Lord. As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, it is the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment around him, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the water.

The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it and some bread.

Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish you've just caught. So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153.

But even with so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. None of the disciples dared ask him, who are you?

They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples, after he was raised from the dead.

[ 5 : 05 ] So John's the only one that tells us about this meet-up moment with Jesus in Galilee. And we get the sense that the disciples arrived there in Galilee, and with nothing else to do, maybe just Peter decided to do what he always did, to go to work, go fishing, let's get some food on the table.

And the other six disciples who were with him decide to tag along. But after fishing all night, they caught nothing. And then, in the morning, all of a sudden they see this guy on the shore, and he's calling out to them, like often happens between fishermen, if you've ever been out to the lake.

You know, you guys catch anything? Nope. Nothing. But then, put your net down on the right side of the boat, and you'll catch some.

This is the kind of advice that most fishermen chuckle at, as if the other side of the boat will make any difference. And yet, amazingly, all of a sudden, the net is so full of fish, so much that they can't pull it up into the boat.

Yet, it was John who realized what was happening first, even before Peter. It's the Lord, said John.

[ 6 : 26 ] And when Peter hears this, he realizes it for himself, grabs his outer garment, jumps into the water, swims to shore, and what does he find? But here's Jesus on the shore, and he's got a fire going.

And there's some fish on it, and there's some bread. He's cooking breakfast for the disciples. Jesus says, bring some of those fish that you've just caught.

Let's eat. And so Peter does. He goes, he gets the net, he drags it on shore after they arrive in the boat, and they start counting out these fish, and it's 153 large fish.

If you include Jesus, that makes eight. So that's about 19 each. A lot of fish. And they sit down, and they have breakfast on the beach together.

I love this story. Why did Jesus choose to reveal himself, to appear to them in Galilee in this way?

[ 7 : 27 ] Some people, you know, look at this and wonder, like 153 fish, that's it? Well, that doesn't seem very impressive. Last time, the boats were sinking. Why did Jesus this time seem to do like an inferior miracle?

But, you know, the more I've thought about this, I don't think it was really about the number of fish. I think the purpose of this miracle was different.

It wasn't to blow all the other miracles out of the water. I think the purpose of this miracle was to be a sign, but a different sign from the other signs.

This sign, this miracle was special because it was personal. What made it special, what made it personal, was that it was almost an exact repeat of that awesome miracle Jesus had done three years earlier, which marked the beginning of their following Jesus.

If you look back at that in Luke chapter 5, the parallels between this that Jesus did here and what happened three years ago are striking. In both cases, they fished all night and caught nothing.

[ 8 : 43 ] In both cases, Jesus gives some advice to the professional fishermen that ordinarily would seem laughable. In both cases, there's this miraculous, massive catch of fish.

And as we'll see in a few minutes, in both cases, Jesus will tell them the same thing afterwards.

Follow me. Maybe it's easy for us today to miss just how special, how meaningful this miraculous sign would have been to these men, these fishermen in Galilee.

When Jesus did it the first time, that was the day that they dropped everything. They left their jobs as fishermen behind and they began following Jesus full time.

This wasn't really a miracle for the masses. This was a miracle specifically for the men in the boat.

Only Peter and maybe James and John knew what Jesus had said to Peter in the boat.

Let down the nets for a catch. Back in Luke 5. Probably only Peter and James and John really cared that they'd been out the whole night and hadn't caught anything.

[ 9 : 56 ] So this was almost, I think, kind of like an inside joke. You know, remember that time that Rabbi Jesus told you, Peter, the experienced fishermen that you are, to let down the nets for a catch.

And you begrudgingly humored Jesus, only to find out that Jesus was much more than you thought possible. That was the turning point miracle.

That was the special personal sign to Peter and to James and to John, the fishermen, that this Jesus indeed was the Messiah that they'd been hoping for.

And so that's why I think Jesus does it again, almost like a secret handshake, something that only they would recognize and fully appreciate. It was like a *deja vu* miracle.

I mean, think of this from the perspective of Peter and James and John. There they are. I mean, they're excited that they saw Jesus alive, but there they are again, sitting in a boat all night long.

[ 11 : 01 ] I wonder what they were thinking. Like, you guys remember the last time that this happened, when we fished all night long and caught nothing? Yep, that was the day that everything changed.

And now, suddenly, there's this guy on the shore giving us some laughable advice on how to catch fish. Can you imagine the excitement in their hearts when after putting the net down on the right side of the boat, they catch the mother load again?

But this time, the excitement wasn't just about the fish, the catch. Peter doesn't even seem to care about the fish. He and John immediately see what the sign points to.

Jesus is here. That's him on the shore. And I love how Peter just jumps out of the boat and swims for shore. It's like he doesn't even care about the fish. You guys deal with the fish.

I'm going to see Jesus. It was the *deja vu* miracle. And not just the catch, but also the catching of nothing the night before.

[ 12 : 05 ] And God's thinking about this, you know. Fish kind of have a mind of their own. They're just creatures. This wouldn't have had nearly the same effect had Peter been out all night and, well, they caught six or seven.

But, you know, some of those fish, all they had to do was swim over here. Oh, there's a net. They're caught in it. And Peter got something last night. So, you know, I think even part of the miracle too is that they got nothing the night before.

It was as if Jesus and his father wanted to set up this whole thing the same way as it happened three years earlier so that there could be no doubt in their minds that, yes, this man on the shore really is Jesus, the resurrected Christ here.

Let's notice this detail in verse 12. Jesus invites them to come over and have breakfast and John says, none of the disciples dared ask him, who are you?

They knew it was the Lord. These are kind of interesting remarks. It seems that, on the one hand, they wanted to ask, who are you? And yet, on the other hand, John states quite clearly that they didn't because they knew it was the Lord.

[ 13 : 19 ] Well, what are we to make of this? I think we should take John at his word. They knew it was Jesus. Not they thought, not they suspected. They knew it was Jesus.

And yet, at the same time, it was like there was something inside of them that just couldn't believe that this was really happening. I mean, we kind of say the same sort of thing when something really wonderful happens that's totally unexpected.

We'll say something like, I just can't believe that this is happening. Is this really happening to me?

And I think this is the same sort of thing. They wanted to ask Jesus almost like, is it really you?

And they didn't because they knew. You know, people don't come back to life from the dead very often. So this was something else for them to experience.

Here he is, cooking breakfast for them on the beach. Let's go on with the story. Verse 15. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

[ 14 : 30 ] Yes, Lord, he said. You know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my lambs. Again, Jesus said, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

He answered, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, take care of my sheep. The third time he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my sheep.

What an interesting exchange between Jesus and Peter. If you've ever heard teaching on this before, you've probably heard that there's some changing up of the Greek word for love in this conversation.

It starts with Jesus asking if Peter loves him with that Greek agape love. And finally, the last time, it progresses towards the phileo love.

[ 15 : 41 ] Maybe you've heard some of that. Well-meaning preachers have sprung off of that into all kinds of stuff about the differences between agape love and phileo love. And you've got the, you know, the agape love.

That's kind of God's unconditional love towards us. And then you've got phileo love, which is kind of more our human brotherly love towards one another. Well, as time goes on and we get better at studying the Greek language of the Bible and we develop better tools for analysis and more Christian men and women have put their time in, it seems to be the consensus among scholars today that actually that whole hard line distinction between agape and phileo was maybe a little bit overstated in the past.

As it turns out from careful study, they're basically just near synonyms overlapping in meaning and in fact, John actually uses them interchangeably elsewhere in the gospel. It's a stylistic choice probably, not to be too repetitious.

So we don't want to get distracted from the main point here and kind of go off into this nuance here. It seems as if Jesus is simply asking him three times, do you love me?

And Peter's giving his answer. But what's the main thing in this conversation? What is it really about? Why does Jesus ask three times the same question?

[ 17 : 06 ] And what is it that Jesus is asking Peter to do? Well, let's start with some sanctified imagination. Imagine that you are Peter and you're sitting there around this fire eating breakfast and Jesus looks you in the eye and he asks you this very personal probing question.

Do you love me? Do you love me more than these guys do? What thoughts and feelings are going on in your mind as you are singled out in the group and asked about what's really in your heart?

If I'm Peter, I'm thinking back to what happened in the garden that night that Jesus was arrested.

I'm thinking about how I talked the talk. I made great boasts.

I'm willing to die for you, Lord. But then I'm remembering about how the moment of testing came and I denied even knowing you three times and you caught me red-handed right in that moment.

And then I'm thinking back to the day that you rose from the dead and the women told us and I didn't believe them. And then I ran out to the tomb and I saw that the tomb was empty and I still didn't believe it.

[ 18 : 32 ] John over here did, but I didn't believe it. So it's like, what can I say in this moment to affirm my love for you, Jesus?

Well, Peter doesn't go through all that in his out loud answer. Instead, he just says what he believes. He says, Jesus, you know what's in my heart.

You know that I love you. Three times he says the same thing. Lord, you know that I love you.

Peter knows it's true. He knows he loves Jesus, but how do I convey that? Well, you know, all along through the story, Jesus has been the one that's really known what's going on inside of me, inside of others.

It's been so obvious. He's said it again and again. And so that's what he says. You know, Lord, you know that it's true, that I love you.

[ 19 : 38 ] And the third time, Peter, he explains a little more fully. He says, Lord, you know all things. You know all things.

You know that I love you. So this answer of Peter's is actually full of faith. Faith that Jesus, the very Son of God, knows all things.

Even the depths of Peter's heart. It's like he's saying, if I didn't love you, I wouldn't even be able to hide it from you. You know all things.

You've been right about me all along, what's going on inside of me the whole time. It's a deep, personal, probing question.

It's a little unusual, perhaps, to be asked something like this on the spot in front of others. But then it gets a little bit awkward because Jesus asks it again.

[ 20 : 38 ] And then it gets even more awkward because Jesus asks it a third time. In fact, John tells us that with the third time, Peter was hurt. The word there literally means grieved.

something about being asked that third time stung. Likely, Peter didn't know why. Jesus was asking him repeatedly and now this third time, is it because he doesn't think I'm sincere?

Does he doubt my love for him? Is he asking this because of what I said and did that night when I betrayed, I denied him?

I mean, this might have been somewhat humiliating for Peter in front of all the others. Why three times? And then, on top of all that, there's this unexpected thing Jesus says after each time. Feed my lambs. Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep. This is kind of odd. What is this all about? [ 21 : 49 ] Jesus gives this directive to Peter three times and again, there's a little bit of stylistic variation there. There's feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep, but I think it's all driving at the same thing.

But what an odd thing to say in this moment. You know, I think there is a reason in Jesus' heart for why three times.

I'm not sure, however, that any one of us can really put words to that with 100% confidence that this is why Jesus did it. Almost every Christian I've ever talked to or heard about this seems to have this intuitive understanding, and I have it too, that just as Peter denied Jesus three times, so now Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to affirm his love for him three times.

Somehow, these two things are connected. Many Bibles in the titles that are right above the section say something like Jesus reinstates Peter or Jesus restores Peter.

Is this a reinstatement? Did Peter get uninstated when he denied Jesus three times? I'm not so sure about that. What is obvious is that Jesus is not holding what Peter had said or done against him at all.

[ 23 : 19 ] And I think we often gravitate towards that. Look, the Lord has forgiven him. That's obvious. But there's more here. Jesus is giving him a job to do.

Neither is this an opportunity for Peter to prove himself. Some people have kind of spun it that way too. or somehow to make right what he had done. Listen, confessing three times that he loves Jesus doesn't change what he did.

It doesn't make it right. It doesn't atone for it. What Jesus did on the cross is what atoned for it. And so why does Jesus do this thing three times?

I'll be honest. I don't know 100% that I can put the words to this. All I can say is two things. First, it sure adds a lot of weight to this charge that he is giving Peter.

Three times, feed my sheep. Take care of my lambs. Feed my sheep. Look after them. It's as if Jesus is saying him, don't miss this, Peter.

[ 24 : 35 ] Hear this. Then go back and underline it. Then go back and highlight it bright yellow. This is what I want you to do, Peter, from now on. Look after my sheep.

Take care of them. Feed them. Be a shepherd to them. The second thing that seems clear enough here is that Jesus is somehow connecting Peter's love for him with this job, this command.

It's almost as if the flow here is because you love me truly as you do, do this for me. Feed my sheep. Take care of them.

Look after those who belong to me in the days ahead as I leave. Show your love to me, Peter, in this way. Let's move on.

Verse 18. Jesus goes on after this conversation. He says, Very truly, very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.

[ 25 : 58 ] Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, Follow me. So Jesus starts to talk about what the future holds for Peter and he does it with this contrast between young and old, between being free to do whatever you want or do as you please and being restricted and being led where he does not want to go.

Jesus says that he will stretch out his hands and John makes it clear that this was talking about how Peter would die. In fact, it's possible that John is writing this over three decades later and that at the time of his writing, Peter had already died and so John may be even making a statement about how Jesus was right.

This is fulfilled. Look at how we all know Peter died at least in the day that John wrote this. Some think that you will stretch out your hands refers to stretch out like this crucifixion.

Others think that it means to kind of hold them out to be bound with chains and then led away to some kind of execution. We don't really have a lot of strong sources outside the Bible that speak of

Peter's death but tradition holds that he was martyred in Rome about three decades after this. One source about 150 years later says that Peter was crucified and we don't know if that guy had some inside information or some good sources or if he was just looking back at what John wrote here.

[ 27 : 37 ] Another idea that you may have heard is that Peter was crucified upside down because he thought he would be unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as Jesus and unfortunately that seems to have crept up quite a lot of years after as almost like a legend and some of the sources that point to that are pretty dubious in some of the other things that they report according to scholars.

So this is a sobering moment for Peter. First he's probed, then he's charged repeatedly, and then he's told in a somewhat ambiguous metaphor how his story is going to go, how his life is going to come to an end.

But notice the word John chooses here. there's one word that just flips this whole thing on its head. Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Yes, it was going to be hard, it was going to be awful, but for Peter it would be a death that would bring praise to God. not like how he denied, not like how he said I'll lay down my life for you, but then didn't, but then down the road you will lay down your life for me.

You will bring praise to God. At this point, Jesus says to him, follow me.

[ 29 : 13 ] Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, Lord, who is going to betray you?

So at this point it seems that Jesus asks Peter to go for a walk, using that same language of three years ago, follow me. He gets up and he starts going and it seems that John kind of tags along behind, probably listening in.

Again, there's that parallel to what happened earlier, just kind of leaving the fishing stuff behind and going. Here, they're walking along and there's a bit of a conversation that takes place here.

So Peter sees that John is following and when Peter saw him, he asked, Lord, what about him?

Jesus answered, if I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?

you must follow me. Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die.

[ 30 : 30 ] He only said, if I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down.

we know that his testimony is true. So there's this interesting little conversation between Jesus and Peter as they walk along with John kind of following behind.

Peter's just heard something about how he is going to die. But now he's curious about John's story. How is it going to go? What about him? Is it going to be the same for him?

And Jesus gives quite the answer here. If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.

What a loaded answer. John tells us that because of this answer the believers started spreading all kinds of rumors about John living until the return of Christ.

[ 31 : 37 ] But John graciously reminds his readers that Jesus didn't say that. That wasn't the point that he was making. It was a hypothetical, rhetorical question.

Like, Peter, if I have a totally different plan for John than for you, what concern is that of yours? You must follow me.

In other words, Jesus is basically saying each person may receive something different and unique from God. But for each one of us, we must follow Jesus with what he gives, with the way that he leads, with the circumstances that he allows and brings.

Don't worry about someone else's lot in life. Focus on your own following of Jesus. Peter, don't compare yourself to him.

Keep your eyes on me. Follow me. You know, I got thinking about this too. It's quite something that Jesus is calling Peter to follow him just a couple weeks before he goes up.

[ 32 : 52 ] Jesus wasn't looking for people to just walk around behind him in Galilee 2,000 years ago. He was looking for people to give their lives to following Jesus as their Lord, king, obeying his commands, devoting their whole lives to him in whatever unique circumstances that God gives.

For Peter, it was going to look a certain way. He would glorify and bring praise to God in this particular way that Jesus said. But for John, it might be totally different. For you and me, it might look totally different. Finally, we come to John's last words. Verse 25. Jesus did many other things as well.

If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. This is John's way of saying, you know, I could go on and on and on about Jesus and all this from my three-ish years with him.

time and space didn't permit me to include everything in this account. What John is saying is that this account of Jesus' ministry that he's just given us, all 21 chapters of it, it's just the tiny tip of the iceberg of what happened with Jesus.

[ 34 : 26 ] As we draw this series to a close, let's consider one more time how John has already said he wants us to respond to all this. First and foremost, above all, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

This is the main application of the whole story. If there's only one thing that God wants you to do in response to this account of John, it's this, it's to see the things that Jesus did and said and believe that he is the Son of God, the Messiah, and the promise comes with it.

If you do, Jesus promises that you will find eternal life, life forever with God. that's his gracious gift. And so I leave you with that question. Do you believe that Jesus is the one and the only? I know many of you already believe that with all your heart.

So there's a couple other things that this passage can point us to, or ways that it speaks to us.

There's this question that Jesus asked Peter, and I want to encourage you to imagine for a moment Jesus asks the same thing to you.

[ 35 : 57 ] What's your answer to it? Do you love me? Do you truly love Jesus?

Being a Christian is about more than just belief. It's about love. It's about a relationship with Jesus. Jesus. Yes, he is the teacher and the master and the king, but it's a relationship that's characterized by love where you love him, and he loves you.

How would you answer his question were he to ask you that same thing today? Do you love me?

Finally, do you hear Jesus call to Peter, but not just to Peter, also to you?

that call, follow me. There's a particular story, path, future that Jesus has for each one of us as his followers.

And sometimes we might wonder, why is mine going this way and somebody else's looks so good? Theirs is going that way. Why can't I have what they have?

[ 37 : 14 ] hear Jesus' words to you. If I have something quite different for them, what is that to you? You must follow me.

Each of us by the wisdom and kindness of God has a unique way that we get to bring glory to God with our lives, that we get to praise his name.

something special, how we will highlight God's goodness, God's grace, God's power in ways that won't be true of every other person.

And so when the going is tough, I want to just encourage you, don't turn away. Keep following

Jesus. Keep your eyes fixed on him. He is the good shepherd word and he will lead us through.

Let's close this series by asking for God's help to do this. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we give you thanks for this awesome thing that you have preserved for us over the centuries, this glimpse into what happened when you broke into our world and turned everything upside down and spoke to us the good news and did the good news, died for us, rose again.

[ 38 : 47 ] I pray that you would stir up faith in our hearts, that where it's not there, it would be there, that where it's there, it would grow stronger. And I pray that each one of us would be able to answer this question and say truthfully from the heart, Lord you know that I love you.

Help us to follow you. Lead us. We pray this in your name, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

I'll invite the worship team to come up. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.