

The End of the Beginning - Part 1

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[0 : 00] John 21. Give me a moment just to find it. I'm reading the ESV version. After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way.

Simon Peter, Thomas, called the twin, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing.

They said to him, we will go with you. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, children, do you have any fish? They answered him, no. He said to them, cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.

So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, it is the Lord.

[1 : 06] When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it and bread.

Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish that you have just caught.

So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. Now none of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish.

This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

[2 : 17] He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

He said to him, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, tend my sheep. He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter was grieved because he had said to him the third time, do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. Jesus said to him, feed my sheep.

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.

This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this, he said to him, follow me. Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them.

[3 : 23] The one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, Lord, who is it that is going to betray you? When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man?

Jesus said to him, if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me. 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? This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things and who has written these things.

And we know that his testimony is true. 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.

So, sorry everyone.

[4 : 37] I was working between two computers there and two screens. So, I just needed to, I thought I was going to be unmuted from the center. Sorry about that. Okay, I was just saying to Rachel that I was really glad she played that song because it's also a favorite of mine.

Many of the time I've sat on top of a hill. We have a big storm rolling in and that's the song that comes to mind. This morning we're going to look at the first part of John chapter 21. We decided to break it into two parts.

There's just a fair bit in it. So, we're just mainly concentrating on the first 14 verses today. They say it's impossible to improve on perfection. Well, John seems to have achieved perfection in his biography of the life of Jesus.

He has carefully and thoughtfully led us through the three-year story of Jesus. He's presented detailed evidence of what Jesus claimed about himself and the miraculous things that Jesus did to back up his claims.

John shocked us with the terrible injustice and tragedy of Jesus' crucifixion, his death and his burial. Then he confronts us with the outrageous proposition that Jesus come back from the dead.

[5 : 52] He describes incidents where individuals and groups actually meet the resurrected Lord, the resurrected Jesus, and we're prompted to say, I or we have seen the Lord.

And finally, Thomas, the ultimate skeptic, as we saw last week, is compelled by the sheer will of hard evidence to respond to Jesus in words of worship, my Lord and my God.

And with that, John's superbly worded conclusion seems to bring us to a point of perfection.

The conclusion, verse 30, 20, 30 and 31 seems to be perfection itself. Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. What more could be added?

[7 : 04] What more could be gained? His case has been perfectly presented. Yet, we have chapter 21. John. And chapter 21, therefore, presents a bit of a textural challenge, which we need to address first up.

And basically, the question is, how does chapter 21 fit into John's biography? At first glance, it seemed so, it seems so ordinary compared to chapter 20.

And that's led some to conclude that chapter 21 is a much later addition by someone other than John. But that seems unlikely because no manuscripts of John's gospel have been found without chapter 21.

And the style and the vocabulary of chapter 21 fit easily with the rest of the gospel. And verse 24 and 25 don't have to be problematic. It appears quite simply that John has a bunch of people behind the scenes whom he chooses to leave unnamed, but who are qualified particularly both to authenticate John as an eyewitness of everything written in his biography, and also to authenticate him as a competent historian and writer who has carefully and fairly selected from a vast quantity of material as he presents his case for Christ beyond reasonable doubt.

So it's far more accurate to think of chapter 24 as the epilogue, just as chapter 1 is the prologue.

And together, the opening and closing chapters become massive bookends, highlighting the two great pillars of the gospel, the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus.

[8 : 47] And many times in this series, I've suggested that John's biography is presented like a courtroom trial. And I've sent through with the email, the bulletin email this week, a summary diagram.

So you could check out the detail of that. The prologue is the opening statement for the prosecution in terms of a courtroom trial. And that's where he makes clear what he intends to argue.

And then chapters 22 through to 20 is the hard evidence to back up his claims. And finally, at chapter 21 is the epilogue, his closing statement, which pulls the whole case together practically.

And the bookends themselves are tied together with a very significant word for John, the word revealed, which means manifested in the Greek, which means to show something as it really is.

If you look back to John chapter one, verse 31, John the Baptist was very much aware that his purpose was simply that Jesus would be manifested.

[9 : 51] John chapter one, verse 31, John says, I myself did not know him, but for this purpose, I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed or manifested to Israel.

So John's biography begins with him, with Jesus manifested as the pre-incarnate, pre-existent word of God, the creator and sustainer of everything in this world, the one who shows and displays God's glory like no other.

He's manifested as God's Messiah, God's King and Savior, taking on flesh or humanness to bring salvation to our world, to bring new relationship with God and build a new community of true Israelites, people who would gladly worship, honor, and obey the Lord.

So the biography begins as a supernatural, miraculous, incredible story. And John's biography concludes with the post-resurrection Jesus manifesting himself.

Look at chapter 21, verse one, twice in this verse, that word used. After this, Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.

[11 : 16] And he manifested himself in this way. And again, verse 14, this was now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

High emphasis. What's happening here? Why the emphasis? Well, I think it goes something like this. Having demonstrated his love for and commitment to saving his people in his death, he now wants his saved people to be totally committed to him as the resurrection man, properly understanding the significance of his resurrection, and living with resurrection delight and purpose. In other words, Jesus wants his people to understand that the resurrection changes everything, not just for Jesus, but for them. And here in these verses, Jesus continues to manifest as truly and completely God.

In the story here, he just turns up where he wants. He's concerned with the physical needs of those he loves. And it's interesting that this fishing story is not presented like other miracles in John's record.

This is just really Jesus being Jesus, providing for his people from his limitless power and his endless compassion. Here, in these verses, Jesus, as God's King and Savior, initiates fellowship with his own, another familiar phrase from John's gospel, his own who have believed and received life.

[12 : 54] Interestingly, these guys were off fishing. They weren't seeking Jesus, but he pursued them, determined to bring them to full understanding of his glory, as the resurrection man, and bring them to full engagement in resurrection life.

And here, as I've said before, Jesus manifests himself as truly and completely human. There's real emphasis in the chapter 20 and 21 on the real bodily resurrection of Jesus.

He's not hallucination. He's not some disembodied spirit, hovering. He continues to be completely human after his resurrection.

A real body, real puncture marks, real hunger for a real breakfast of bread and grilled fish, real conversation, in a moment, a real moment of time.

Now again, the question is, why such emphasis on bodily, physical resurrection? Well, very simply, it's because it's essential to salvation. So it goes something like this.

[14 : 05] One obvious consequence of sin was physical death. When Jesus fully paid the penalty for sin in his death, the consequence no longer applied.

Hence, coming back from death in bodily resurrection. And even more amazing, what we see here in chapter 21 is that the resurrection man will take flesh with him forever into heaven.

That is just mind boggling. And it provides great hope, confidence, and reassurance for us. Jesus is our trailblazer.

What he gets, we get. That is bodily resurrection, to be with the Lord in heaven forever. So, as John's biography of Jesus begins, so it ends.

A supernatural, miraculous, incredible story. Friends, Arthur Pink writes, and we'll be looking at this in the breakout groups, Arthur Pink writes this, we cannot make too much of the death of Christ, but we can make too little of his resurrection.

[15 : 25] Our hearts and minds cannot meditate too frequently on the cross, but in pondering the sufferings of the Savior, let us not forget the glories which followed.

Calvary does not exhaust the gospel message. End of quotation. Chapter 21 shows that Jesus has more to teach, and his disciples have more to learn.

So, in the remaining time, let's look at what the teaching focus of these first 14 verses is. The teaching focus is that fellowship is the goal of salvation. Now, the incident begins with seven disciples, all fishermen by trade, but now bonded at another level in their common experience of the

resurrection man, Jesus.

All now believed that he was alive. But apart from this, it appears that they have no sense, no new sense of identity and purpose in life as a consequence of Jesus' resurrection.

So we find them here in this story, they simply went back to what was familiar, fishing. Now, it's really important to note here that evidence was super important for their belief to that particular point.

[16:48] They all believed that Jesus had come back from the dead. But here's the problem. They needed a deeper work in their hearts to see the implication of Jesus' resurrection.

In a previous encounter that Dave took us through last week in chapter 20, verse 21, Jesus, when he turned up in the middle and said, peace be with you. Now, that word peace is also the word for rest.

And the word for rest was a feature of Genesis 1, the end point in God's creation. And rest was the enjoyment of relationship between God and his image bearers in the context of whole of life worship, glad obedience and delight in God.

Sin stole rest away, stole that peace or rest, leaving God's people at odds with God, leaving God's people restless as they search for meaning and purpose and satisfaction in places and things other than God.

And here in this story, after the resurrection, we see Jesus demonstrating what it looks like to belong to resurrection, resurrection man's new community.

[18:07] Jesus is committed to pursuing them so that they might have full enjoyment of new life in relationship with him. That he might, they might enjoy rest and know God's rest.

Here in these verses, we see Jesus providing his hungry, tired, defeated disciples with breakfast. And in this action, reminding them that he is both the source of their life and the provider of their every need.

Now, you remember, Jesus had taught them visually months earlier, as part of his ministry through the feeding of the 5,000. He had taught them that very lesson, that he was the source of the life and the provider of their every need.

Only two weeks earlier, he had reinforced that same lesson as they ate and drank together on the night he was killed. You remember, that whole section was about their hearts being deeply troubled. They were confused. But fellowship with Jesus assured them that everything was going to plan according to King Jesus. It gave them hope of true life beyond his death.

[19:22] Jesus shows that believing in him, and he shows it here, that believing in him as the resurrection man means living under his lordship at every point in life, recognizing that daily needs are his ongoing concern.

And it's quite interesting the interchanging between Jesus and the disciples at the end of the fishing trip. Tired and dejected after a long night without catching a single fish. Remember, this is their competence as fishermen being exposed now.

Jesus asked them a question. It was a very colloquial, friendly question. Hey guys, catch any fish? And his question immediately forces them to admit their inability to provide for themselves.

Then he commands them to let their net down on the other side of the boat. His command asked them to trust his ability and competence for the basics of life. And then, of course, we know the consequence of obedience and trust was huge blessing in that miraculous catch of fish.

And that leaves, verse 12, that leaves the disciples once again with their heads spinning. They know dearly well it's Jesus. Just as they're coming to terms with Jesus as the resurrection man, suddenly there's a new challenge, a new challenge to engage personally with Jesus, to live under his lordship at every point to be in fellowship with him as the ultimate purpose of his death and resurrection.

[20:58] And finally, in these verses, I think here we see Jesus confirming his key promise of his ministry, which was that his own will come to him, believe in him, and receive abundant life.

The life of unimaginably huge blessing, which they saw before their very eyes in a very limited way, 153 large fish. Now, how does that come out?

Well, I actually believe that John names this group in these first verses very deliberately and it's part of his point. Now, the fact that Nathaniel's mentioned here immediately throws us back to chapter one.

That's the only other time that Nathaniel is mentioned in the whole biography. Now, there's two unnamed disciples here and if we assume for a moment that they are Andrew and Philip, then what we have is a very significant group of disciples taking us right back to the start of Jesus' ministry. In fact, all those first invited into fellowship with Jesus at the start of his ministry are here now with the resurrection man, Jesus. Not only that, but it includes Peter who denied and abandoned Jesus and Thomas who just outright refused to believe initially.

[22 : 17] And here's the point. Jesus is demonstrating here, manifesting himself as truly God, truly Savior, truly King. None have been lost as he promised.

For all their failure, for all their lack of understanding, they had been brought to belief and now we're experiencing peace, rest, and fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

Friends, as I wrap up my time here, the resurrection man is incredibly strong in terms of evidence.

The resurrection man is proof, proof of so many things.

Firstly, he's proof that the gospel is real and that it works to change people. Why? Because Jesus perseveres and changes people's hearts and renews their desires and ability to love and serve him through the Holy Spirit within them.

We're seeing this process happening in these particular disciples. Jesus has more to teach and they've got more to learn. And guess what? Verse 12 again, the more they learn, the more their categories have to change because Jesus is just bigger than they could ever imagine.

[23 : 32] His grace is bigger than they could ever have thought. The gospel is also about grace creating a new community of fellowship and worship. So here's the rub for you and me very, very practically.

It's never enough simply to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. It's never enough simply to believe those basic facts that come out of the hard evidence.

It's true but it's never enough. You need to respond and pursue fellowship with the resurrection man, Jesus, living every aspect of life under his lordship.

See, it's not a proper gospel response to focus on your forgiveness, true as that might be, through the death of Jesus. Without also focusing on what it looks like and what it means to live authentically in the resurrection community.

Drawn into fellowship with Jesus, drawn into worship of him in every part of your day, every day of your life. And of course, here's where we push up against our sinful hearts again.

[24 : 49] Because our sinful hearts would push us to make Jesus' death a sort of personal get out of jail free insurance policy. I can relax now.

My sins are all forgiven. I'm bound for heaven. And we can take that line on Jesus' death while quietly wanting to maintain our own autonomy.

Quietly refusing to live under his lordship. In other words, we just want enough of Jesus to make us uncomfortable.

That's right. We just want enough of Jesus that leaves us being comfortable. We don't want Jesus to make us uncomfortable as he claims every aspect of our lives under his lordship.

So, in a very real way, chapter 21 is the end of the beginning. true gospel response means new resurrection community.

[25 : 55] It means new community identification. It means fellowship or living under the lordship of Christ. Next week, we'll see something more of how chapter 21 is also the beginning of the end in verses 15 through to 23.

And that we'll see then how the resurrection man shapes his resurrection community for mission.

Because fellowship with the lord Jesus is never something that can be contained.

Resurrection man is incomparable. Resurrection man is unstoppable. His mission continues to provide fellowship in the four corners of our world.

God so tune in next week for verses 15 to 23. In the meantime, just join with me as I pray now.

Lord, we thank you for the complexity of the written record which we have, which is John's gospel.

We thank you, Lord, for questions arise that cause us to dig into it and think deeply about it. We thank you, Lord, for the fact that Jesus has much to teach us and we have much to learn.

[27 : 12] We pray, Lord, that we might be willing to learn. We pray, Lord, that we might not have half a gospel or a truncated gospel, a gospel, Lord, that we mould to our own suitability.

Help us, Lord, not to think of Jesus as the one who forgives our sins without also being the Lord who claims our allegiance and our loyalty to him at every point in life. Help us, Lord, to look this

week and reflect again on which parts of our lives we want to keep under our own Lordship and which parts of life therefore we need to hand over to the Lordship of Jesus.
And I pray you might help us do that in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you very much.