

John 21

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Date: 25 May 2014

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

It's 63 minutes long. That's four hours in the 20s of three minutes. And this is one of the longest movies ever made in English.

And when you watch it, at some point in the movie, you recognize just how long it is. You recognize that you're sitting on the couch for three hours and stuff in the middle of the movie. The other thing you'll notice is that the movie has several endings.

A city is defended against people, but then assaults on people's self-made, a ring is destroyed, and a king is converted, and on and on. And so it goes.

But it wasn't to be an annoying event in the movie or the book. It also calls to recognize that the story is over there. As grand as it is, it must have all of those endings in order to include all the generic strengths that have been done.

[1 : 26] The movie would actually be an interesting thing. Without it. You know, John ends like the Lord brings. He has multiple endings.

Look at chapter 20. That chapter concludes by giving the reason why the book of John was written. Jesus has already been raised from the dead and appeared to the apostles, and things look like they can wrap up here pretty well.

In fact, many more liberal biblical scholars say that chapter 21 shouldn't even be in this book for precisely that reason. It seems to act on to the ending of the book, which properly ends in chapter 20.

But it seems to me that there are really good reasons to say that chapter 21 is original to the book. And therefore, the better argument is to see John, like the Lord of the Rings, having multiple endings.

Each given the conclusion of a particular narrative thread that has woven its way throughout the book. So the gospel of John is incomplete without chapter 21. Our task tonight, therefore, is to determine what exactly this ending, chapter 21 of the book of John, tells us about the work of redemption that Jesus brought about through his death.

[2 : 40] So, we're going to take it up and read it now. It's page 907 in your pew Bibles, if you'd like to follow along. The gospel according to John, chapter 21.

After this, Jesus reveals 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 the disciples were together.

Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing. And they said to him, We'll go with you. And they all went out and got into the boat. But that night, they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore.

And the disciples did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, Children, do you have any fish? And they answered him, Nope. He said to them, Cast a 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. And that disciple whom Jesus loved, therefore, said to Peter, It's the Lord. And when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work.

[3 : 58] And he threw himself into the sea. And 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. And when they got out onto the land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid on it and red.

And 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, a hundred and fifty-three 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 his disciples, after he was raised from the dead. And when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, 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. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

[5 : 11] 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?

And Peter was grieved, because he said to him the third time, Do you love me? He said to him, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. And 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, the one who had also leaned against him during the supper, and 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's my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.

[6 : 21] 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 a 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.

And were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. So, tonight I will argue that the point of chapter 21 is this.

Jesus' faithfulness restores what our faithlessness has lost. Jesus' faithfulness restores what our faithlessness has lost.

We'll see this in four ways. First, Jesus' faithfulness restores meaning in his disciples' lives. notice here, the chapter opens after the disciples have seen the risen Lord.

[7 : 34] Jesus has appeared to them in chapter 20 and given them a blessing. Peace be unto you. That greeting appears nowhere in the gospel before the resurrection. It seems not only to be a simple greeting but even more to tell the disciples something about their condition in the eyes of God as a result of the work of the cross.

It will later form part of Paul's favorite greeting grace and peace to you. Christ has secured for them already the acceptance of God and therefore the immediate disciples and we, the followers of Christ centuries later have peace.

But it seems unlikely that the apostles understood this peace at the moment. There's no evidence in this chapter of a clear spirit-filled mission and vision.

We find the disciples in this chapter not busying themselves about the work of telling people about the resurrection, not working and striving eagerly to bring about the promised kingdom, but fishing. Now, why fishing?

Well, this was their profession before they met Jesus and after their time with Jesus looks like it might be completed, they're not really sure what exactly they ought to do and so they take up their previous life.

[8 : 45] They go fishing. Now, we have the book of Acts and the bit of church history that has transpired between the apostles and us and so we know how the story ends.

We know something of the meaning of the resurrection but it seems like the apostles don't. So they seem neither to have rejected Jesus nor to have been eagerly calling to mind all the things that he had said while he was with them in order to understand what the resurrection meant.

They just were fishing. And besides, let's remember that these disciples didn't leave Jesus on good terms last time. They abandoned him in his darkest hour when the hour of Jesus' crucifixion came, the hour that he pleaded with them more than ever in his life for them to watch and pray with him because his soul was in agony.

They slept. They abandoned. Their courage failed them in the heat of battle and they deserted. And now their leader has returned to them and what will he do with the deserters?

Certainly any friendship between them and Jesus must now be in ruins. Imagine the greatest shame that you felt after you acted far less noble than you know you should have when you betrayed or abandoned a close friend.

[10 : 08] Knowing full well how terrible your actions were and then you have to face that person again. Can you imagine the shame that Peter felt after he betrayed the Lord three times and Jesus looked across the courtyard at him just as the rooster crowed?

Surely now Jesus will have nothing to do with his disciples. That would be the just thing to do. And so the disciples drift. They spend their time fruitlessly and the author highlights this fruitlessness and vanity of their work by making it literal.

They literally catch nothing. They're literally wasting their time. That is until Jesus arrives and at his command they acquire fish so numerous they have difficulty in hauling them in.

There's a metaphor here I think. Jesus has called his apostles earlier and told them they would be fishers of men and here the only difference between their catching no fish and their catching far too many fish to manage is the fact that they are obedient to God.

but God is ultimately responsible for the success of their efforts. This is true even in the evangelistic task they are given later. So Jesus' faithfulness restores meaning in the disciples' lives.

[11 : 28] Second Jesus' faithfulness restores the disciples' history. Restores the disciples' history. The second purpose of this story is to walk these disciples through the history of their discipleship.

Do you recall where it was when Jesus first called many of these men to be the disciples? This story is given to us in Luke 5. There in that story Jesus comes to the disciples while they're fishing or they're in the boat.

He employs one of their boats as a platform for his preaching and then he instructs them to cast their nets into the water and they catch so many fish the boats begin to sink. And only at that point when the nets are almost breaking Peter recognizes the power of Jesus and Jesus calls him to follow him.

Peter at that point leaves his nets and immediately follows Jesus. And so begin three years of his life where Peter's impetuosity and stubbornness clash often with the wishes of Jesus and where he frequently misunderstands the doings of Jesus.

And while over the course of these three years Peter seemed to show improvement, faithfulness, even a fierce loyalty it was only a superficial loyalty. For in the end Peter betrayed Jesus.

[12 : 45] Think of the bitter weeping he had when he betrayed him. We have no account of what Peter did between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Was it spent mourning his unfaithfulness to Christ? Was he ever tempted to look at and apply to himself the Old Testament prophecies of the people of God abandoning their Lord?

Did he weep more bitterly over the death of a comrade or the death of his courage? We can't be sure. But certainly there must have been a hint by this time in the story that Peter had squandered his opportunity.

His history it seems would now be forever marred by the indelible stain of betraying the one he loved. But now that setting of the original call is being reconstructed.

Look, the boat the fishermen the fish the Lord it's all there. God seems to be giving Peter a second chance to walk through his own history and this time to redeem it.

[13 : 50] But this is seen more clearly in the following section where Jesus restores Peter. We have already considered that the apostles all abandoned Jesus and Peter did so most obviously.

Peter's boast before Jesus crucifixion was the loudest and the brashest. Even if all others deny you I will never deny you. I will even go to death with you but I will never deny you.

But betray him he did. And it is ironic that the gospels give more attention to the details of Peter's betrayal than to the betrayal of any of the others except for Judas.

Jesus said that all the apostles would abandon him but what about Bartholomew? We don't really know much about him. His boasting is absent. It didn't seem to boast that he was the best and would punch the bad guys in the face.

His boasting is absent and his betrayal seems minimal in the text. He's gone but the gospel doesn't emphasize it. But Peter's boasting was loud and his betrayal is given in great detail.

[14 : 54] This is difficult you see. It introduces a problem. The ancient Greek philosophers were fond of a certain saying there is one thing that even the gods cannot do.

Undo what has been done. That is the past cannot be altered even by the gods. And perhaps you feel that way sitting here today.

Perhaps you are aware of your many failures. perhaps they run through your mind even as I'm speaking these words. Perhaps you can't break an addiction that plagues you every week.

Perhaps you fight in vain against the temptation to compare your accomplishments to those of the people around you. Perhaps you have some betrayal that you committed embedded so deeply in your history that it has come to define the way you view yourself.

The past cannot be altered, even by the gods. So what hope is there for you? Well I think this section is illuminating and it actually gives us great hope.

[16 : 04] You see Jesus in this section restores Peter by walking him through his failures. Look here we mentioned that the boats are there the fish are there the fisherman is there.

Look even at the charcoal fire. Do you see it there in verse 8? Not to put too much emphasis on this but there's only two places in the whole book of John where a charcoal fire like this is mentioned.

And interestingly enough the previous time all the characters are the same. The last time in John 18 Peter sat before a fire early in the morning it was in the courthouse of the courtyard of the high priest and he was asked a question you are one of his disciples are you not?

In fact the gospel of John recounts that this question or a variant of it was asked to Peter three times all of them by the same fireside and three times Peter emphatically answers no I did not know the man I have no association with him.

Three questions three denials and here he is again by a sunrise fire set being asked if he would associate himself with Jesus but this time it's the crucified one himself who is asking the question what can be made of this?

[17 : 26] I suspect that this is Jesus reminding Peter in word and in deed about his betrayal and proceeding to negate to erase the denials one by one.

You are also one of this man's disciples aren't you? I am not. Simon son of Jonah do you love me more than these? Yes Lord you know that I love you.

You also are not one of his disciples are you? I am not. Simon son of Jonah do you love me? Yes Lord you know that I love you.

Did I not see you in the garden with him? I tell you I do not know the man. Simon son of Jonah do you love me?

Lord you know everything you know that I love you. Jesus recounting Peter's denials one by one and negating each of them shows both to Peter and to those around him that his sins are forgiven and his position is restored.

[18 : 40] And note that this happens at breakfast with the other disciples around after Peter's boast made in front of all of them they would all know he had failed to maintain his faithfulness to the Lord and if he was called to strengthen and encourage the apostles how was he to do that with such a blot on his record?

So Jesus walks him through the painful recounting of his failures in public in order to deal with them and finally to erase them.

He won't let Peter hide. He goes right to the source of betrayal. Consider an example. If you've ever had a sports injury you've likely had to go to a physical therapist during the process of your recovery and when you have an injury it's your body's natural reaction to attempt to shield that muscle from further injury by using other muscles to compensate for the work that muscle ought to do.

Your body hides the injured muscle. But that's not how the muscle gets healed and so it's the job of the physical therapist to put your body through exercises and stretches that isolate exactly that muscle and exercise it directly often with great pain in order finally to restore the health of that very muscle that has been injured.

I think this is what Jesus is doing with Peter here. Or another example perhaps more intimate and maybe even childish but I think God sometimes buries his greatest truths in shallow sand.

[20 : 19] When I was a little boy and would be playing outside I would sometimes get a scratch or two go cry to my mother and she would pick me up sit me down in the kitchen top counter and ask me where's the boo-boo and I would of course point to the scratch on my elbow or my knee and my mother would lean over and kiss it and she said there now it's all better she would identify the direct source of the pain and she would give me the loving care that I need right there you know she even did this for the injuries that I incurred because I had disobeyed her I think that's something like what Jesus is doing for Peter here and this is why confession of sin is also so important for the health of the Christian soul confession requires us to look our sin directly in the eye and renounce them to expose our injury in order to treat it we admit to a fellow believer or to God himself that we have not kept our vows to the

Lord we hear the condemnation of that sin and the good news that Christ has taken away our condemnation this is the true meaning of Martin Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers not that each individual is his own church and doesn't need others no but on the contrary that each individual believer can intercede for the rest can beg that God's grace be given to his fellow church member and that he might be kept from stumbling once again here here at Trinity we often do this in a morning service during some prayer time where we confess our sins to God and we hear the forgiveness of them or we do so in the quiet time before we receive the Lord's supper we take time to examine our consciences confess our sins and make sure we are in right standing before we receive the bread and the wine don't think lightly of these times of confession they're not a formality they're abalmed the soul redemption of our failures you see always comes by walking through those failures the first time when we sin we walk through our failures away from

Christ but in repentance we walk through our failures again this time with Jesus at our side the first time in this story it is Peter siding with his sin against Jesus here Peter takes the side of Jesus against his sin this is what makes his restoration possible so Jesus faithfulness restores the disciples history third Jesus faithfulness restores the disciples calling the result of this process of restoration through which Jesus takes Peter is a strange one he is commissioned three times feed my sheep feed my sheep feed my sheep but then Jesus predicts Peter's end verse 18 and 19 there 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 is a strange consolation this is a strange encouragement and

Peter ministers with this prophecy hanging above his head for three decades before his martyrdom comes to pass but do you note that there's also a hope that's hidden in this prophecy the gospel writer John in verse 19 says this is the death by which he would glorify God you you see Peter will be killed at the end but his death will bring glory to God and why because the next time he's challenged concerning whether he belongs to Christ he will not fail the test where once Peter shrunk back in fear at the interrogation of a mere slave girl now Peter will stand firm even in the face of torturers and assassins Peter has failed once but Jesus promises here that he will not need to be restored again and in the book of Acts we read stories of a very different Peter in Acts Peter is preaching to thousands of people instead of cowering before just a few he's going to jail being flogged and beaten and praising the

Lord for all of it this is a changed Peter what accounts for this change Jesus has sent his Holy Spirit to dwell in Peter and as Pastor Nick said this morning those who have the Holy Spirit never fall finally away but in this story Peter does not yet see this prophecy as having even a hint of good news in it he attempts to evade what about this one he says but Jesus will have none of it what does it matter to you he says you follow me you see there is a certain simplicity about the Christian life we simply do what God commands us to do we don't take a poll to determine the popularity of our actions we just do what we're called to do so we ought to encourage

[25 : 48] Christian teenagers and young people that while this is difficult and sounds rough there are many voices in the lives of our young people in our church that cloud their path and tell them to do things that the Lord doesn't tell them to do we ought to tell them that while they may feel alone and isolated they have a higher calling God has called them to greatness and they are to do what God commands knowing that therein lies the way of truth and happiness in my years I have found this to be true that God is a faithful father who desires our happiness and he will not let us down we have a high and noble call to God be faithful you see that this calling and Jesus rejection of Peter's comparison to John also destroys competitiveness competitiveness characterizes many perhaps all other aspects of our lives it's a competitiveness that ought not exist at all in the

Christian life we cannot compare the work that God has called us to do with the work that he has called another to do the work that God has called each of us to do is not identical faithfulness for you may look like a life of pain and a martyr's death for the one in the pew in front of you it may mean bearing under the weight of a disease year after year and tenaciously clinging to the words of Job though he slay me yet will I praise him for still another God's call to you may be to spend the prime of your life raising a goodly heritage of children or working in a nine to five job at the office where you steadily lay down your life to provide for your family and be faithful to your church and God is glorified in all of these things yes we can and we ought to strategize about how we can bring most glory to

God but once we've received a calling from God we ought to fight the temptation to compare ourselves to our brothers and to lament that we have a less noble calling than they you will not bring a copy of your resume to the final judgment so we have many missionary biographies that recount the mighty works that God did through a certain preacher or teacher and I think these books are great and they encourage us to consecrate our lives to God but let me tell you about a story about a friend of mine about whom you'll never read a book his name is Tim and I had the honor of working with him in northern Iraq two years ago where he was a missionary the work is hard and the converts are few one day I asked him Tim are you ever discouraged and tempted to believe you misread the hand of God he replied to me sometimes but you know

I made my peace a long time ago with the 30 the 50 and the 100 do you get what he means by this do you remember in the parable of the four soils the good soil receives the word of God and what does Jesus say it does it bears fruit some of it bears 30 fold some 50 fold some 100 fold see even there in the parable is embedded the recognition that in terms of sheer numbers we won't all have the same amount of success and just a year ago Tim and his wife had to leave Iraq because she was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease and she died in January seeing only a few converts from nine hard years of labor in northern Iraq but I ask you this is God not glorified in that so keep on my friend keep on do not put your hand to the plow and turn back be faithful in the furrow of

God's field in which he has placed you knowing that a harvest of righteousness awaits all those who are faithful to do the work that God has called them to do not be weary in well doing for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart and what is the motivation for this well doing and the assurance of this harvest this is my fourth and final point tonight finally fourth Jesus restores the earth Jesus restores the earth he restores history he restores vision he restores calling and he restores the earth look at the last verse of the chapter it says now there are many also many other things that Jesus did and were every one of them to be written I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written some people tend to think this is an exaggeration

[31 : 14] I don't you see Jesus John ends this book by reminding us there are many things that Jesus did he began the book by telling us that the divine word of God the second person of the trinity is the blueprint for all creation he says all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made you see it is Jesus who is the blueprint for all of creation consider this therefore if Christ created the whole world and he was also active in loving the father and the holy spirit before the foundation of the world and if Christ in his flesh taught and healed and prayed far more often than is recounted in this book and if through his resurrection he began the process of rolling back the curse then of course the world itself cannot contain the books that would be written the world itself is just one of the books that would be written and do you know that

Jesus is active still do you know that he intercedes for you this is the power of the man who ate fish with his friends on the beach in Galilee and this is the power that stands behind and assures each of us of every one of his promises promises to restore meaning promises to restore history promises to restore our calling promises to restore our world this is our God let us go forth this week and praise him in word in song and in deed let's pray Lord I thank you for your resurrection I thank you that death by death has been defeated and that you are in the process of a great restoration of this world I pray that we would have eyes to see this restoration going on around us and we would have zeal to be participants in this restoration we pray that you would do this work quickly we pray that you would give us faith we pray these things in the name of your son amen so there's anything unclear about the sermon or you'd like to hear more about or anything in general fire away we have not that long so try to keep the questions short and I'll keep the answers short as well yes sir short answer no long answer if you if you want to have some fun tonight go home and look up various historical interpretations of the 153 fish because there are lots of them and I think all of them are nonsense but they're all a lot of fun if you do really weird multiplication triangles and stuff it ends up sort of

Illuminati-esque probably the reason is these guys are like oh my goodness there's a lot of fish I wonder how many of them are I don't know Peter let's count them and they ended up with 103 yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah good question so a similar question on this text is this play between these two verbs do you love me and it's a phileo and agape so basically in Greek it's two different verbs what you'll notice throughout John frequently is he likes to make these subtle changes in his words so I actually don't think there's any real difference between Jesus' three answers or the three questions if you notice the questions are also different slightly different but then it says here in verse 17 Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time do you love me so it seems like it seems like

Peter is receiving this as the same question three times so the variations I don't think there's much there the significance of the feed my sheep though I think it's calling Peter back to what he was going to do originally what Jesus had told him to do I find it fascinating before the crucifixion Jesus has the whole disciples there and he says Simon the devil has asked for and then in Greek it's y'all has asked for y'all that he might sift you like wheat but I prayed for you singular that your faith would not fail and when you were restored go encourage the brothers so it seems like Peter has some sort of responsibility here to have a pastoral role toward the rest of the apostles and you see he continues to do that in the book of Acts in the Jerusalem church there yes Patrick yeah that's a great question

I have found I asked my mother this question I was having some sort of like dark night of the soul and I said mom it just seems like I get a new sin every year like I can look at the calendar and tell you this is the year of anger and this is the year of impatience and like what's going on am I just getting worse and my mom said no it may be the case that when you become more spiritually mature the Holy Spirit sort of turns up the magnification on the microscope and you can see more clearly all these things you didn't see before and what I found is that repentance needs to be an ongoing thing over and over and over Martin Luther's first thesis of the 95 is when the Lord said repent he meant that the life of the believer should be one of continual repentance so repentance is a thing that I tend to do try to do every day sometimes I can tell when sort of the channel to the

[37 : 40] Holy Spirit is a little bit clogged and I know that I'm harboring sins that I have not yet confessed so what I'll often do is just like in the morning you pray through your schedule of the day at the end you do it again you say Lord I really failed there I was impatient with that person there I really want to do better would you give me the grace to do it and thank you for the cross that I know that my efforts at repentance here don't even have to be perfect I can trust you with the sins I don't even see and know that you have taken care of them on the cross and so strangely enough repentance makes the cross sweeter for you okay okay thank you right thank you