SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

John

Chapter Twenty-One, Verses 1–25

Breakfast on the Shore, Follow Me — the risen Lord at the lake, a second charcoal fire, three questions and one command

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

After a night of empty nets the risen Jesus calls from the shore, fills the net, cooks breakfast, and by a second charcoal fire asks Peter three times, “Do you love Me?” — then tells him how he will die and says, “Follow Me.” Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind John’s key words.

THE PASSAGE

John 21:1–25

catch · breakfast · restored · follow · witness

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Five movements from an empty net to "You follow Me!"

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"Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"" — John 21:22

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

John 21:1–25

Breakfast on the Shore, Follow Me — A night of nothing, a morning catch, a meal from His hands — and a denier made a shepherd

† How to Read This Study

This study walks John 21 in 5 movements, in John's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the passage so you can see where John is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word — R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle — MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions; Command / instruction; Key repeated word; Sin / warning; Promise / blessing; Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · JOHN 21:17

"He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

† Before the Passage

John 20 seems to end the book: "many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:30–31). Then comes chapter 21, an epilogue set "after these things." Some critical scholars treat it as a later addition; Sproul opened his sermon on it by answering them, and a Ligonier devotional on these verses concludes that "the evidence suggests that chapter 21 is not a later addition." No surviving manuscript of John ends at chapter 20.

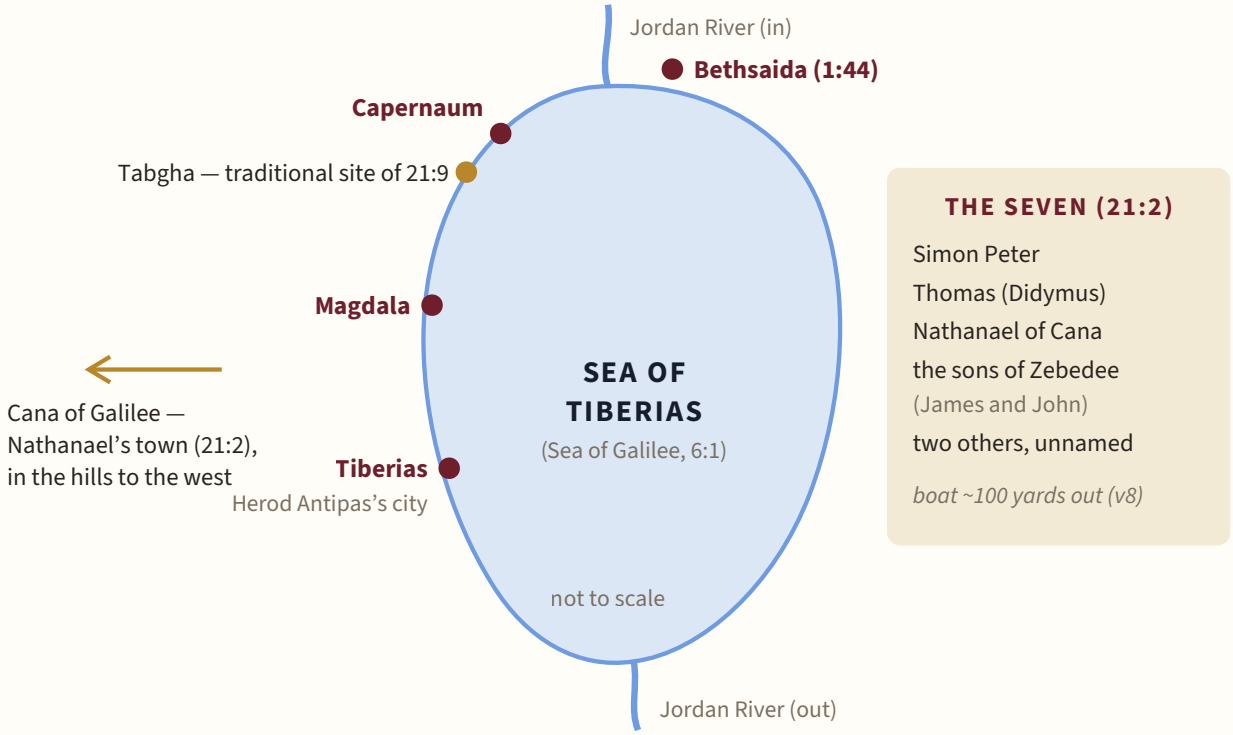
The scene moves north. The angel had said, "go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you'" (Mark 16:7). John calls the lake by its Roman-era name, the Sea of Tiberias (as at 6:1, "the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias)"), after the city Herod Antipas built on its

western shore and named for the emperor. Seven disciples are there — Peter, Thomas, Nathanael of Cana, James and John, and two unnamed — on home water: Bethsaida was "the city of Andrew and Peter" (1:44).

The chapter leans hard on two earlier scenes. Luke 5 had told of another night of nothing — "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing" — followed by a net-breaking catch and the call to catch men. And John 18 had set Peter beside a charcoal fire in the high priest's courtyard, where he denied Jesus three times, as Jesus had warned: "a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times" (13:38). Chapter 21 lights a second charcoal fire and asks three questions.

Read the chapter in five movements: an empty night and a full net (vv. 1–8), breakfast from the hands of the risen Lord (vv. 9–14), Peter restored and commissioned (vv. 15–17), Peter's death foretold and the call to follow, with a question about John (vv. 18–23), and the author's signature (vv. 24–25). The Gospel that began with "Come, and you will see" (1:39) and Jesus' first "Follow Me" (1:43) ends with Jesus saying it again — twice (vv. 19, 22).

FIGURE · THE SEA OF TIBERIAS



The disciples are back on home water in Galilee: Bethsaida was Peter's town, Capernaum his base, and later tradition places the breakfast at Tabgha on the north-west shore.

I
MOVEMENT

JOHN 21:1–8

A Night of Nothing

Seven men, an empty net, a Stranger on the beach — and "It is the Lord"

[1] *After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way.* [2] *Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.* [3] *Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.* [4] *But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.* [5] *So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No."* [6] *And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.* [7] *Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea.* [8] *But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.*

JOHN 21:1–8

"Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets.""

LUKE 5:5

ἐφανέρωσεν

EPHANERŌSEN · "MANIFESTED" · G5319

From *phaneroō*, "to make visible, bring into the open." John uses it twice in verse 1 and again in verse 14 to frame the whole first scene: this is a manifestation, the risen Christ deliberately showing Himself. It is the same verb John used of the first sign at Cana — Jesus "manifested His glory" (2:11) — so the Gospel's signs end as they began, with Galilee, a gift of abundance and disciples who believe. The KJV's "shewed himself" is the same word.

Παιδία, μή τι προσφάγιον ἔχετε;

PAIDIA, MĒ TI PROSPHAGION ECHETE · "CHILDREN, YOU DO NOT HAVE ANY FISH, DO YOU?" · G3813, G4371

Paidia (G3813) is a diminutive of *pais* — "lads," "boys," the word a man might call across the water to younger workmen. *Prosphagion* (G4371), found only here in the New Testament, is anything eaten with bread, a relish — in Galilee, usually fish. The question opens with *mē*, which in Greek expects the answer "no": Jesus already knows the net is empty, and He lets them say so. The KJV's "have ye any meat?" uses "meat" in its old sense of food.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that readers have long argued over Peter's "I am going fishing." Some call it a "compromised return to a former occupation"; others think Peter was simply being wise and practical. Guzik lets the heart's attitude decide, and observes: "Whether their motives were good or bad, that night they caught nothing." Jesus' "Children" was a common greeting among working men, and it made them admit the failure. The right side was no better than the left — "There was no reason why fishing on one side of the boat would be better than the other side" — the point was working under divine guidance. John saw first: "John knew that anything this wonderful had to come from Jesus." And "John was first in recognition, but Peter would be first in devotion."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Ligonier's summary of Sproul's sermon "Breakfast on the Seashore" (St. Andrew's, 5 October 2003, on vv. 1–14) says he began with the claim of "many critical scholars" that "John chapter 21 does not belong in the canon of Scripture," and answered it before walking through the text. He stressed the failure of professionals: "These expert fishermen had fished all night and had nothing to show for the effort." Then Jesus tells them to cast on the other side, and the catch is huge; "when Peter finds out it is the Lord on the shore he dove in and started swimming to Jesus." (The transcript itself is not on the page; this is Ligonier's outline of the sermon.)

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In "The Two Draughts of Fishes" Spurgeon sets John 21 beside Luke 5. Both teach that means must be used — the fish do not leap into the boat — and that means alone are useless, for skilled men fished all night for nothing. Success comes from Christ: "Christ's presence in the midst of the Church is the Church's power." But the scenes differ. In Luke, Christ is in the ship; in John, He stands on the shore, as He now stands in heaven, and His particular word — "Cast the net on the right side of the ship" — is the Spirit's guidance that makes work fruitful. The fishers are nearer land than they think: a saved soul is near heaven, and the night's toil ends at the Master's feet.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry is gentle with the fishermen: "They knew not well what to do with themselves," so they went back to honest work, and Christ met them there. Their empty night is a lesson: "See the vanity of this world; the hand of the diligent often returns empty." They took Jesus "for some common person," not expecting Him, but "Christ has many ways of making himself known to his people." The great draught "was designed to prove that Jesus Christ was raised in power, though sown in weakness." "He whom Jesus loved was the first that said, It is the Lord;" and Peter, girding his coat, went in — "sink or swim, he would show his good-will and aim to be with Jesus."

II
MOVEMENT

JOHN 21:9–14

Come and Have Breakfast

A fire already laid, a net that held, and bread from the hands of the risen Lord

> 9 *So when they got out on the land, they saw* ◷ *a charcoal fire already laid* *and fish placed on it, and bread.*
> 10 *Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught."* 11 *Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish,* ◷ *a hundred and fifty-three*; *and although there were so many,* ☆ *the net was not*

> *torn*. 12 *Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord.* 13 *Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise.* 14 *This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.*
>
> JOHN 21:9–14

FIGURE · TWO CHARCOAL FIRES

THE FIRST CHARCOAL FIRE John 18:15–27		THE SECOND CHARCOAL FIRE John 21:9–17	
WHEN	night, "for it was cold" (18:18)	WHEN	"the day was now breaking" (21:4)
WHO LIT IT	the slaves and the officers	WHO LIT IT	Jesus — "already laid" (21:9)
PETER	standing, warming himself	PETER	threw himself into the sea to reach Him
THREE TIMES	"I am not," "I am not," denied again	THREE TIMES	"You know that I love You" (21:15–17)
THE END	"a rooster crowed" (18:27)	THE END	"Tend My sheep … Follow Me!" (21:17, 19)

ἀνθρακιά (anthrakia, G439) — used only in these two scenes in the whole New Testament

John 18:18 and 21:9: the place of the fall becomes the place of the restoring

Read across each row: John uses the word for a charcoal fire only twice, and the second scene answers the first point for point.

ἀνθρακιά

ANTHRAKIA · "CHARCOAL FIRE" · G439

A heap of burning coals — not a blaze of wood but a low charcoal bed for warmth or cooking. It occurs only twice in the New Testament: John 18:18, where Peter stood warming himself among the officers and denied his Lord, and here, where Jesus has a fire "already laid" with fish and bread on it. John does not explain the echo; he simply uses the word again, and the reader who remembers the courtyard feels it. The KJV's "a fire of coals" is a fair rendering of the same word.

οὐκ ἐσχίσθη τὸ δίκτυον

OUK ESCHISTHĒ TO DIKTYON · "THE NET WAS NOT TORN" · G4977

Schizō, "to split, tear" — our word "schism." John uses the verb only twice: of Jesus' seamless tunic, "Let us not tear it" (19:24), and of this net. In Luke 5:6 the nets "began to break"; here, with a counted catch of 153 large fish, the net holds. Verse 9's "fish" is *opsarion* (G3795), a small cooked fish, the word of the feeding of the five thousand (6:9, 11); verse 11's catch is *ichthys*, live fish from the lake. Jesus feeds them from what He prepared, and invites them to add what He gave them.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik is struck that the risen, glorified Lord "took the trouble to prepare a fire and cook the food for His disciples." "We are again impressed at the servant nature of Jesus, even in His resurrection." The meal was ready before the catch came in: "What they caught added to the menu; it did not make it." On the 153 he is restrained. After surveying the allegories (Augustine's link to seventeen among them) he concludes, "all we know for certain is that 153 represents the number of fish in the net." With Tenney, he reads the exact count and the unbroken net as the marks of an eyewitness and a fisherman's eye.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "Breakfast with Jesus" (24 February 1889) notices the order: "Our Lord began this third manifestation of himself, not with prayer, but with provender." Wet, cold, hungry men are fed before they are questioned, and those who must feed the flock must first be fed. Success is no food for the soul: "You will find it very hungry work if you try to live on catching and counting!" The Host serves alone — "Only one serving man, and that the Lord himself!" — and "Jesus feeding us is Jesus revealed." The guests say little and ask no doubting questions, "knowing that it was the Lord": near Him, communion grows quiet and doubt dies.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry refuses to speculate: "We need not be curious in enquiring whence this fire, and fish, and bread, came." The point is that Christ provided, and then "he called to them very familiarly, Come, and dine." After their night of labor, "Hunger is the best sauce." He reads the 153 practically — "These were many more than they needed for their present supply, but they might sell them" — and the net held, "so that they lost none of their fish, nor damaged their net." He notes that this was the third appearance to the disciples as a group, each one confirming that the Lord was truly risen.

III
MOVEMENT

JOHN 21:15–17

Do You Love Me?

Three questions by a second fire — and a denier made a shepherd

15 *So 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, "Tend My lambs."* 16 *He said to him again 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, "Shepherd My sheep."* 17 *He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.*

JOHN 21:15–17

"Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself."

JOHN 18:18

> *"Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.""*
>
> JOHN 13:37

FIGURE · THREE QUESTIONS, THREE ANSWERS, THREE COMMANDS

	JESUS ASKS	PETER ANSWERS	JESUS COMMISSIONS
v15	*agapaō* "… do you love Me more than these?"	*phileō* "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."	*boskō* "Tend My lambs."
v16	*agapaō* "… do you love Me?"	*phileō* "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."	*poimainō* "Shepherd My sheep."
v17	*phileō* "… do you love Me?"	*phileō* "Lord, You know all things …"	*boskō* "Tend My sheep."

Three denials by one fire (18:17, 25, 27) — three confessions by another
and every confession answered with work: "My lambs … My sheep … My sheep"

Follow the Greek verbs: Jesus twice asks with agapaō, Peter answers each time with phileō, and the third time Jesus takes up Peter's own word.

ἀγαπάω … φιλέω

AGAPAŌ … PHILEŌ · "LOVE … LOVE" · G25, G5368

Jesus asks twice with *agapaō* (G25), Peter answers three times with *phileō* (G5368), and the third time Jesus takes up Peter's word: "*phileis me*?" Many readers hear a humbled Peter, no longer willing to claim the higher word; others note that John uses the two verbs interchangeably — the Father "loves" the Son with *agapaō* in 3:35 and *phileō* in 5:20, and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is *agapaō* in 21:7, 20 but *phileō* in 20:2. Either way the grief of verse 17 is not over a vocabulary change but over "the third time." Peter also shifts verbs of knowing: "You know (*oidas*, G1492) all things; You know (*ginōskeis*, G1097) that I love You" — You see it all, and You can tell.

βόσκε … ποίμαινε

BOSKE … POIMAINE · "TEND … SHEPHERD" · G1006, G4165

Three commands, two verbs. *Boskō* (G1006) is to feed, to put to pasture (vv. 15, 17); *poimainō* (G4165, v. 16) is the whole work of a shepherd — guide, guard, govern — the verb behind Peter's own later charge, "shepherd the flock of God among you" (1 Peter 5:2). All three are present imperatives: keep on. The flock is "My lambs" (*arnia*, G721), "My sheep" (*probata*, G4263): Christ never hands ownership to the shepherd. Verse 17's "grieved" is *elypēthē* (G3076), to be pained, hurt.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik hears “more than these” as a probe of Peter’s old boast: “Jesus asked Peter to compare his love for Jesus to the love that the other disciples had for Jesus.” Some take “these” as the boats and nets, but “Peter’s previous claim to a greater love suggests that Jesus referred to the other disciples, not the fish.” He notes Jesus’ *agapas* and Peter’s *phileo*, and that most commentators see a more reserved Peter; the third time “Jesus slightly changed His question,” using Peter’s word. Peter’s grief was “a plain reminder of his previous three-time denial.” And the flock stays Christ’s — “His sheep, not Peter’s” — with Morris on “tend”: “Exercise the office of shepherd.”

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew’s

Ligonier’s summary of Sproul’s sermon “Feed My Sheep” (12 October 2003) says he weighed “three possible meanings” of “more than these” and discussed the Greek words for love. His article of the same name, adapted from a 2008 Pastors Conference message, grants the standard link between the three questions and the three denials but raises another possibility — emphasis by repetition, as in Isaiah 6:3, Galatians 1:8–9 and Revelation 8:13. Sheep are helpless without a shepherd, and these are Christ’s: “They are His lambs.” “There is no greater sacred trust than to have God entrust His people to a pastor’s care.” So “Pastors must feed God’s people the truth,” for “Food that is spoiled poisons people,” and “A shepherd is not called to entertain.”

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon’s “Lovest Thou Me” treats the question as an examination, not a request for information: “it is well, especially after a foul sin, that the Christian should well probe the wound.” Christ asks about love because “love is the best evidence of piety,” and “works without love are not evidences worth having.” Peter’s answer is discreet. He no longer claims to love more than others — “There is no loving heart that will think it loves better than the least of God’s children” — and “Peter answered not as to the quantity but as to the quality of his love,” appealing to Christ’s own knowledge. Then love must be shown: “Do something to prove thy love,” beginning with the lambs.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry notes that Christ waited until after dinner, so the talk came as reconciliation, not rebuke. Then “Christ puts his trial upon this issue: Dost thou love me?” “More than these” sets the bar: “Those only love Christ indeed that love him better than all the delights of sense and all the profits of this world.” The threefold question “put him in mind of his threefold denial of Christ, and was plainly designed to do so,” and “Every remembrance of past sins, even pardoned sins, renews the sorrow of a true penitent.” “Feed them, that is, teach them; for the doctrine of the gospel is spiritual food.” He adds that the passage gives Peter no primacy: “Peter himself never claimed such a power.”

IV
MOVEMENT

JOHN 21:18–23

You Follow Me

Peter's death foretold, a question about John, and the call that silences comparison

18 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and* *someone else will gird you*, *and bring you where you do not wish to go."* 19 *Now this He said, signifying* *by what kind of death he would glorify God*. *And when He had spoken this, He said to him,* *"Follow Me!"* 20 *Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"* 21 *So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?"* 22 *Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain* *until I come*, *what is that to you?* *You follow Me!"* 23 *Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"*

JOHN 21:18–23

"knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me."

2 PETER 1:14

ζώννυμι

ZŌNNYMI · "GIRD" · G2224

To fasten a belt, tie up the long robe for action. It appears only three times in the New Testament — twice here ("you used to gird yourself … someone else will gird you") and in Acts 12:8, where the angel wakes Peter in Herod's prison: "Gird yourself." Young Peter dressed himself and went where he pleased; old Peter would "stretch out" his hands and be bound and led. John's comment — "signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God" — repeats the very phrase he used of Jesus' own death (12:33; 18:32). Peter would die the Master's kind of death, and it would glorify God.

σύ μοι ἀκολούθει

SY MOI AKOLOUTHEI · "YOU FOLLOW ME!" · G190, G3306

Akoloutheō (G190), "follow," is a present imperative — keep on following. In verse 22 Jesus adds the pronoun *sy*, "you," which Greek does not need, for emphasis: *you* follow Me. Peter had promised, "I will lay down my life for You" (13:37) and been told, "you will follow later" (13:36); this is later. "Remain" is *menein* (G3306), John's great word for abiding; "until I come" (*heōs erchomai*) points to Christ's return. John 14:3 had promised, "I will come again."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik reads "stretch out your hands" as a prophecy of crucifixion — Peter carried "to a place he would not want to go – a place with stretched out hands, crucified on a cross." He passes on Clarke's report of the tradition that Peter asked to be crucified head downward (a tradition, not Scripture). "It would be by this death he would glorify God." With Tenney, "Follow Me" means "Keep on following me." Peter's first move was to deflect onto someone else, a temptation most of us share; "Jesus wanted Peter to consider the possibility that He might have an entirely different destiny for John." The rumor that John would not die shows how often "the brethren" misunderstand; Tasker: Jesus "had only spoken hypothetically."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "Following Christ" (No. 3057, preached 11 May 1873) notes that Jesus had to say "Follow Me" twice, because curiosity about John had already pulled Peter's eyes away. "The main business of our life is to follow Jesus" — trusting Him first, then becoming like Him, then serving in our own calling. We are not to pry into God's dealings with others; like a farmhand critiquing his master, we should hear, "Get on with your plowing! Get to your own proper work!" He even warns against getting lost in prophetic date-setting: "Nobody will be lost, as far as I know, through my getting a wrong theory of prophecy." His charge: "keep close to Jesus!"

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry reads the prophecy plainly: "The stretching out of his hands, some think, points at the manner of his death by crucifying," and the death would be one "by what death he should glorify God." Then Peter's question shows a curiosity about others that crowds out duty, and Christ answers, in effect, "It is nothing to thee, when or where, or how, John must die." The rumor teaches how unreliable tradition is: "Because John must not die a martyr, they conclude he must not die at all." Henry's rule: "Let the words of Christ speak for themselves." And the promise inside the command: "Those that faithfully follow Christ in grace shall certainly follow him to glory."

V
MOVEMENT

JOHN 21:24–25

The Witness Is True

The beloved disciple signs his book — and admits it could never hold everything

> 24 *This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that △ his testimony is true.* 25 *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even ◷ the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.*
>
> JOHN 21:24–25

> *"but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."*
>
> JOHN 20:31

μαρτυρία

MARTYRIA · "TESTIMONY" · G3141, G3140

The noun (G3141) and its verb *martyreō* (G3140, "testifying") run through John like a thread: John the Baptist "came as a witness, to testify about the Light" (1:7), and at the cross the beloved disciple "has testified, and his testimony is true" (19:35). Verse 24 closes the thread. The present participle *ho martyrōn*, "the one who is testifying," keeps the witness speaking as the book is read. "We know" is *oidamen* (G1492) — a community vouching for the author — and "true" is *alēthēs* (G227), truthful, reliable, nothing hidden. Our English "martyr" grew from this word: the witness who will not take it back.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik identifies the writer as the disciple left unnamed throughout the Gospel — the beloved disciple — and says, "John gave solemn testimony to the truth of what he wrote." The last verse is an honest confession of limits: "John wrote the truth about Jesus, but it was impossible for him or anyone else to write the *whole* truth about Jesus." He quotes Morris on the "delightful hyperbole" and Barclay's summary of the apostles — Peter the shepherd, Paul the pioneer, "but John was the witness of Christ." And the "many other things" Jesus does continue among His people: "a book that continues to be written."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry reads "we know" as the voice of the church: "they knew that their testimony was true, for they ventured both this life and the other upon it." The closing line about the books "is a hyperbole common enough and justifiable" — all the libraries of the world "could not contain the books" if every work of Christ were written out. Yet what we have is enough for faith, as 20:31 says, and Henry closes with gratitude: "Let us be thankful for the books that are written," and with the Gospel's final Amen as our own assent.

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From the first empty night to the Chief Shepherd's crown — where John 21 reaches back and forward

"Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets.""

LUKE 5:5

"Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times."

JOHN 13:38

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

JOHN 10:11

> *“But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.’”*
>
> MARK 16:7

> *“shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;”*
>
> 1 PETER 5:2

> *“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”*
>
> 1 PETER 5:4

> *“knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.”*
>
> 2 PETER 1:14

> *“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”*
>
> JOHN 14:3

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew’s

Sproul grounds “Feed my sheep” in the whole Bible’s picture of God’s people as sheep wholly dependent on a shepherd — Psalm 23 and John 10 — so that Peter’s commission is Christ’s own shepherding passed to under-shepherds.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon reads the two catches as a pair: in Luke 5 “Christ was in the ship,” the nets break and Peter cries “Depart”; in John 21 Christ stands on the shore, the net holds, and the toil ends in a feast — the church on earth and the church as heaven sees it.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one chapter. Guzik walks the text and weighs the commentators; Sproul (known here through Ligonier's sermon summaries and his "Feed My Sheep" article) presses the pastor's task; Spurgeon turns each scene into a plea to the heart; Henry gathers it into Puritan counsel. They differ on small things — whether Peter was wrong to go fishing, whether the two Greek words for love differ, why there were three questions — and agree on the large one: the risen Christ restores the fallen and sends them back to work. A dash means no source for that teacher on those verses.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · The empty net	Motives debated, nets empty either way; John first to see, Peter first to go.	Critics answered; expert fishermen with nothing to show; Peter dives and swims.	Means must be used, means alone fail; Christ on the shore gives the catch.	The hand of the diligent returns empty; sink or swim, Peter goes to Jesus.
II · Breakfast	The risen Lord cooks; their catch added to the menu, did not make it.	—	Provender before prayer; you cannot live on catching and counting.	Don't ask whence the fire came; hunger is the best sauce.
III · Do you love Me?	More than the other disciples; agapas and phileo; His sheep, not Peter's.	Three meanings weighed; perhaps emphasis by repetition; feed the truth, don't entertain.	Probe the wound; quality not quantity; do something to prove thy love.	Every remembrance of pardoned sin renews the penitent's sorrow; feeding is teaching.
IV · Follow Me	Stretched hands mean a cross; keep on following; John's path is not yours.	—	The main business of life is to follow Jesus; get on with your plowing.	Nothing to thee how John dies; let Christ's words speak for themselves.
V · The witness	The whole truth about Jesus could never be written; the book continues.	—	—	They staked this life and the next on it; thank God for the books we have.

JOHN 21:1–25 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **The Lord meets failure at the place of failure.** Peter fell by a charcoal fire (18:18); Jesus restores him by another (21:9). *Anthrakia* appears only in those two scenes in the New Testament. THE GREEK
- **The question is designed to hurt so it can heal.** Henry: the threefold question "put him in mind of his threefold denial of Christ, and was plainly designed to do so." Peter is grieved — and then commissioned. HENRY
- **Breakfast before the hard conversation.** Spurgeon: "Our Lord began this third manifestation of himself, not with prayer, but with provender." Jesus feeds Peter before He questions him. SPURGEON
- **Their catch added to the menu; it did not make it.** The fire, fish and bread were already there (v. 9). Guzik: the disciples' work was welcome but never the foundation of the meal. GUZIK
- **The sheep stay His.** "My lambs … My sheep … My sheep." Guzik: "His sheep, not Peter's." Sproul: "They are His lambs." No shepherd owns the flock. THE TEXT
- **Restoration ends in work, not in a feeling.** Each confession is answered by a command — tend, shepherd, tend — all present imperatives: keep on doing it. THE GREEK

- **Love, not performance, is the test.** Spurgeon: "love is the best evidence of piety" and Peter "answered not as to the quantity but as to the quality of his love." SPURGEON
- **Peter would die his Master's kind of death.** "Signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God" (v. 19) repeats John's words about Jesus' own death (12:33; 18:32). Peter later wrote that the Lord had made it clear to him (2 Pet 1:14). THE TEXT
- **Comparison is the enemy of following.** "What is that to you? You follow Me!" — with an emphatic "you." Spurgeon: "Get on with your plowing! Get to your own proper work!" SPURGEON
- **The Gospel ends with a signature and an admission.** "His testimony is true" — and the world could not hold the books. Guzik: no one could write the whole truth about Jesus. GUZIK

† Questions for the Table

1 **Where have I gone back to "fishing" — the old life, the old way of coping — when I didn't know what else to do?**

Henry: "They knew not well what to do with themselves." Jesus met them right there.

21:3; Luke 5:5

2 **What is my "charcoal fire" — the place or memory of my worst failure — and what would it mean to meet Jesus there?**

The same word, two fires: the place of the fall becomes the place of restoring.

21:9; 18:18

3 **Jesus fed Peter before He questioned him. How have I experienced His kindness before His correction?**

Provender before prayer — the meal came first.

21:12–15

4 **If Jesus asked me today, "Do you love Me more than these?" — what would "these" be for me?**

Henry: love Him "better than all the delights of sense and all the profits of this world."

21:15; 13:37

5 **Who are the "lambs" Jesus has put near me to feed, and what would tending them look like this week?**

Love proved by work: "Do something to prove thy love."

21:15–17; 1 Pet 5:2

6 **Whose life or calling am I comparing mine to, and what does "You follow Me!" say to that?**

Emphatic "you": your road, your cross, your Master.

21:20–22

John's Gospel ends on a beach with a fire, a meal and a question. The man who denied Jesus three times by one fire confesses his love three times by another and is sent to feed Christ's sheep. The last words Jesus speaks in the book are for every one of us who has failed Him: "You follow Me!"

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

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