



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: John 21:17-25

“Peter was grieved that [Jesus] asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” “Feed my sheep,” Jesus said. ¹⁸ “Truly I tell you... when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.” ¹⁹ He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, “Follow me.” ²⁰ So Peter turned around and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them, the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and asked, “Lord, who is the one that’s going to betray you?” ²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?”

²² “If I want him to remain until I come,” Jesus answered, “what is that to you? As for you, follow me.”

²³ So this rumor spread to the brothers and sisters that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not tell him that he would not die, but, “If I want him to remain until I come, 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.

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if every one of them were written down, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:17b-25 CSB)

SUMMARY:

The final episode of John’s Gospel zeroes in on two pivotal characters: Simon Peter and the ‘Beloved Disciple’ (John himself). Peter, now restored and recommissioned after his threefold denial of Christ, quickly finds himself embroiled in his old rivalry with John. He asks, “What about him?” Jesus’ blunt

reply, “None of your business; you follow me!” not only settles their rivalry but also delineates their distinct ministry roles. However, from John’s later perspective, Peter and John are also symbolic figures representing the ‘Apostolic Church’ and the ‘Johannine community’ respectively. From this angle, Jesus’ affirmation validates both as authentic expressions of His Church, challenging the erroneous notion of a single legitimate form of the New Testament Church. Instead, John’s Gospel climaxes with Jesus validating the Johannine community. This Gospel offers glimpses of its unique, non-hierarchical, Spirit-led, egalitarian form; delving deeper, we will uncover further facets of John’s ‘alternative Church’ portrayed in his other writings (1-3 John).

John 21 “has an emphasis on the situation of the Church and its leaders...” – George Beasley-Murray

1. Peter Restored & Recommissioned (21:17-19)

- a. Forgiven (Restored): “*Do you love Me?*” (3x) (21:17)
- b. Feed (Recommissioned): “*Feed/shepherd My lambs/sheep*” (21:17b)
- c. Future fate: a Martyr’s Death: “*When you are old...*” (21:18-19)
- d. Focus: “*Follow me*” (21:19b)

2. Peter’s Rivalry Resolved & Restricted (21:20-22)

- a. Reemerging Rivalry: Comparison – Competition – Rivalry: “*What about him?*” (21:21)
 - “Confident perhaps after his own commission & restoration (21:22), Peter directly asks Jesus about John’s fate, ‘*This man—what about him?*’ Do we dare sense *in Peter’s tone a rivalry that echoes the ... race to the tomb* (20:4)? Jesus’ answer is abrupt...To paraphrase: ‘Peter, this matter is not your concern; it is mine. You have one duty: follow me!’” [Gary Burge, in CA. Evans (ed.) *Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: John*, p. 162]
 - “The Lord has just given [Peter] an awesome... commission. Instead of... gratitude, he wants to know what John is going to do. An old sibling *rivalry is showing*. The *competition & jealousy... is creeping up again*. Jesus’ retort is sharp: ‘*What’s that to you? You follow Me!*’ ...*Comparisons lead to competition; competition leads to consternation* ...The Master says, ‘Claim... the calling I’ve given you... Never mind what I’m giving to...others. You follow me!’” [Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *God’s Best for My Life*, p. 126]
- b. Restricted: “*What is that to you?*” (21:22) (“*None of your business!*”)
 - The “Beloved disciple, *who is Peter’s rival*, is brought into the discussion by Peter’s question (21:21). Jesus says in effect that *Peter should attend to his own ministry* (‘what is that to you?’) *and discipleship* (‘Follow me!’). Peter obviously has a witness to bear...So also the Beloved Disciple...” [D. Moody Smith, *John*, 402]
 - “Although Peter is given a pastoral role... the Beloved Disciple *does not take second place.*” –RA. Culpepper
- c. Rivalry Resolved (~AD 30)
 - a. Personal Rivalry Resolved
 - b. Ministry Rivalry Resolved
 - The “Epilogue... *resolves the seeming competition* between Peter & the Beloved Disciple, showing that *their roles are complementary* within the early church.” [Stephen J. Binz, *Jesus the Word...*, Pt 2, p. 115]
 - “The relationship between Peter & the Beloved Disciple is resolved in terms of noncompetition... The...roles of Peter and the Beloved Disciple...[are] *removed from the realm of competition and their complementarity* strongly & explicitly *confirmed.*” [Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, p. 584 & #6]
 - c. Church Rivalry – not yet an issue
- d. Re-Focus: “*You (sing.) follow Me!*” (21:22b)

3. The ‘Beloved Disciple’ (John) (21:20-24)

- a. Following (21:20b)a
- b. Future – lifelong following during a long life (21:22a, 23)
- c. Functions:
 - a. Testifying – “*This is the disciple who testifies these things*” (21:24a)

- b. Writing – “*who wrote them down*” (21:24b) John's Gospel & Letters (1-3 John)
- c. Shepherding “*the brothers & sisters*” (21:23a) “*in the [Johannine] community*” (NRSV)
 - ‘*Brothers*’: “The term is used to refer to the members of *the [Johannine] community*.” –U. von Wahlde
- d. Correcting the false rumor – “*If...*” (21:23b)

4. Resolution: Peter & John Representing Church Alternatives

a. The Time Perspective (21:23)

- a. At the time (~AD 30)
- b. At the time of writing/publication (~AD 90s)
 - The “rumor spread to *the brothers & sisters* that this [‘beloved’] disciple would not die...” (21:23)
 - “The narrator jumps from the progression of the [narrative] forward through time to a retrospective perspective...*into the present of the audience* [21:23 ~AD 90s].” [Jo-Ann A. Brant, *John*, 285-6]

b. Peter & the Beloved Disciple as Representative Figures

- a. Peter – Represents the ‘Apostolic Church,’ (Petrine Community)
 - “In all probability Peter’s appearance has something to do with *what or whom he represents*, for there’s no doubt that *Peter was an important leader in the early church*, as... he had been among Jesus’ disciples. *The Beloved Disciple... is... the representative of the Johannine community* and tradition.” [D. Moody Smith, *Theology of...John*, p. 46]
- b. Beloved Disciple –Represents the Johannine Community
 - “Designed to *represent the Johannine community’s* special knowledge of Christ, the *Beloved Disciple is... presented in competition with Peter*, who may represent the larger apostolic church.” — SL. Harris
 - “*The Beloved Disciple... is... the representative of the Johannine community...*” –D. Moody Smith
 - “The relationship between the Beloved Disciple & Peter suggests ...that the former [*Beloved Disciple*] was the *Johannine community’s apostolic authority*, the one from whom the community had received its teachings. He was their link with the earthly Jesus & their witness to the risen Lord. The [*Johannine*] community recognized the role of Peter, but nevertheless maintained that the *Beloved Disciple had been given a unique role...* The Beloved Disciple serves, therefore, as an important figure, *legitimizing & authorizing the distinctive teaching of the Johannine community in the face of the rising authority of Peter* in other traditions.” [R. Alan Culpepper, *John...Son of Zebedee*, pp. 84-5]
 - “*In counterposing [the Beloved Disciple] over against the... [leader] of the Twelve [Peter], the Johannine community is symbolically counterposing itself over against the kinds of churches that venerate Peter & the Twelve... the ‘Great Church’ ...The Johannine Christians represented by the Beloved Disciple* clearly regard themselves as closer to Jesus & more perceptive than the Christians of the *Apostolic Churches* [symbolized by Peter].” [RE. Brown, *Community of Beloved Disciple*, pp. 83-4]
 - “The (Johannine) community secured its own position by placing the Beloved Disciple alongside ... Peter... *John 21 is not an attack on the pastoral authority of Peter; it is a demand for the recognition of another type of discipleship*, just as authentic as that of the original apostles.” [Brown, *cit.*, p. 191]

c. Rapprochement between Peter & the Beloved Disciple

- Rapprochement: “an establishing, or especially a restoring, of harmony & friendly relations” (Collins)
- “In the epilogue [Jn. 21] relationships between Peter & the Beloved Disciple become matters of utmost concern ...*More than personal relationships... come into play...* The *Beloved Disciple is representative of the Johannine...community*, while Peter ...the leader of the Twelve, is probably also a representative figure. *Their coming to terms with each other, especially Peter’s coming to terms with the Beloved Disciple, is representative of the rapprochement between Johannine Christianity & the Petrine branch of the Church.*” [D. Moody Smith, *John*, 402]
- “Jesus says...Peter should attend to his own ministry...& discipleship...So also the Beloved Disciple... *Peter’s followers are*, by clear implication of Jesus’ words, *admonished to let stand the work & witness of his colleague [the Beloved Disciple]* ...who has come to a good & honorable death. Thus, *the validity of the [Beloved Disciple] & his community*, the community of the Beloved Disciple, *is finally & emphatically endorsed*. The seeming rivalry between them has come to an end.” [D. Moody Smith, *John*, 402-3]
- “*Peter was an important leader in the early church...The Beloved Disciple... is the representative of the Johannine community & tradition*. Does this final scene [Jn. 21] represent some sort of *rapprochement [reconciliation] between the two*, in which Peter & Petrine, or ‘apostolic’ Christianity are recognized, but the *Beloved Disciple retains pride of place?* Probably the intention is to honor Peter & the Christian

tradition he represents, while simultaneously *underscoring the value & truth of the Johannine witness & its Gospel (21:24).*" [D. Moody Smith, *Theology of...John*, p. 46]

- "The effect of the characterization...in the Gospel of John is to *recognize [Peter's] role as an apostle, but to insist that the Beloved Disciple had equal authority by virtue of his special relationship to Jesus...* Given the importance of Peter in the apostolic church... we may well suspect that in the figures of Peter & the Beloved Disciple we see... *the concern of the Johannine community to reply to...churches that looked to Peter as the leading apostle. The role of Peter is recognized, but the Beloved Disciple had given [John's community] a tradition they knew to be true (21:24b).*" [R. Alan Culpepper, *John*, 47]

5. The Johannine Community – Where's the Evidence?

a. The Theory of 'Gospel Communities' behind the 4 Gospels

- "In recent decades, scholars of the New Testament have... [tried to discern] the communities behind particular NT texts, ...to *reconstruct communities behind the [4] Gospels.* They have constructed the communities behind the Gospel of John (the Johannine community), the Gospel of Matthew (the Matthean community), ...Mark (the Markan community), &...Luke (the Lukan community) ...*Where is the evidence for these Gospel communities?*" [Dwight Peterson, *Origins of Mark*, pp. 1-3]

b. John's Letters (1, 2, 3 John) are 'Incontrovertible Evidence'

- "With regard to the Johannine Epistles ... [1-3 John, there's] an unusually high degree of consensus... that the *Letters are addressed to 'the Johannine community.'*" [Judith M. Lieu, "Audience...", in R. A. Culpepper (ed.) *Communities in Dispute*, p. 123]
- John's "Letters, especially 2 & 3 John, are *incontrovertible evidence for the existence of the Johannine community.*" [Thomas F. Johnson, 1, 2, & 3 John, p.]
- "1-3 John appear *prima facie* to be evidence for at least one [Johannine] community." – David Smith
- "There is *clear evidence* from the ...Epistles that there was a Johannine...community." – RA. Culpepper
- "Of the Gospels, *only John has a closely related group of Epistles written to a network of house churches.* That network...[is] *the Johannine community* in the broadest sense...[John's] Epistles are... used to realize the Johannine vision more effectively within that...community" [John Painter, 1, 2, 3, John, p. 75]

c. Evidence: Strong for Johannine Community vs Weak for Synoptic Communities

- "It is critical to note that *unlike the Synoptic Gospels*, our knowledge of John's community is aided by the presence of three epistles bearing John's name (1, 2, 3 John). These letters are written in the same style... as the Gospel. This means [*evidence for*] *a Johannine community rests on a much more secure foundation* than do the other *theoretical* gospel communities." [Chris. W. Skinner, *Reading John*, p.]

6. John's Church: A Different Way of Doing Church

a. Mistake to assume only one way of doing Church

- It's a "*mistake... to assume that there was only one model of church governance in the early church* rather than a multiplicity of models." –Paul Anderson
- "Only 60 years after Jesus' death...the 4th Evangelist & [his] community...modelled...[a] *very different ecclesiastical system.*" —Robert Vande Kappelle
- It's a "*mistake... to assume that there was only one model of church governance in the early church* rather than a multiplicity of models... [Christ's Lordship] functions through a *variety of means* rather than a singular one– the hierarchical one– & *this is a point made with emphasis in John's presentation of Peter & the Beloved Disciple.*" [Paul Anderson, "Petrine Ministry & Christo-crazy," George Fox U. (2005) p. 37 #7]
- "The mistake is to *assume there's only one apostolic ecclesial approach* to the organization & community life of the early church. [John's] Gospel poses a Spirit-based alternative." [Paul Anderson, *Christology of the 4th Gospel*, p. 341]

b. Different Ways of Doing Church

- *Johannine Christianity was marking out a distinctive path* within the range of later 1st-century Christianity." — James Dunn

a. Sense of Distinct Identity

versions of Christianity. Luke moves Peter more forcefully to the center of the [overall] community. John incorporates... the Beloved Disciple in order to move Peter off center [i.e., to de-center Peter]. [Pheme Perkins, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church*, pp. 83-4]

i. In Ephesus, Johannine Community would recognize Pauline Christianity, but remain separate

- “The ‘*Johannine community*’...was a *distinct & separate community from the Pauline community* in Ephesus.” [Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus...*, 271]
- “Nothing is mentioned in John about a Pauline church in Ephesus, & there’s no evidence that this [Pauline] group simply merged with John’s assembly. [Paul] Trebilco may be correct by suggesting that the two groups [Pauline & Johannine] knew each other & *were not hostile* towards one another *but chose to remain separate entities.*” [B. J. Oropeza, *In the Footsteps of Judas...*, p. 164]
- In Ephesus around the turn of the century, “the readers of the Pastorals [1-2 Tim., Titus, i.e., the *Pauline church*] and the readers of 1-3 John [the *Johannine community*] would have been *aware of each others existence, would not have refused contact* with each other... and would have had ‘non-hostile relations.’ ... [However,] they clearly *retained the distinct identity of their separate groups...* While *preserving their distinct identity...* they would have been willing to *acknowledge the validity of each other’s claim to be part of the wider movement [of] early Christianity.*” [Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus...*, 716-7]

7. Applications