

Small Group Study Questions / Answers

Restoration: the Epilogue

Jn. 21:1-25

John ends his gospel with one final story, the restoration of Peter. Why do you think John felt this last story was necessary? What does this story teach us about Jesus? About Peter? About John?

Read John 20:30-31. Can you see why some scholars have claimed that John's gospel originally ended with these verses?

Some scholars contend that a disciple of John likely added chapter 21. They see in the conclusion of chapter 20 what appears to be the original end of the gospel. There is no evidence in the manuscripts for this claim. It is included in the best copies of the original gospel that we have today.

Chapter 21 has always been a part of John's gospel. Read chapter 21:1-25.

Q: This chapter has been called the "epilogue." Why do you think John included this final chapter before finishing his gospel?

An epilogue is different than an "appendix". An appendix is not part of the document itself but a reference. It is clear that John intended for this last account of Peter's restoration to be a final word at the end of the gospel. This is why we refer to it as the "epilogue." It's the final statement John wants us to remember. He wants us to see that God restores.

Q: Peter and the other six are back to fishing on the Sea of Galilee (v. 3-4). Do you think it is significant that they have gone back to their old job? Why else are they in Galilee (Mk. 16:7; Matt. 28:7)?

Many scholars have concluded that Peter and the others had gone back to their "secular" job as part of their being disillusioned about the death of Jesus. They have accused Peter with going back to his old life in unbelief. The passages cited above show clearly that Jesus had instructed the disciples to go to Galilee where He would meet with them. They were there waiting for the Lord. Their fishing is not sinful or the result of unbelief but rather a means of being productive until the Lord comes to meet them.

Q: Peter and John have been competitive with each other previously in John's gospel as they are in this passage. What are the differences between these two disciples? What can we learn about differences and competition from their lives?

John is the lover. He's quicker on the uptake than Peter. He's slower and more deliberate than Peter. Peter also loves the Lord. His love looks different than John. Peter is more impulsive and bold in his exercise of faith. John got to the empty tomb first, but Peter barged in when he got there. John recognized the Lord first in this passage, but Peter dove out of the boat. God has ordained differences in the body. Look at 1 Cor. 12 to see the way that the body is composed of diverse members. Unhealthy competition between believers is often rooted in spiritual pride. Just as the disciples argues about who was the greatest (Jn. 13) we often compete with each other for "top dog." God has plenty of love for all of us. There is no shortage and no need to compete for his affection.

Q: Jesus asks Peter three questions (v. 15-17). How would you respond to these questions from the Lord?

Each member of the group will have their own answers to the three questions:

1. Do you love me more than these (other people)?
2. Do you love me?
3. Do you have affection for me?

Q: What was Peter's main problem? What did Jesus need to correct in him to make him more useful for the kingdom? Do you struggle with similar problems to Peter's?

Peter struggled with self-reliance, spiritual pride, a lack of humility, a lack of dependence on the Lord. He trusted in his own ability and strength prior to his fall and denial. Jesus needed to show Peter that his strength was inadequate, that he needed to depend on God's strength. Once Peter learned that "strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9) he was more useful for the kingdom. Sometimes God has to break us to make us useful as tools for His purposes. The problems Peter faced were common to the other ten disciples in the upper room. Most of us struggle with similar problems in our lives. Depending on God is a learned behavior, sometimes the hard way.

Q: According to church history, Peter was crucified upside down. Why is this significant in light of this passage? Did Peter finally "get it?"

Peter, in the end, understood that Jesus was in a class by Himself. Peter moved from wanting to be in the "in" crowd to seeing the need for him to walk in humility. It seems that Peter finally understood that he was a recipient of God's grace. He learned that as a fallen and weak man God's grace was sufficient for him. Peter's fall and restoration made him the useful apostle that he became in the early church.

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