Blessings to you in Christ Jesus

*This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. 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

John is the beloved disciple who wrote this Gospel, three letters, and Revelation. He wants us to believe. He wants us to believe in Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour; as the one and only way to the Father. It is only by saving belief in Jesus that we can escape the sentence of hell and receive the unsurpassed rewards of heaven. And it is only by His grace, because we deserve nothing good from Him.

John doesn’t attempt to write down every single thing Jesus did. He has written enough. He has given us enough evidence to believe that Jesus is Messiah and that salvation is through Him alone. If a person doesn’t believe from what has been written, it doesn’t matter how much more is written, they will still not believe. Blessed indeed are we who believe.

John makes the statement that the world could not contain all the books if all that Jesus did was written down. When we consider that Jesus’ ministry was only about 3 years, and that His entire life was only about 33 years; we might be tempted to think that this is hyperbole; perhaps exaggeration to make a point.

But remember the beginning of this Gospel: *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.* How many books would it take to describe the creation of everything in existence? How many books would it take to describe Jesus keeping all of creation going?

Well, perhaps the world couldn’t contain all the books.

In Christ’s love

John

 5-8-22

John 21

For the last few weeks, we’ve been considering the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, what He did during the time He spent in the grave, and now the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. Really, there isn’t a whole lot of information given to us in the Bible about those days; just enough for us to believe that Jesus is risen from the dead.

The Gospel accounts mainly tell us about the encounters of Easter morning and later in the day. John gives us an account of Jesus appearing to the apostles that evening. Paul tells us that there were several individual encounters and one appearance to over 500 people at once. The last chapter of John’s Gospel tells us one more occurrence of Jesus’ manifesting to seven of the apostles.

John tells us that this took place at the Sea of Tiberias; which is another name for the Sea of Galilee. These disciples had gone to the region of Galilee, just as Jesus had told them to. Perhaps the others were waiting elsewhere or perhaps they hadn’t arrived yet; John doesn’t tell us. Nor do we know how long it had been since Jesus had appeared to them in the locked room and invited Thomas to examine His wounds.

In any case, Simon Peter, never one to be idle, decided to go fishing and his companions chose to go with him. There have been lots of talk and ideas regarding this decision and the fact that they followed through with it. Some claim that they had given up on Jesus and tried to go back to their old way of life; some have gone so far as to say this was apostacy. I think that if we consider the circumstances, we can come up with something much more reasonable.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus was quick to call out His disciples if they ventured into the territory of sin. When Jesus came to them in this account, He made no mention of anything wrong; He did not rebuke them, even in the gentlest terms. Certainly, if they were apostate, Jesus would have said something. There was no sin in what the apostles did; they simply went fishing.

Jesus had given instructions to His disciples to go to Galilee where He would meet them. He didn’t tell them how long they would have to wait. It is easy for us to say that they should have been busy praying or preaching or something. But remember that they didn’t have the Holy Spirit indwelling them yet. Additionally, we know that later Jesus told them to continue to wait until they received the Helper.

With Peter’s personality, it is easy to see him as someone who had to be doing something. He probably couldn’t stand waiting doing nothing; he was better off waiting while doing something. Also consider that they had to eat. Whether they catch fish for themselves or to sell to buy food, they had to have sustenance. And, as we have studied in Genesis, God made us to work. For the disciples to work to earn their food is a good thing. Remember how many times Paul had to ply his trade as a tent-maker while he spread the Gospel.

The disciples spent the night fishing but they didn’t manage to catch anything. They saw a man standing on the bank of the lake who asked them if they had done any good. Imagine the disciple frame of mind: happy that their Lord was alive, but not knowing where He was or what He was going to do; still reeling from the recent events; now they have worked hard all night with nothing to show for it. It all sounds pretty frustrating. They simply responded to the question with a “*No*”.

The man on the bank told them to cast their nets of the right side of the boat. And they did so. Now, why would they listen to some man standing on the bank telling them to cast on the other side of the boat? They didn’t know nor did it cross their minds that it was Jesus. But they did it anyway. I really think they did what they were told because it was God standing there telling them to do it. Just the power of His instruction would have been enough to cause them to obey.

Remember the soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane? John 18:4-6: *[Jesus] said to them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered Him, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He said to them, “I am He.” And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. So when He said to them, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground.* The voice of God has infinite power. His voice created all the heavens and the earth. Bear in mind that one day we will all stand before Him and hear His voice. If we are not protected by the blood of Jesus, we will not be able to withstand what He says.

Their obedience to the risen Christ pays off and they experience a huge catch. This may remind us of another account in Luke 5:1-11 that had taken place about three years earlier. This is where Jesus used Simon Peter’s boat, from which He preached to the crowd. When He was done, Jesus told Peter to go out into the Lake and put down the nets. Peter explained that they had fished all night with no success, but he did what the Master told him. The catch caused the nets to start to break and almost sunk two boats.

In Luke’s account, Peter asked Jesus to leave him because he was a sinful man. Instead, Jesus invited Peter to follow Him. He promised him that he would catch men instead of fish. The lesson here in John 21 is that we can’t catch anything without Jesus. And we certainly can’t catch people for the Kingdom of God. The work of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary and without Him working, no one can be saved.

This should be very comforting to us: it is our job to share the Gospel; we are not responsible for whether or not the person accepts it. If a person rejects the Gospel, they are actually rejecting the prompting of the Holy Spirit. God has chosen to work through us as those who plant and those who water, but He brings about the growth.

Once again, the apostle John show himself to be the most perceptive. From what just took place, he realizes that it is Jesus who is standing on the bank and he tells Peter. We must consider: Are we that perceptive? Do we recognize that every good and wonderful thing that happens in our lives is from God? All good things come from Him; do we give Him thanks?

Peter realizes that John is correct, loses all interest in the fish, and jumps into the lake. For all his faults, mistakes, and inability to understand, Peter is loyal to his Lord. And that is what the Lord seeks. He wants loyal followers. He knows we can’t be perfect; He knows we can’t even come close. But He wants us to allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, and come back to Him every time we mess up.

The disciples held onto the net full of fish and drug it behind the boat as they rowed to the shore. It was so heavy that they couldn’t bring the fish into the boat. This wasn’t for lack of strength, but because they would have tipped the boat. The net didn’t break in spite of the strain and weight. And neither will the Gospel. We can use it as much as we want and it will never wear out. There is no one whose sins are too heavy for the Gospel net. It will hold them; it will not break.

Jesus already had a fire going and was cooking fish and bread. Did He bring these things with Him or did He just speak them into creation? We don’t know, so it doesn’t matter. What matters is that Jesus was still caring for and serving His disciples. Again, there is no rebuke for them having gone fishing. Jesus simply invites them to come have breakfast. They had worked hard all night, they had to be hungry. And Jesus is caring for a very basic human need.

Throughout the Gospel accounts, Jesus is the servant to the people He comes in contact with; and He calls His followers to the same. He even said that He had come not to be served but to serve. So here, after all He has been through, Jesus is still serving even after His resurrection. Keep in mind that He is still serving His people today.

Jesus is at work still, interceding for us in heaven. But there is more. Think about the last supper when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. After Peter protested, he then asked Jesus to wash his hands and head as well. Jesus replied, “*He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean*.” From this we see that when we are washed in the blood of Christ, we are completely cleansed from all our sin; past, present, and future.

But as we travel through life, we get our feet dirty. We still sin from time to time and although the stain doesn’t stick eternally, it hinders us from coming before the Lord; into His house so to speak. That is why we need to daily repent and ask forgiveness from God. In this respect, Jesus is still washing our feet. If our Lord and Saviour is still serving us, how careful we must be to gladly serve others.

After breakfast comes the well-known dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him and three times Peter attests that he does. Much is said regarding the fact that two different words for love are used in this conversation. The first two times Jesus asks, He uses the word agape, which is a self-sacrificial love. Peter responds using the word phileo, which is a brotherly or friendship love. For the third question, they both use the word phileo.

Is this significant? Some say it is an indication that Jesus was asking Peter to declare a complete self-sacrificing love for Him and that Peter was unwilling to do so. Finally, Jesus asked Peter to at least love Him like a friend. On the other hand, the apostle John uses two different words with the same meaning three other times in this same account. John could be just interchanging words for variation. You get to decide which makes the most sense to you.

Most importantly here, is that at least this part of the conversation takes place among the other disciples. They all hear Jesus give Peter the responsibility to tend and shepherd the flock of Jesus Christ. They all hear Peter reinstated after his sin of disowning the Lord three times. This does not put Peter ahead of the other apostles, nor does it establish a line of succession. It lets the others know that Peter is still an apostle and charged with the same work they are.

In verses 18 and 19, Jesus issues a prophecy for Peter and gives a command. John gives a commentary on what Jesus said. *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.” 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!”*

To stretch out the hands meant crucifixion. Peter ministered about the next thirty years knowing that this was how he would die. But it also showed that he would never again disown Christ, even when faced with such a terrible execution. Jesus accounted for Peter’s whole life: he used to do whatever he wanted and the time will come when he will suffer crucifixion; but his life in between will be spent following Jesus.

When Jesus said, “*follow Me*”, it was a command for the rest of his life, but also immediately. Jesus and Peter set off and we learn that the apostle John was following after them. We can imagine that Peter was upset learning that he would die by crucifixion; a very unpleasant thought. So Peter asked what would happen to John. Jesus’ answer carries a lot of weight: *“If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!”*

Each of us has our own ministry. Each of us has work to do that God has ordained for us from before the beginning of time. It is our responsibility, once we become Christians, to complete that work. It is very tempting for us to look around at other people and wish we could do what they are doing. It is easy to do nothing with our skills because we envy the skills of others. This is sin. God has specifically given us what He wants us to have in order for us to do what He wants us to do. We each must pursue our work with dedication and contentment.

This also goes back to spreading the Gospel. We are each to spread the Gospel from whatever platform God has provided us and we are not to concern ourselves with what we cannot do. Most of us simply have the platform of the local people we come in contact with; especially our families. And the rest of the world? Perhaps God has blessed us with the means to support missionaries financially. If so, that is what we are to do. If we don’t have the means, don’t worry about it. Perhaps the most important thing we all have is the ability to pray. Jesus told us to ask the Father to send out harvesters; to pray for the spreading of the Gospel is a Biblical prayer, and according to the will of God.

God used the apostle John to spread the Gospel to the entire world and down through two millennia. None of us will ever accomplish that; but it doesn’t matter. We are to faithfully pursue the ministry God has given us; we spread the Gospel, and encourage and equip the saints. Even those who reject our offer of salvation through Christ will glorify God at the judgement. Regardless of the amount of fruit produced, if you are faithful in God’s service, you too will hear “*Well done, good and faithful servant*.”

Prayer

Lord God, thank You for Your word, the Bible. In it You provide sufficient evidence for us to believe in Jesus for salvation. We learn of His teaching and His signs, of His testimony, of how He is the one who has fulfilled Scripture. We learn of Your great love for us; how from before the beginning, You had devised a way by which we might be saved. Saved from judgement and punishment that we deserved.

Thank You that You have chosen to use us to bring You glory and advance Your Kingdom. Remind us, Lord, that we are to first follow what You write for us in Scripture. These are the things that are pleasing to You and by which our lives can most glorify You. Then, Lord, lead us into the special ministry You have for each of us. We can only discover this when it is revealed by You; give us the wisdom to see it and the courage to accomplish it.

Now I pray that You would provide each one here with an overflowing of the Holy Spirit, to give the power to minister in the way You have chosen. May these ministries be carried out, not in our own futile strength, but in strength of the Holy Spirit. In this way, they will accomplish what You desire, for Your glory.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen