

Jesus Recommissions His Disciples Part 5: Be Faithful to the End

sermonaudio.com

Gospel of John

By Ty Blackburn

Bible Text: John 21:20-25
Preached on: Sunday, July 31, 2016

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 21st chapter of John, probably the last time I say, "Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of John." We began six years ago almost, September of 2010. We've taken a number of breaks; it wasn't constant through that six years but the Gospel of John, what a treasure.

The title of the message is, once again the main title is "Jesus Recommissions His Disciples." We've said that that's basically the title for the 21st chapter that we have here, kind of a type of great commission that John includes in this epilogue that is chapter 21. This final words of the Gospel have for us, Jesus recommissioning his disciples and basically telling them to do four things. We've looked at the first three, though it has taken us four weeks to do it. We looked at the first three things and there's a fourth we're going to look at today. We saw that he was basically telling his disciples that, "After I'm gone, what I want you to do is fish for men." That's the first 14 verses where taking them back to the fishing expedition that they first met him on where he said, "Be fishers of men." He's calling them to fish for men and so all of us are called to do the same thing, to fish for men, to fish for people to follow Christ. The second thing we saw was that we're to feed his sheep. And then thirdly, last week, we looked at the call to, "Follow Me." Today we're going to look at the call to be faithful to the end. That's our subtitle this morning. So as Jesus recommissions his disciples, "Be Faithful to the End."

The first was generally to all, "Fish for men"; the second and third, "Feed My sheep," and "Follow Me," were, again, to all but they were specifically aimed at Peter first. Peter was in the spotlight, as it were, in those two commands. Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He's talking to Peter, Simon Peter. "Do you love Me? If you do, feed My sheep." Then when he said, "You follow Me!" he was pointing at Peter. Though it applies to all of us, it was specifically Peter that was in the spotlight on those second two commissions, "Feed My sheep," and, "Follow Me!" When you come to the fourth, be faithful to the end, the spotlight shifts. The spotlight moves from Peter to John, the author of this Gospel. It moves to the disciple whom Jesus loved. And though the last two commissions had been seen in what Jesus said to Peter and he said to Peter, "Feed My sheep," he said to Peter, "Follow Me," this commission is seen in what Jesus says about John, not directly to John. It's what he says about John that shows us this fourth

instruction, to be faithful to the end, and John in the truest sense exhibits this the most clearly because he lives a long life of faithfulness to Christ.

And I think that he shares these details and when we're looking at Scripture, we always want to look and think, "What is the purpose of the author?" And we know that God is the author of all of Scripture, every word is breathed out by God, but there is also God works through means, he works through human beings whom he is inspiring and they have a purpose and an agenda that the Lord is superintending to his purpose. And what is John's purpose in sharing some of the details he's going to share in verses 20 to 25? I think one of his purposes is to establish his credibility and thus to establish the credibility of the entire Gospel. He, in a sense, is solidifying his credentials as one who can speak authoritatively about Jesus Christ. He is likely dispelling some mistaken ideas about him or sort of rumors, negative thoughts. You know, Satan was always trying to raise up opposition to the true apostles to the true Gospel. We see this throughout the New Testament, you know, Paul is dealing with adversaries who were saying certain things about him. Though John doesn't explicitly say it, it's possible and I think probable based on the fact that he includes this last section here, that there may have been mistaken ideas or people raising questions, "Hey, why is John still alive? All the other apostles are dead," and had been dead, most of them, for about 20 years when John writes this Gospel. "Is it a case...has he really been faithful or has he compromised the Gospel?" So what John is essentially saying here and including what Jesus said about him when Jesus says, we're going to read in a moment, that, "What's it to you if I leave him until I come?" John is basically saying, "I have lived a long life because Jesus said I would. I have lived a long life because that's the path Jesus called me to. So my path is very different than Peter's path but it's not less important."

It's really a beautiful thing here too the contrast of Peter and John. Now, John loves Peter and, in fact, John has said some wonderful things about Peter and has given us some information here that really encourages us because he's the one Gospel writer who shows us Peter's full reinstatement. All four Gospel writers we noted when we talked about the denial of Jesus by Peter, that he denied Jesus three times, all four Gospels record that but John alone records this reinstatement, this threefold affirmation of Peter's love for Jesus. "Yes, Lord, you know that I love You," three times. So John is even blessing the memory of his dear friend, Peter, and they were close companions. We see it in the Gospels and we see it in Acts. But because they were close companions, it was easy for John to get lost in the shadow of his outspoken friend. In fact, when you look, there's only one place in the Gospels where we have John speaking directly. Now, we're told that James and John said some stuff but James was his older brother, I kind of think James was probably doing the talking then. In fact, in one place we're told that not only it wasn't John talking, it was his mother talking.

But Peter and John, you know, we read Acts 3, Acts 4, Peter and John go to the temple to pray and it would be like Peter and John saw the lame man and who talks? Peter continually. It's Peter who says, "Silver and gold have I none but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk." It's Peter who then preaches to the crowd. It's Peter who the next day before the assembly though it says both Peter and John

were filled with the Spirit, both Peter and John, they saw how learned they were, it's Luke in writing about the administration of the Holy Spirit, records what Peter said. So John is kind of always getting drowned out. I'm not saying this to say that he had an envy problem, I'm not saying that at all, but it could tempt skeptics who didn't want to believe his ministry to sort of minimize him. You know, John, he is a weaker apostle, a weaker disciple. Nothing could be further from the truth. I mean, one of the reasons John was hanging with Peter, Peter was hanging with John even though John was a lot younger, was John was an outstanding young man and he was able to run with the big boys, so to speak. You know, when you were a kid if the big boys wanted you to play football with them, unless they were just really hard up for an extra body, that could mean a lot. It could mean something good, you know, "Hey, the high school boys let me play football with them today. They threw me a pass." You know, that kind of stuff. Anyway. So John was...sorry, I digressed there. But anyway, maybe John played football with Peter. No, they would have played soccer, I guess. I don't know. No, they wouldn't have done that surely.

But John had a different path to walk. Jesus called him to follow a different path and his path is no less wonderful, no less important, and this is great encouragement for us because each of us, every single one of us, every single Christian who has ever lived, is called to walk a distinct path. Your path is different than mine. Mine is different than yours and ultimately there is no sense that one is better than the other because it's all determined by Jesus. What you want to hear him say when you get to heaven is, "Faithful. Well done, good and faithful servant." You want to hear him say that you had been faithful to do what you were called to do. So John in sharing this is telling us that his commission was to be faithful to the end, and that applies to us as well.

Now, let's read the Scriptures together. We'll begin reading at verse 15 all the way through verse 25. We're going to focus on verses 20 to 25. Verse 15,

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. 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?" 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.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your word and we ask that your Spirit might work in our hearts that which is pleasing to you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

John lived possibly into his 90s, died as an old man, and his message for us, the message that Jesus gives to him that he then exemplifies for us that every Christian is called to do, just like we're called to fish for men, like we're called to feed the sheep, like we're called to follow Jesus, we're called to be faithful to the end. So that's our theme: be faithful to the end. And the question is: how to be faithful to the end. And what does this text show us about how we can be faithful to the end along the course that God has called us to? There are going to be two major points, two main points in the message this morning. The first is, each is going to begin with the word "abide." The way that John was faithful to the end is how we are to be faithful to the end and the first thing we need to do is we need to abide in the love of Christ. Abide in the love of Christ. Verse 20, "Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved." What a way to think of yourself, the disciple whom Jesus loved. It's not about who I am or what I did, what the most significant thing about me is that Jesus loves me. Do you want to know who I am? Well, I can tell you some things but do you know what's really the most important is that Jesus Christ loves me. I have a relationship with the living Savior, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

So John has learned to abide in his love. He's the one who recorded for us the only place in the Gospels that we have the wonderful "I am the vine," and what does Jesus tell us in John 15:9? He says, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love." Now, that verse is so rich but what I want to do, there are two sub points to this first point. How do we abide in the love of Christ? We're called to abide in the love of Christ and there are two sub points and the first, what we need to do to abide in the love of Christ is first: reflect, this is the first sub point, reflect on the love of Christ. Reflect on the love of Christ.

Look what he says, I just had you turn back to John 15:9, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love." How does the Father love Jesus? He loves him all the time continually, whole-heartedly, with a singularity of focus. I mean, the Father delights in his Son. "This is My Son whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased." He says that out of heaven two different occasions in Jesus' ministry. "This is My Son

whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased." He always delights in the Son. He wants the Son to be honored even as he is honored and so Jesus says, "I love you the same way that the Father loves Me. Remain in that love. Bask in it. Reflect on it."

John had done that. In fact, there are five times in the Gospel he refers to himself, describes himself; he never uses his name and five times he describes himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." We see it there first in our text, chapter 21, verse 20, "Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved." Look back at verse 7 of chapter 21. This is when they're in the boat. Jesus has just told them to cast their nets on the right-hand side of the boat. They did. They catch a huge haul of fish. Verse 7, "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter." Chapter 20, verse 2, after Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and finds it empty she runs to Simon Peter, chapter 20, verse 2, "and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved." He refers to himself and the other disciple in the rest of that passage. Verse 3, "Peter and the other disciple went forth." Verse 4, "The two were running together; and the other disciple." He doesn't want to use his name but when he does try to describe himself more specifically, it is simply the disciple whom Jesus loved. Chapter 19, verse 26, on the cross we're told that standing at the cross in verse 25, "were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then saw His mother," verse 26, "and," who? "The disciple whom He loved." Then the first time he uses that phrase is in chapter 13, verse 23, at the Lord's supper. After Jesus has become, verse 21, "become troubled in spirit, and said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.' The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking." Verse 23, "There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved." It's just the way John refers to himself.

Now, it's interesting to note, I think when we put the evidence together of all the different passages in the New Testament, I think you could make a great argument and a compelling argument that Jesus and John were actually first cousins physically. Let me show you this. I just mentioned 19:26 and I just read from verse 25 as well. Look at 19, verse 25, "Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were," and you can understand this as either three ladies or four ladies and I think it's obvious it's four and I'll explain why. Look who are the ladies standing at the cross that John mentions, "His mother," Jesus' mother, "His mother's sister," thirdly, "Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene." Four ladies. Now I say it because you could take it as and just the grammar and syntax of the sentence could mean this, the context tells you, it could mean his mother, Jesus' mother, and his mother's sister who is also named Mary, the wife of Clopas. Do you see that? Appositionally, that's that phrase, but that would mean what? Somebody would have been able to say, "I'd like you to meet my sister Mary and my other sister Mary." Remember Darryl and Darryl? It would be like that. Jesus' grandmother was short on names, one daughter named Mary and another daughter named Mary.

So clearly it's not. It's four ladies and two of them are not named explicitly. Now, there happened to be a lot of Marys around, though: Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. But there were only three Marys there because it was Mary the mother of

Jesus and another lady who we don't know her name here, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. But he doesn't give the name of this woman and I would contend that that is actually John's mother, that his mother was Mary's sister and you put this together when you look at, say, Matthew 27:55-56 tells us that standing by the cross Mary, the mother of Christ, Mary Magdalene, and one of the person's mentioned is "the mother of the sons of Zebedee." You see, the mother of John and James was there at the cross too. So it just so happens that she, I think, is his...it's not 100% certain but I think that that's an interesting thing to consider, and if that were the case, they would have known each other from before but then when Jesus starts his ministry, he goes and finds his cousins and calls them to be his disciples.

Now, regardless of whether that's true or not, we know that John was a part of his inner circle. He had three closest friends. Jesus took three with him on the Mount of Transfiguration, not all 12. They were Peter, James and John, the two brothers, the sons of Zebedee. Peter, James and John. There were three that he asked to go with him into the garden of Gethsemane a little deeper. Remember, the disciples follow him in the garden but he asks three to come along with him as he goes off to pray. Who were those? Peter, James and John.

So he was in the inner circle of the disciples, of that circle, and I would contend he's also telling us here in chapter 21, turning back over to chapter 21, he's telling us that he was perhaps the closest of all. He was perhaps the closest friend of all to Jesus. Where do you get that? Look at chapter 21, verse 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?'" Now, this is where you've got to think about what you're reading. This is a parenthetical remark that kind of breaks the flow. We already know the disciple whom Jesus loved, he said it five times already. We know who he's talking about if we read carefully, but he adds to it, "Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; this is the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, 'Lord, who is the one who betrays You?'" He already told us about that in John 13, why bring it up now? That's the question you need to ask as you look at a passage, "What is God doing with this?" Why does John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit put that here? He's reminding us of what happened in John 13 which he had told us about earlier. He's alluding to it.

Turn back to chapter 13. We looked at it just a second ago because it's one of the places where we saw that phrase, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." And as I said, in verse 21 Jesus says, "He became troubled in spirit," he is in anguish. Though he is the perfect Son of God, never had any sin, tempted in every way, yet without sin, yet he felt the pressures of being a man. He was tempted and so he's overwhelmed, it says, in a sense. I mean, not overwhelmed in the sense of losing it, but he is deeply troubled. That's what that word means, "became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.'" Now, in this moment Jesus needs someone close to him. "The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved." There is one of the guys that is kind of leaning back on Jesus.

You know, the bosom, we don't use that word much, it's in the NAS, and John had used it again in chapter 21, the same word, but in the Greek what it means is "the hollow between the shoulders." So it means like your bosom is like say you're holding your child on your lap against you, or you're holding someone who is crying against you, or you're hugging someone for joy. You know, it's one of those things that it's a picture of closeness and communion. I remember not too long ago watching some account of one of the tragedies around the world, I can't remember which one it was, you know, all these different terrorist things, and seeing a woman who was weeping because of what had happened to someone she loved and what happened? A man she didn't know came up and gave her his bosom. It's something you don't think about, we've got to do it. This person is in anguish and so the place of consolation and comfort is right here.

So John was in the place of consolation and comfort in the moment of this great anguish. I think giving comfort and being comforted. He felt intensely the anguish of Jesus. He was sensitive to it in a way that even Peter wasn't. And he brings this up in chapter 21 to tell us about this. He's establishing again his credibility. "The reason you should listen to my Gospel is because I have been with Jesus. I have been in the bosom of Christ." In fact, I think he's alluding because his Gospel is unique and the qualities of it, it's a masterpiece.

Let me tell you something: every word of Scripture is a masterpiece. Every word of Scripture, I believe, is inspired by God in exactly the same way. It's perfect. You understand that. But God works through means and one of the things that he did was he let John live a long life and have a lot of time to reflect and pray and read the word, a lot more time than all the other apostles did and he came to a depth of theological understanding and comprehension that surpassed them all. Now you think about that. I'm not saying anything about....every...Matthew, Mark and Luke and John are all equally God's word and I'll tell you, if I was preaching through Matthew, Mark and Luke, I'd be telling you that's the best book too, okay? We know that because whenever you're in a passage of Scripture, the thing that you marvel at, it's kind of like what John says in verse 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." What he's saying is Scripture is so deep that you can go anywhere and you can just keep digging and digging and digging and mining treasure and treasure and treasure and finding food and food and food because that's the word of God. It's a living book.

Now that said, God still prepares his instruments. It's also a human book. It is a divine book 100%, yes, but it's also a human book and this is the glory of God. You know, he creates his instruments to be exactly what he wants them to be. When he wanted a book of Psalms, he created a David to write them and he used all of his life experiences to superintend all of that so that everything that David wrote inspiring him by the Spirit, he wrote the perfect word of God. The same thing with Isaiah and Hosea and certainly with all of the New Testament writers as well. So John has this growth in grace; this understanding of Jesus that has come from this closeness.

Now back to my point. That was a long parenthesis because I was actually trying to explain the issue of the phrase "bosom" and how John weaves things together in his Gospel in a way that is more sophisticated than the other Gospel writers because, again, he's been meditating and thinking and studying longer and it makes a difference. That should be a real source of encouragement. The older we get in Christ, the more opportunity we have to know more of Christ. And in heaven it's going to be that way. It's never going to get old. It's only going to get deeper and more delightful forever and here's the testimony to it right here, read John's Gospel and look at the glory of it.

Now, I said the bosom. He says it in chapter 21, verse 20, "leaned back on His bosom at the supper." In chapter 13, there are two words here and one of the words is the same word as we're going to find in chapter 1, verse 18, but I think he's making the connection, 21 connects to 13, verse 23, "There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved." That's a word that's also used in chapter 1, verse 18. What does chapter 1, verse 18 say? "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." I think he's making a connection like that. Of course, it's not in the same order. God is God, but he's saying, "Listen, I was in the bosom of Jesus and what I am telling you about to listen to." You know, people are foolish. There were people we know from 1 Corinthians that had a party spirit, "I'm of Paul. I'm of Apollos." There were probably people saying, "I'm of Peter." Not many people saying, "I'm of John." And John is saying, "Listen, I was there. I had a relationship with Jesus that you must not discount for your own eternal sake, the sake of your eternal soul."

But John had learned to abide in the love of Christ. He loved to be with Jesus and so at the Last Supper, he sees Jesus in anguish and he leans upon him, seeking comfort and comforting. In fact, John 21, the passage that we're in today, after they had been talking at the fire apparently, when Jesus started questioning Peter by the fire, the charcoal fire, they apparently get up and began to walk because verse 20, "Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them." What is John doing? Jesus got up and walked away, what did John do? "I'm going with Jesus." I bet the other guys were still by the fire. Peter, John and Jesus because Peter looks back and sees one of them and says, "Hey, what about him?" He didn't say, "What about them? What about him?"

He has learned to reflect on the love of Christ. He has learned to meditate on this amazing love that the Father has for his Son. It's now the love that Jesus has for us. This is how we're to live the Christian life. How are you faithful to the end? You learn to abide in the love of Christ by reflecting on the love of Christ and that, first of all, means you understand the love of Christ expressed in the Gospel. Every one of us who belong to Jesus, every one of us here needs to understand and accept the love of Christ made known in Jesus Christ and that is that God, who is holy, loved sinners like you and me. In spite of the fact that we didn't love him, God loved us, and he sent his Son into the world to be a propitiation as we read earlier. To be a propitiation, that is to bear the wrath, his holy wrath and justice against our sin. Someone had to pay and Jesus, his perfect Son, comes and lives a perfect human life. Spotless. Righteous. And then offers himself as a sacrifice of atonement. He experienced what God should have done to me. Jesus takes

that out of the way. What God should have done to you, Jesus takes it out of the way because of his great love. And if you believe that Jesus died for you on the cross and shed his blood for you and he rose again from the dead and you give yourself to him, then you enter into the love of Christ and what are you supposed to do? Never forget it. Reflect on it continually. Preach the Gospel to yourself every day.

But not only just in the general sense of what he's done in dying, the glorious death of Christ, but also in how he is loving you each day. I think that's what John is doing. He's thinking about the particulars of his own relationship with Jesus. He had a close relationship with Christ in his earthly walk. "I was there at the Last Supper and I leaned upon him and it was me they asked." I mean, you see, Peter knew John had the best relationship because Peter says, "John, John, ask him who it is." Peter didn't say, this is one time Peter didn't jump out. The moment was too serious. "I need to go to the guy closest to Jesus and that's John. Ask him, John. Ask him the question." That's why that's here in chapter 21.

John is asserting, "Listen, I had a close relationship with the blessed Savior," and he reflects on that and so as we learn to reflect on his love in our lives, how has he loved you as you've walked through your life? Circumstances are hard. Well, you've got to learn....you know, he loves you the way the Father loved him. How did the Father love him? Did the Father make Jesus' life easy? He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief so why are you judging by what your outer circumstances how he loves you? He loved his Son in the midst of all of that pain and anguish and he delighted in him. So what is Jesus doing to you? And how has he loved you through the suffering and difficulty of your life? That's the question.

Think about that, the specificity of his love. He loves each one of us. He knows us by name. He's like a shepherd who knows his sheep individually by name. We're told that shepherds have sometimes special calls for each sheep and they know each sheep. Palestinian shepherds, it's not like American shepherds, you know, they just put them in a big field and then send out stuff to feed them, or Australians that have the dogs chasing them. The Palestinian shepherd, the shepherd would lead them to pasture and the shepherd would know who his sheep were and his sheep knew the shepherd. He knows one is missing. Jesus knows us like that. In fact, one of my favorite verses in Revelation is Revelation 2:17 where it says to the saints in Pergamum, "If you overcome," Jesus says, "you will receive a stone with a name written on it which only you and I will know. No one else will know the contents of that except you and Me." What a glorious Savior.

So reflect on his love. Abide in the love of Christ, you reflect on his love, and then you respond to the love of Christ, the second sub point. We're under the first major point, abide in the love of Christ, how to be faithful to the end, abide in the love of Christ. You do that by reflecting on the love of Christ and responding to the love of Christ. He followed Jesus. He says in John 15:10, "abide in My love." How did Jesus abide? He said, "abide in My love," and how do you do that? "Just as the Father loved Me," John 15:9, "I have also loved you; abide in My love." That's the command. Verse 10, "If you

keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

How do you abide in his love? You reflect on his love for you and you respond to it. How do you respond to it? You obey. You obey him. That's how you express your love for him. This is why John would say in 1 John 2, he would say in verse 6, "the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. By this we have come to know Him," verse 3, "if we keep His commandments." You say you know him, well, keep his commandments. You say you love him, obey him, follow him, do what he says, and you ought to look more like him as you go along. And that's exactly what was true of John. He looked more like Jesus. In fact, the apostle of love, I told you that's his name that he was known by in the first century, and you know, these misunderstandings, he wasn't a girlie guy like this silliness of da Vinci's painting. You know, that's just nonsense. It's misreading the Bible. John was not anything like that. John was a manly man. He was a fisherman, for crying out loud. He wasn't doing some little thing like me, I don't get my hands dirty when I'm doing my work generally, not physically. John did, and when you fish, you get dirty. He was a tough guy. In fact, what was his nickname? He and James were known as the sons of thunder. The sons of thunder. John, I said he only speaks one time by himself in the Gospel and do you know when that is? It's in Mark 9 and what he says to Jesus is, "Hey, Lord, we found a guy that was casting out demons in Your name and I told him to stop it." Basically, I'm paraphrasing slightly. "Because he wasn't with us." And Jesus says, "If he's not against us, he's for us. John, your spirit is all wrong in that. You don't know what you're talking about."

But, you see, he's not weak and timid, he just happens to always be around people who are talking out quicker. I mean, John would be ready to say something but he never can because Peter beats him to it. Luke's Gospel, we see that in chapter 9, verses 52 to 56, he and his brother James, they're going through Samaria. Jesus says, "Go ahead to this village and prepare a place for us," and the Samaritans don't want him to come in and John goes back to report what the Samaritans did and he said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven on that village?" Not exactly a timid, easygoing kind of guy. The son of thunder who wanted to call down fire on that village became the disciple, the apostle of love. How did that happen? He grew in grace. He abided in love and he became more and more like his Savior. His weakness became his strength and that's why he can speak like he does about love.

He also is someone who grew in humility. In fact, turn over to Mark 10. I mentioned earlier that his mother speaks. Well, let me show you. I'll tell you this passage...look at Mark and then we'll look at Matthew. This is one of the times James and John come up to Jesus saying, verse 35, "James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, 'Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.'" It's always a bad thing, "Hey, dad, will you do something for me? Do you promise?" "What? What is it?" "He said to them, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' They said to Him, 'Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.'" Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking.'" Now, down to verse 41, "Hearing this, the ten began

to feel indignant with James and John." The other ten are indignant and angry that James and John are trying to pick out the best spots in the kingdom and when you read Matthew's account of this same thing in chapter 20, verse 20, we see that the mother was also there. Their mother came up to Jesus saying, "Yes, let them sit on the right hand and on the left hand." These aren't exactly timid and meek guys. They're saying, "Hey, we've got dibs for the place right beside You in heaven." And you read his Gospel and he never mentions his name. Some 50 years later he writes this Gospel. He doesn't say, "John, the son of Zebedee." He simply says, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." When you read that he and Peter are running to the tomb in chapter 20, it's just "the other disciple. The other disciple. The other disciple."

He doesn't speak of James's name in this chapter 21. Back to John, our text, John 21. When he mentions the names of the apostles in verse 2, the disciples that are there at the Sea of Tiberias, he says, "Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus," careful to make sure we know, "Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee." He doesn't even mention James's name either. They were all about being first in line, "We want, hey, can we have the seating? Can we have our nameplate over it so nobody gets in it?" John's seat. James's seat. And when he mentions the ladies at the cross, isn't it interesting he doesn't name his mother by name. The mother of Jesus and his mother's sister.

It's evidence of just a growing in humility. I'm not saying that you can never say your name or anything like that, but obviously the Lord had done something in him because it had been a struggle for him. He wanted to be first and the Lord had taught him to be last and he's the only Gospel writer that tells us about the words of John the Baptist. He's the only one who records for us what John the Baptist said. What did John the Baptist say near the end of his ministry? "He must increase, I must decrease." John understood humility. He was growing in the love of Christ, growing in the grace of God. He was abiding in the love of Christ and that's what God wants you and me to do. If you're going to be faithful to the end, you have to abide in the love of Christ. You've got to learn to just bask in the love of Jesus, reflect on the love of Jesus continually, and respond to the love of Jesus continually.

Reflecting on it, the way that we overcome sin, how do you do it? It's not so much just fighting against sin. There are things that we do to fight strategically against sin. We learn the truth that relates to our sin problem, but one of the foundational things that fuels us is we reflect on the love of Jesus. "Even as I struggle with this, Jesus loves me. He loves me as I am and he's done what's necessary to take this away." You reflect on that and that makes us want to respond to it. We love him because he first loved us so we feel this temptation, our besetting sin in which we continually struggle with, we feel it, it overwhelms us, what do you do? Well, you learn Scripture about that but you also fix your foundation of your heart upon the Gospel. "He loves me in spite of myself. Jesus has called me by name. I am a disciple whom Jesus loves. He loves me even though I'm struggling with this. He knows all about this and he still loves me and he's allowing me even to go through this difficulty of overcoming sin." One of the reasons he's doing that because we would all like, wouldn't we like when it's an area that you really struggle

with, don't you wish that you could just read a Bible verse and it would be gone forever, the sin struggle? Don't you just wish that? And the crazy thing is there are a lot of Christian teachers who act like that's a possibility but that's not the way God works. God has never worked that way. He doesn't work in such a way that he just takes care of something so you never need him again. His way is to allow us to come to places of increasing dependence and need so that we learn to cling to him and hold on to him.

So he allows these struggles in our lives and we need to fight sin, hate sin, run from it but the way that we do it is, "He loves me." And even this temptation that has come up, where did it come from? Sometimes we make some headway and we think we're past that now, "I've made such ground," and then suddenly it comes in again out of nowhere. What do you do? Don't get discouraged. Don't panic. Don't think everything's lost. That's what Satan is lying to you at the time. "Your flesh, it's not good. It doesn't work." Lies. Lies. Lies. What do you do? Put your eyes on Jesus. Fix your eyes upon Jesus so that you can run the course that is set before you. You fix your eyes on the author and perfecter of your faith and realizing that even the temptation has made me do what? It's made me look to Jesus and doesn't that make you love a Savior who knew you needed that so that you would do what? Look at him. He's not interested in just fixing you, he's interested in you knowing him and loving him and treasuring him every moment of every day from now until glory and then every day after that. He is so much more wonderful than we would design a God to be and he is so much more worthy of full surrender and complete delight in his presence.

John had learned that. Abide in the love of Christ. Abide in the love of Christ. Do you know the love of Christ personally? Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior? You can today. You can repent and place your faith in Christ. Put all of your hope in him and you can be loved by the God of the universe who will love you with a perfect love. Your life is not going to be easy. It's going to be better than that. God's going to use the circumstances, the path that he calls you to, to make you love him more and more and to see that he is everything that you ever desired. That's the wonder of who God is.

Another token of his goodness is that we have one more week in the Gospel of John. I just covered one point and we had two.

Let's pray together.

Father, we marvel and we just stand amazed at who you are and what you have done. We know that we are completely unworthy of your love. We remain unworthy of your love and yet you are a God who delights to love. You're also a God who is holy and who will judge those who do not repent and do not respond to your love. And time is short and they need to repent, they need to love you. They need to not run from this love. But it is so wonderful to see that behind everything in our lives is a God who is inviting us into the love, a love relationship that is the essence of everything that we need. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for making yourself known so beautifully and wondrously in Jesus. Lord Jesus, we thank you for doing everything necessary to save us and we pray that you would work in every heart in this room; those that don't know you, bring them to

*yourself, and those that do know you, Lord, let us know you more. Let us love you more.
We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*