

EXALTING CHRIST . . . THE LAMB OF GOD

“ . . . And What about This Man?”

John 21:17–23

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Often, one of the most impactful parts of a written work is the epilogue—the closing thoughts that summarize what has been previously declared. John 21 provides just such a powerful closing word from John, who personally (and intimately) reflected on Peter's colossal failure and subsequent return to Jesus.

Yet, the apostle John pointed out that Peter still faltered, focusing on his doubts rather than his faith. What things in your life cause you at times to falter and doubt what you once firmly believed? Take a moment to ask the Lord to gently and graciously remind you again of your great salvation. Ask Him to remove your doubts and replace them with trust.

Quotable

*God doesn't save us,
nor deal with us,
nor will He reward
us on a comparative
basis—He relates
to us individually,
one on one.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

John 21 forms an epilogue to John's gospel. And like any well-written ending, it is full of rich meaning. In each section—loving and serving (John 21:17), living and dying (21:18–19), lingering and following (21:19–23)—we see that Jesus taught Peter a significant lesson the disciple needed to learn.



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Observation: Jesus' Encounter with the Disciples by the Sea

Observation, the process of looking closely at the details of a passage of Scripture, helps you start to understand the setting and key ideas. In the following sections, we'll observe how Jesus drew in close to Peter and helped him understand his personal need to focus his priority on following his Lord.

Loving and Serving—John 21:17

In John 21:17, Jesus asked Peter one final time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” What was Peter’s reaction to this third question? What emotion did Peter feel?

Jesus made a clear connection between Peter’s devotion to Him and his new mission in life. What was that connection?

Living and Dying—John 21:18–19

As Jesus continued to speak intimately with Peter, He revealed to him something significant about his future. What did Jesus reveal?



What contrast did Jesus use to illustrate the cost of Peter’s following Him?

Why did Jesus use the illustration contrasting Peter’s youth with his older years? What did Jesus say would be the ultimate purpose of Peter’s death?



Interpretation: Lingering and Following—John 21:19–23

In this final, intimate encounter with Jesus, Peter is forced to decide if he’s willing to go to the next level in his relationship with his Savior. Bible scholar and commentator Dr. Hall Harris brings a helpful perspective to the significance of this final conversation between Jesus and Peter:

After these words to Peter concerning his martyrdom, Jesus said to him in summary, “Follow me.” Peter was to follow Jesus first in discipleship and later in death, as Jesus had just foretold.¹

Read back through John 21:18–22. Jesus seemed to be inviting Peter into a deeper commitment and focus in this conversation. What do you think Jesus had in mind for Peter?



Jesus was urging Peter toward a continual, unswerving commitment to follow Him. Why did Peter’s question about John evoke such a strong response from Jesus?



Correlation: How Does It Relate?

Correlation is the step in the *Searching the Scriptures* process that uses related passages of Scripture to support your interpretation. John wasn’t the only New Testament writer who held a deep conviction about the significance of sacrifice in following Christ; dying to self and proclaiming the power of the cross became a foundation for Paul’s preaching too:

For Christ didn’t send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power. The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.

(1 Corinthians 1:17–18)

In what ways does Paul’s emphasis on the power of Christ’s crucifixion help us understand the meaning of His conversation with Peter about following Him even to the point of death?

How can the reality of the cross lose its power in our lives when we insist on looking back and worrying about our past failure as Peter did?



How does our continually dying to ourselves unleash the power of Christ in our lives?

Why does dying to our own will and selfish ambition appear as foolishness to those who don't believe (1 Corinthians 1:18)?



Application: Moving Forward in Forgiveness and Grace

John's epilogue about Jesus' final conversation with Peter reveals several important applications for all believers.

1. *Past failures can be forgiven in love . . . so don't quit.* How often do we allow our failures to hinder us from experiencing the freedom in Christ to serve Him in the future? What about your past is keeping you from serving Jesus in freedom and joy? How can you allow His gracious love and forgiveness to set you free?
2. *Present lifestyle is no guarantee of the future . . . so don't predict.* Could there be ways you are presuming on the Lord and on your future based on what you are experiencing today? How might you view your future with a more Christ-honoring attitude?



3. *Personal obedience is an individual matter . . . so don't compare.* Like Peter, perhaps you're more concerned about someone else's level of obedience than your own. Are you struggling with jealousy or envy regarding someone's success? Is your focus on someone else's lack of commitment keeping you from committing to what Christ is calling you to do? Write your thoughts here.
4. *People will understand God's message . . . so don't be afraid.* Often our fear of the response of others to the gospel keeps us from sharing it freely. Do you feel afraid to share what you believe? Are you resisting sharing your commitment to follow Jesus with your family because you fear their response? Ask the Lord for boldness and to open the hearts of those who need to hear of His grace. Close your study by writing a prayer to the Lord as if He had been addressing you as He addressed Peter.



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, Father, for gently reminding me that my obedience is between You and Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help me decide each day to take up my cross and follow Him with passion and resolve. Don't let me waver. Deliver me from fear and doubt. In Jesus' powerful name, amen!

ENDNOTE

1. “Exegetical Commentary on John 21,” *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Bible.org, accessed August 31, 2018, <https://bible.org/seriespage/exegetical-commentary-john-21>.



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Tools for Digging Deeper



Exalting Christ . . .
The Lamb of God:
A Study of John 15–21 —
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Following Christ . . .
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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