



The Epilog

John 21

The Epilog... Do you remember the Streets of San Francisco. It still gets re-runs on Sat TV, it starred Karl Malden and Michael Douglas. One of the features of that show was that it always had the Epilog without the "ue" because it was an American program (without the "me"). Whatever happened, the Epilog always had a happy end as the two Californian detectives solved the case and banged up the criminals to their just desserts.

The epilogue is the bit that comes after the main story because the author wants to add something that helps us wrap up the story. Earlier today we recalled the resurrection account of the apostle John. In many ways John's gospel is unique as John emphasises his eyewitness testimony, particularly of the post-resurrection period. John 21 is often called the Epilogue because John seems to wrap his testimony up at the end of chapter 20 and then gives us this unique account. John seems to have written it for a reason beyond what he had planned to say because as it says in verse *John 21:21 (TEV) When Peter saw him, he asked Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" 22 Jesus answered him, "If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" 23 So a report spread among the followers of Jesus that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say he would not die; he said, "If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you?"* It seems that some were saying that John had been spared until the Lord returns because he said: *"If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you?"* Because this was said to Peter and John by Jesus post-resurrection, John puts the story as an epilogue to make it clear that Jesus had not predicted that he would be alive until Jesus returned but that it was not Peter's (or anyone else's business for that matter) what would happen to John; that was to be according to Jesus' will. We know John did live until old age and probably died of old age too.

So that tells us why the epilogue was written but in doing so, John tells us something about the relationship between Jesus His disciples, particularly Peter by just relating it. John focuses as he usually does in his writings on relationships.

Let me start by summing it up: The risen Christ brings newness of life and newness of relationships.

This comes out of this very personal passage that John relates. We know from the other gospels that Jesus had told the disciples to go into Galilee so we find seven of the eleven disciples going fishing. Why? It probably wasn't anything to do with them losing their faith as some suggest. It was just that they needed to do something whilst waiting for Jesus in Galilee. They had already met Him twice so I expect they were looking forward with expectancy to what Jesus was going to do next.

So what about the newness of newness of life and newness of relationships that come in this chapter?.

◆ A New Relationship

Is this story just a bit familiar? If you know your gospels it is. Turn to Luke chapter

Luke 5:1 (TEV) One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. 2 He saw two boats pulled up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets. 3 Jesus got into one of the boats--it belonged to

Simon--and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd. 4 When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Push the boat out further to the deep water, and you and your partners let down your nets for a catch." 5 "Master," Simon answered, "we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets."

6 They let them down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break. 7 So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full of fish that the boats were about to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, "Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!" 9 He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. 10 The same was true of Simon's partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." 11 They pulled the boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus.

Familiar stuff from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Luke's account of the call of four the disciples who were there in John's epilogue involved a similar circumstance - some instructions as to where they should drop their nets. Why did they follow Jesus on either occasion? Maybe they thought He had noticed something they had not - perhaps they thought He had spotted the shoal of fish on the shoreline as far as they were concerned? Whatever, on each occasion they followed His instructions and had a huge catch of fish.

When they first saw Jesus here in John 21, they didn't know who He was because they didn't recognise Him - he was on the shore and it was first light. So how did they in the end realise it was Jesus - because they had seen it all before some three years before. And for John the penny dropped. *"It is the Lord!"*

Peter was in the water and straight to the shore without getting his clothes on. People often contrast Peter's response now with what he had said days before about never denying Jesus and comment on how penitent and ashamed Peter must have felt. That's true, but I would suggest by this day that wasn't the issue here.

He had already met Jesus twice as did the others and they knew that they were forgiven and accepted. More interesting is the contrast between this time and the previous time they had a huge catch. Look what Peter said then: *8 When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, "Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!" 9 He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. 10 The same was true of Simon's partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon,*

And we can see that the feeling was mutual with the other disciples. As he saw the power of God unleashed on nature, a part of nature they were astonished and for Peter as he looked into the act of a holy God, he knew that he was sinful and not fit to be in His presence - , *"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"*

What a difference three years and one resurrection made! Peter sees this amazing miracle again and rather than want Jesus to go away, he jumps in the water so quickly that he forgets to put his clothes on! He couldn't wait to see Jesus. Why? Because even though he had failed as a disciple in boasting that he would never deny Jesus and then did, he knew that he was forgiven. He had met the risen Christ twice, he now understood what it was all about and he was overjoyed to see Him. He wanted to be in Jesus presence rather than being to ashamed of his sinfulness that he wanted Jesus to depart.

Do you feel you have failed Jesus and feel inadequate? Maybe you feel negative about your faith? Jesus died so that you could be a child of God. He died to deal with your sin, failure and inadequacy. Like Peter, why not rush with excitement to Jesus this evening because he is the one that picks us up when we have failed in life, when we have failed in His service and we find acceptance. Recently I preached on Romans 8:1 - *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* The scene of an excited Peter jumping over the side of His boat to reach Jesus tells us that quite simply. The man who had failed so badly knew forgiveness. Their relationship was renewed because of the forgiveness that Jesus brings.



A New Commission

The Risen Christ brings newness of life and newness of relationships. For Peter it was a new role. At the first big catch situation Jesus said *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."* For them it was a change of occupation from being fishermen to fishing for men - being evangelists and in the gospels the disciples were no strangers to performing miracles, driving our demons and preaching the kingdom.

In the world of the raised Christ I guess this remained true, but we see Peter now gaining a specific role. Jesus asks Peter three times if he loved him? A sensible thing you may say because after all it wasn't long since Peter had failed Jesus. And you can see Peter getting impatient because Jesus is asking the same question. But look more closely. Jesus gives three commands. The NRSV gives them in better detail than the Good News:

John 21:15 (NRSV) 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." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."

16 A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."

17 He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."

Feed my lambs (bosko)

Tend my sheep (poimaino)

Feed my sheep (bosko)

Look carefully. Lambs are babies, they need basic nourishment and that isn't difficult. A lamb is helpless and needs to be nurtured. Peter had this charge first. It was the job the children of the shephard had because it wasn't hard work. But in the second command he is called to be a Pastor – the shepherd. He is called to tend the sheep. The word for sheep here is *probatia* (probation) and Peter is called to look after them – tend them – make sure they don't run off. The third makes it go even further. He is called to feed the probatia - more demanding than feeding the lambs or tending the sheep. Someone of maturity and experience was needed to deal with older sheep who were larger, wilful and more complex. And who was that man? Peter. The one that just two or three weeks earlier had denied his Lord.

No longer was he to be just a fisher of men, but a keeper of sheep and he took an important role in the development of the early church. it doesnt matter what our past is, even our recent past - God can still use us for His glory if we desire to follow Him.

But there's more about Peter, because his attitude had changed. Rather than the bold and brash of a few weeks earlier, his attitude is altogether more humble here. Look at the words again.

"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus uses the standard word *agapeo* for love here. This is the self denying love that took Jesus to the cross. But Peter replies with the word *phileo* - it means love but is not as intense as *agapeo*. It was the same the second time Jesus asked him. There is significance here. No longer the brash man. He was a man who could not say *"I'll love in the way You have"* - because he had bottled out and the answer shows humility - he loves but knows his limitations. By the third time when Jesus says , *"Simon son of John, do you love me?"* He's using *phileo* too. In His grace Jesus recognises Peter's limitations but still gives him the charge to feed His sheep.

We have a gracious Lord. He is a risen Christ who calls us to live His risen life and serve Him. We have

our calling like Peter did.

But maybe you feel compromised by your own inadequacy. When Jesus asks you **"Do you love me"** then you do say you love Him but like Peter you are not sure you could go quite as far in showing your love for Jesus as He showed for you.

Then you are in good company, so was Peter but it did not disqualify him for service. He was still a man who went forward in the power of the Holy Spirit to make a huge impact. And his love didn't stay at phileo - it ended as agape. As Jesus predicted, Peter was taken by others and he paid the price for being a follower of Christ.

Jesus wants to use us where we are and to take us where He wants us to go. Are we going to be like a humbled Peter and follow Jesus with a devotion that extends God's kingdom. I believe we are all called to it.

A New Destiny

In one sense Peter, John and the other disciple's destiny had already been mapped. But having heard of his, Peter sees John following (who had heard everything) and asks Jesus about his destiny. It wasn't surprising as Peter knew of the love Jesus had for John. Quite why Peter asked it we are not told. Was it just brotherly interest or was it based on those old rivalries between the disciples about who was going to be the greatest? We don't know but Jesus gives the reply: "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

In other words, Jesus is saying "what I do with him is none of your business, yours is to follow Me!

Isn't it so true that we so often are so preoccupied with other Christians that we forget about our own command to follow. You know. We are concerned to criticise others and are concerned with what they do, but we never look at ourselves to examine and reflect on whether we are following Him as we should.

The risen Christ is wanting us to live the risen life He's given us, not someone else's.

So what have we learned this evening?

The risen Christ brings newness of life and newness of relationships.

He brings us back into relationship with Him despite our failures
He commissions us to serve Him as He has called us
Our service is our responsibility

As we continue forward as a church let's put aside past inadequacies and failures in our life which may be holding us back and go forward in His forgiveness and risen life to bring Him glory and extend His kingdom in the place He has called us.

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