**Worksheet #22: John 21:1–25**

**Summary:** Serving as an epilogue to John’s gospel, John 21 pairs with the prologue in John 1:1–18 to form a symmetrical “frame” around the main narrative, providing thematic unity. Although this “second ending” may seem redundant after the apparent conclusion in 20:30–31, it serves several necessary functions. For instance, the passage resolves the seemingly competitive relationship between Peter and the beloved disciple while also providing a smoother ending than would an abrupt stop immediately after the confrontation with Thomas in 20:26–29.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The chapter records three incidents from a day of fishing in Galilee (*cf.* 6:1, where the “Sea of Tiberius” equals Galilee). On this day, Jesus appears to his disciples in the third post-resurrection appearance to the disciples recorded in this gospel (21:14).

A key figure in this chapter is Simon Peter, prominent in all four gospels as outspoken leader among the disciples. Here, it is Peter who initiates the fishing expedition (21:3); it is Peter who first responds when the disciples recognize the Lord (21:7); it is Peter who drags in the abundant catch (21:11); and it is Peter with whom the Lord carries on most of the recorded conversation (21:15–19). Three times the Lord asks Peter to affirm his love, which serves to rehabilitate Peter after the three denials (18:12–27).

Throughout the chapter, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” is right behind Peter at each moment. He appears in the list of disciples as one of “the sons of Zebedee” (21:2); he identifies Jesus on the shore (21:7); and he becomes the primary focus in the closing remarks (21:20–25). In an important statement, he identifies himself as the author of the gospel and an eyewitness of “many other things that Jesus did” not recorded elsewhere (21:24–25).

**Abbreviated Outline[[2]](#footnote-2) (current passage in bold):**

1. INTRODUCTION: THE WORD MADE FLESH (1:1-18)
2. THE BOOK OF SIGNS: THE SIGNS OF THE MESSIAH (1:19-12:50)
3. *The Forerunner and the Coming of the Messiah (1:19-51)*
4. *The Cana Cycle: Jesus’ Inaugural Signs and Representative Conversations (2:1-4:54)*
5. *The Festival Cycle: Additional Signs amidst Mounting Unbelief (5-10)*
6. *Final Passover: Climactic Sign, the Raising of Lazarus, and Other Events (11-12)*
7. THE BOOK OF EXALTATION: PREPARING THE NEW MESSIANIC COMMUNITY AND THE PASSION OF JESUS (13-20)
8. *The Cleansing and Instruction of the New Covenant Community, including Jesus’ Final Prayer (13-17)*
9. *The Passion Narrative (18–19)*
10. *Jesus’ Resurrection and Appearances, Commissioning of Disciples (20:1–29)*
11. *Concluding Purpose Statement (20:30–31)*
12. **EPILOGUE: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF PETER AND THE BELOVED DISCIPLE (21)**
13. ***Jesus’ Third Appearance, to Seven Disciples in Galilee (21:1–14)***
14. ***Jesus and Peter (21:15–19)***
15. ***Jesus and the Disciple Jesus Loved (21:20–25)***

Interpretation: *Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.*

1. How many indications can you find of God’s sovereign oversight in the disciples’ fishing excursion (21:1–13)? What seems to have been the purpose of divine intervention in this event?
2. Notice the awkwardness as the disciples come ashore (21:12). Why does John point this out to us? What does it tell us about this moment?
3. Compare John 21:15–17 with 1 Peter 5:1–3. How did Peter understand his mission, and what does that mean for others entrusted with the care of God’s flock?
4. Why is it significant that Jesus predicted the manner of Peter’s death in 21:18–19?
5. Compare John 21:24 with 1 John 1:1–3 and 4:14ff. Why is it significant for the author of this gospel to have been an eyewitness?

Application: *Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today.*

1. What does this passage tell us about Jesus? How does it help us to understand “his place in the sweep of redemptive history”?[[3]](#footnote-3)
2. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?
3. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?

Review: *Take a few moments to look back through your study of John’s gospel.*

1. What are some passages/topics in John that you found to be particularly challenging?
2. What are some passages/topics in John that you found particularly helpful?

1. In addition, there is no textual evidence for John's gospel ever being copied without the epilogue. Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 583–586. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2009), 307–308. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)