

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 71

CHRIST AND PETER

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Transcript

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John 21:15-25

The following is an Analysis of our final section:— 1. The threefold question, verses. 15, 17. 2. The threefold reply, verses 15, 17. 3. The threefold commission, verses 15, 17. 4. Christ's prophecy concerning Peter's death, verses 18, 19. 5. Peter's question concerning John, verses 20, 21. 6. Christ's reply, verses 22, 23. 7. John's final testimony, verses 24, 25. The final section of this truly wondrous and most blessed Gospel contains teaching greatly needed by our fickle and feeble hearts. The central figures are the Lord and Simon Peter, and what we have here is the sequel to what was before us in chapter thirteen, the Lord washing the feet of His disciples. There, too, Peter was to the fore, and that because he occupies the position of a representative believer; that is, his fall and the cause of it, his restoration and the means employed for it, illustrate the experiences of the Christian and the provisions which Divine grace has made for him. Before we take this up in detail let us add that, just as in the first part of John 21 we have, in symbol, the confirmation of the calling of the Apostles to be fishers of men, so in this second section we have the final establishment of the one to whom the keys of the kingdom were entrusted. The first thing recorded in connection with Peter's fall is our Lord's words to him before it took place: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31, 32). This is very solemn and very blessed. Solemn is it to observe that the Lord prayed not to keep Peter from failing. In suffering His apostle to fall, the Lord's mercy comes out most signally, for that fall was necessary in order to reveal to Peter the condition of his heart, to show him the worthlessness of self-confidence, and to humble his proud spirit. The need for Satan's "sifting" was at once made manifest by the Apostle's reply, "And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" (Luke 22:33). "This is a condition which not only exposes one to a fall, but from which the fall itself may be the only remedy. We have to learn that when we are weak only are we strong; and that Christ's strength is made perfect in our weakness. Peter's case is a typical one; and thus it is so valuable for us. "The Lord Himself, in such a case as this, cannot pray ("cannot" morally do so—A.W.P.) that Peter may not fall, but that he may be

'converted' by it, turned from that dangerous self-confidence to consciousness of his inability to trust himself, even for a moment. Here Satan is foiled and made to serve the purpose of that grace which he hates and resists. He can overpower this self-sufficient Peter; but only to fling him for relief upon his omnipotent Lord. Just as the 'messenger of Satan to buffet' Paul (2 Cor. 12), only works for what he in nowise desires, to repress the pride so ready to spring up in us, and which the lifting up to the third heaven might tend to foster. Here there had been no fall, and all was over-ruled for fullest blessing; in Peter's case, on the other hand, Satan's effort would be to assail the fallen disciple with suggestions of a sin too great to be forgiven—or, at least, for restoration to that eminent place from which it would be torture to remember he had fallen. What he needed to meet this with was faith; and this, therefore, the Lord prays, might not fail him. "How careful is He to revive and strengthen in the humbled man the practical confidence so needful! The knowledge of it all given him beforehand—of the prayer made for him—of the exhortation addressed to him when restored, to 'strengthen his brethren'—all this would be balm indeed for his wounded soul; but even this was not enough for his compassionate Lord. The first message of His resurrection had to be addressed specially 'to Peter' (Mark 16:7), and to 'Cephas' himself He appears, before the Twelve (1 Cor. 15:5). Thus He will not shrink back when they are all seen together. When we find him at the sea of Tiberias, it is easy to realize that all this has done its work. Told that it is the Lord who is there on the shore, he girds on his outer garment, and casts himself into the sea, impatient to meet his Lord. But now he is ready, and only now, for that so necessary dealing with his conscience, when his heart is fully assured" (Numerical Bible). When the Savior washed the feet of Peter, he said, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). This cleansing, as we saw, has to do with the maintenance of a "part with" Christ (John 13:8). It tells of the Lord's gracious work in restoring a soul which has become defiled and out of communion with Him; the "water" figuring the means which He uses, the Word. Now, at that time Peter had not fallen, and therefore he perceived not the significance of the Savior's (anticipatory) act. But now he is to learn in his conscience the holy requirements of Christ, and experience the purifying power of the Word and the recovering grace of our great High Priest. In John 21:9 we learn that the first thing which confronted the Apostle when he joined the Lord on the shore was "a fire of coals," an expression found again in John's Gospel only in John 18:18. There we read of "a fire of coals" in the priest's palace, and that Peter stood by its side with Christ's enemies "warming himself." It was there that he had denied his Master. How this "fire of coals" by the sea of Tiberias would prick his conscience: a silent preacher, but a powerful one, nevertheless! Christ did not point to it, nor say anything about it; that was unnecessary. Next we read of the seven disciples partaking of the food which the Savior had provided, showing that the Lord's attitude toward Peter had not changed. The meal being over, He now turned and addressed Simon. It was there by the side of this "fire of coals" that the Lord entered into this colloquy with him, the purpose of which was to bring the Apostle to judge himself, for "fire" ever speaks of judgment. "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" (John 21:15). Mark carefully how the Lord began: not with a reproach, still less a word of condemnation, nor even with a "Why did you deny Me?" but "Lovest thou me more than these?" Yet, observe that the Lord did not now address him as "Peter," but "Simon son of Jonas." This is not without its significance. "Simon" was his original name, and stands in contrast from the new name which the Lord had given him: "And when Jesus beheld him, he said, thou art Simon the son of Jonas: that shalt be called Cephas (Peter), which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42). The way in which the Lord now addressed His disciple intentionally called into question the "Peter." Mark how that in Luke 22:31 the Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Christ would here remind him of his entire past as a natural man, and especially that his fall had originated in "Simon" and not "Peter!" On only one other occasion did the Lord address him as "Simon son of Jonah," and that

was in Matthew 16:17, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon son of Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." But note that the Lord is quick to add, "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom." Thus this first word of the Lord to His disciple in John 21:15 was designed to pointedly remind him of his glorious confession, which would serve to make him the more sensitive of his late and awful denial. "Lovest thou me more than these?" This was still more searching than the name by which Christ had addressed His Apostle. He would not heal Peter's wound slightly, but would work a perfect cure; therefore, does He as it were, open it afresh. The Savior would not have him lose the lesson of his fall, nor in the forgiveness forget his sin. Consequently He now delicately retraces for him the sad history of his denial, or rather by His awakening question brings it before his conscience. Peter had boasted, "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I": he not only trusted in his own loyalty, but congratulated himself that his love to Christ surpassed that of the other Apostles. Therefore did the Lord now ask, "Lovest thou me more than these?" i.e., more than these apostles love Me? "He said unto him, Yea Lord; thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:15). An opportunity had graciously been given Peter to retract his former boast, and gladly did he now avail himself of it. First, he began with a frank and heartfelt confession "thou knowest." He leaves it to the Searcher of hearts to determine. He could not appeal to his ways, for they had reflected upon his love; he would not trust his own heart any longer; so he appeals to Christ Himself to decide. Yet observe, he did not say "thou knowest if (or whether) I love thee," but "thou knowest that I love thee"—he rested on the Lord's knowledge of his love; thus there was both humility and confidence united. "It was as though he said, 'Thou hast known me from the beginning as son of Jonah; drawn me to Thee, hast kindled love in my soul, hast called me Peter; Thou didst warn of my blindness, and pray for my faith, and hast since forgiven me; Thou hast looked, both before and since Thy death, into my heart, with eyes of grace, so Thou knowest all! What I feel concerning my love is this, that I am far from loving Thee as I ought and as Thou art worthy of being loved; but Thou, O Lord, knowest that in spite of my awful failure, and notwithstanding my present weakness and deficiency, I do love Thee'" (Stier). "He saith unto him, Feed my lambs" (John 21:15). What marvelous grace was this! Not only does the Lord accept Peter's appeal to His omniscience, but He gives here a blessed commission. Christ was so well satisfied with Peter's reply that He does not even confirm it with, "Verily, I do know it." Instead, He responds by honoring and rewarding his love. Christ was about to leave this world, so He now appoints others to minister to His people. "Feed my lambs." The change of figure here from fishing to shepherding is striking: the one suggests the evangelist, the other the pastor and teacher. The order is most instructive. Those who have been saved need shepherding—caring for, feeding, defending. And those whom Christ first commends to Peter were not the "sheep" but the "lambs"—the weak and feeble of the flock; and these are the ones who have the first claim on us! Note Christ calls them "my lambs," denoting His authority to appoint the under-shepherds. "He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" (John 21:16). The Lord now drops the comparative "more than these" and confines Himself to love itself. This question is one which He is still asking of each of those who profess to believe in Him. "'Lovest thou me?' is, in reality, a very searching question. We may know much, and do much, and talk much, and give much, and go through much, and make much show in our religion, and yet be dead before God for want of love, and at last go down to the Pit. Do we love Christ? That is the great question. Without this there is no vitality about our Christianity. We are no better than painted wax-figures: there is no life where there is no love" (Bishop Ryle). "He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:16). In this passage there are two distinct words in the Greek which are translated by the one English word "love," and it is most instructive to follow their occurrences here. The one is a much stronger term than the other. To preserve the distinction the

one might be rendered "love" and the other "affection" or "attachment." When the Lord asked Peter, "Lovest thou me?" He used, both in John 21:15 and 16, the stronger word. But when Peter answered, what he really said, each time, was "thou knowest that I have affection for thee." So far was he now from boasting of the superiority of his love, he would not own it as the deepest kind of love at all! Once more the response of Divine grace is what Peter receives: "He saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (John 21:16). The word for "feed" here is more comprehensive than the one which the Lord had used in the previous verse, referring primarily to rule and discipline. Observe the Lord again calls them "my sheep," not "thy sheep"—thus anticipating and refuting the pretensions of the Pope! "He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" (John 21:17). Here the Lord Himself uses the weaker term—"Hast thou affection for me? Grace reigns through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21). Three times had Peter denied his Master; three times, then, did the Lord challenge his love. This was according to "righteousness." But in thus challenging Peter, the Lord gave him the opportunity of now thrice confessing Him. This was according to "grace." In His first question the Lord challenged the superiority of Peter's love. In His second question the Lord challenged whether Peter had any love at all. Here, in His third question the Lord now challenges even his affection! Most searching was this! But it had the desired effect. The Lord wounds only that He may heal. "Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?" (John 21:17). Here we are shown once more the power of the Word. This was indeed the sequel to John 13. That Peter was "grieved" does not mean that he was offended at the Lord because He repeated His question, but it signifies that he was touched to the quick, was deeply sorrowful, as he re-called his threefold denial. It is parallel with his "weeping bitterly" in Luke 22:62. This being "grieved" evidenced his perfect contrition! But if it was grievous for the disciple to be thus probed and have called to remembrance his sad fall, how much more grievous must it have been to the Master Himself to be denied? "And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:17). Beautiful is it to behold here the transforming effects of Divine grace. He would not now boast that his love was superior to that of others; he would not even allow that he had any love; nay more, he is at last brought to the place where he now declines to avow even his affection. He therefore casts himself on Christ's omniscience. "Lord," he says, "thou knowest all things." Men could see no signs of any love or affection when I denied Thee; but Thou canst read my very heart; I appeal therefore to Thine all-seeing eye. That Christ knew all things comforted this disciple, as it should us. Peter realized that the Lord knew the depths as well as the surfaces of things, and therefore, that He saw what was in his poor servant's heart, though his lips had so transgressed. Thus did he once more own the absolute Deity of the Savior. Thus, too, did he rebuke those who would now talk and sing of their love for Christ! "His self-judgment is complete. Searched out under the Divine eye, he is found and owns himself, not better but worse than others; so self-emptied that he cannot claim quality for his love at all. The needed point is reached: the strong man converted to weakness is now fit to strengthen his brethren; and, as Peter descends step by step the ladder of humiliation, step by step the Lord follows him with assurance of the work for which he is destined" (Numerical Bible). "Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (John 21:17). Does this, after all, warrant, or even favor, the pretensions of the Pope? No, indeed. "The Evangelist relates in what manner Peter was restored to that rank of honor from which he had fallen. The treacherous denial, which had been formerly described, had undoubtedly rendered him unworthy of the Apostleship; for how could he be capable of instructing others in the faith, who had basely revolted from it? He had been made an Apostle, but from the time that he had acted the part of a coward, he had been deprived of the honor of Apostleship. Now, therefore, the liberty, as well as the authority of teaching, is restored to him, both of which he had lost through his own fault. That the disgrace of his apostasy might not stand in the way, Christ blots it out and fully restores the erring one. Such a restoration was needed both for Peter and his hearers; for Peter, that

he might the more boldly exercise himself, being assured of the calling with which Christ had again invested him; for his hearers, that the stain which attached to him might not be the occasion of despising the Gospel" (John Calvin). We may add that this searching conversation between Christ and Peter took place in the presence of six of the other Apostles: his sin was a public one, so also must be his repudiation of it! Note that in Acts 20:28 all the "elders" are exhorted to feed the flock! "Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep." If you love Me, here is the way to manifest it. It is only those who truly love Christ that are fitted to minister to His flock! The work is so laborious, the appreciation is often so small, the response so discouraging, the criticisms so harsh, the attacks of Satan so fierce, that only the "love of Christ"—His for us and ours for Him—can "constrain" to such work. "Hirelings" will feed the goats, but only those who love Christ can feed His sheep. Unto this work the Lord now calls Peter. Not only had Christ restored the disciple's soul (Ps. 23:3), but also his official ministry; another was not to take his bishopric—contrast Judas (Acts 1:20)! "Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep." Marvelous grace was this. Not only is Peter freely forgiven, not only is he fully restored to his apostleship, but the Lord commends to him (though not to him alone) that which was dearest to Him on earth—His sheep! There is nothing in all this world nearer the heart of Christ than those for whom He shed His precious blood, and therefore He could not give to Peter a more affecting proof of His confidence than by committing to his care the dearest objects of His wondrous love! It is to be noted that the Lord here returns to the same word for "feed" which He had used in John 21:15. Whatever may be necessary in the way of rule and discipline (the force of "feed" in John 21:16), yet, the first (John 21:15) and the last (John 21:17) duty of the under-shepherd is to feed the flock—nothing else can take the place of ministering spiritual nourishment to Christ's people! It is striking to observe that in connection with Peter's restoration he received a threefold commission which exactly corresponds with our Lord's threefold "Peace be unto you" with which He saluted the disciples in the previous chapter. "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15) answers to the first benediction in John 20:19: it is Gospel-exposition needed by the young believer to establish him in the foundation truth of redemption. "Shepherd" or "discipline" My sheep (John 21:16) answers to the second "Peace be unto you in John 20:21, which relates to service and walk. "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17) answers to the third "Peace be unto you" in John 20:26, spoken for the special benefit of Thomas, and has to do with the work of restoring those who have gone astray. Compare also the threefold written ministry of the Apostle John unto the "fathers, young men, and "little children" (1 John 2:13). "Verily, verily I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not" (John 21:18). Here, too, the grace of Christ shines forth most blessedly. Not only had Peter been forgiven, restored, commissioned, but now the Lord takes him back to the fervent declaration which he had made in the energy of the flesh: "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" (Luke 22:33), and assures him that this highest honor of all shall be granted him. "Peter might still feel the sorrow of having missed such an opportunity of confessing Christ at the critical moment. Jesus assures him now that if he had failed in doing that of his own will, he should be allowed to do it by the will of God: it should be given him to die for the Lord, as he had formerly declared himself ready to do in his own strength" (Mr. J. N. Darby). "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself and walkest whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not" (John 21:18). The connection between this verse and those preceding is as follows: the Lord here warns Peter that his love to Him would be sorely tested, that caring for His sheep would ultimately involve a martyr's death—for thus do we understand His words here. A more direct link is found in that Peter had just said, "Lord, thou knowest all things": Christ now gave proof that He did indeed, for He speaks positively and in minute detail of that which was yet future, and could be

known only to God. The beloved disciple again would be placed in such a position that he would have to choose between denying and confessing Christ. As the reward for his good confession here, and to supply an encouragement for the future, the Lord assures him that he shall confess Him even to death. "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God" (John 21:19). This is a parenthetical remark by John, made for the purpose of supplying a key to the meaning of the Lord's words in the previous verse. When Christ said, "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whither thou wouldest," He signified that during his earlier days Peter had enjoyed his natural freedom. When he said, "But when thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thy hands," He meant that Peter would do this at the command of another. When He added, "And another shall gird thee," He meant that Peter should be bound as a prisoner with cords—cf. Acts 21:11 where Agabus took Paul's girdle and bound his own hands and feet, to symbolize the fact that the Apostle would be "delivered into the hands of the Gentiles." In His final words, "and carry thee whither thou wouldest not," the Lord did not mean that Peter would resist or murmur ("what death he should glorify God" proves that), but that the death he should die would be contrary to nature, disagreeable to the flesh. Peter was to die a death of violence, by crucifixion. In the "thou wouldest not" the Lord further intimated that He does not expect His people to enjoy bodily pains, though we are to endure them without murmuring. "But the Pope (to whom Peter says in vain, Follow me, as I follow Christ!) is the reverse: the older he grows the more arbitrarily will he gird and lead others whither he will" (Stier). "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." It is not only by acting, but chiefly by suffering, that the saints glorify God. Note how the Lord says to Ananias concerning Saul, "I will show him how great things he shall suffer [not "do"] for my name's sake" (Acts 9:16)! Note how that when the Apostle would strengthen the wavering Hebrews, instead of reminding them of their works, He said, "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illumined, ye endured a great fight of afflictions" (Heb. 10:32). But what sweet consolation to realize that our whole future has been fore-arranged by Christ—by Him who is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." What a lesson is there here for us. True, it is the Lord's return, not death, for which we are to look and wait. Nevertheless, all who have gone before us have died, and we may do so before the Savior comes. Let us remember, then, that should this be the case, we may "glorify" God in death as well as in life. We may be patient sufferers as well as active workers. Like Samson, we may do more for God in our death than we did in our lives. The death of the martyrs had more effect on men than the lives they had lived. "We may glorify God in death by being ready for it when it comes... by patiently enduring its pains... by testifying to others of the comfort and support which we find in the grace of Christ" (Bishop Ryle). It is a blessed thing when a mortal man can say with David, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4). "And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me" (verse 19). Here was the final word of grace to the fallen, and now recovered disciple. Now that Peter had discovered his weakness, now that he had judged the root from which his failure had proceeded, now that he had been fully restored in heart, conscience, and commission, the Lord says, "Follow me." This was what he had pretended to do (John 18:15), when the Lord had told him he could not (Luke 22:33, 34). But now Christ says, You may, you can, you shall. To "follow" Christ means to "deny self" and "take up the cross." In other words, it means to be "conformed to his death." This, in spirit; with Peter, in bodily experience, too. This word of Christ supplies one more link with what is found in chapter 13. There the Savior said to Peter, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards" (John 13:36). This is the sequel: "It was a call on him to follow the Lord, through death, up to the Father's House. And upon saying these words to him, the Lord rises from the place where they had been eating, and Peter, thus bidden, rises to follow Him" (Mr. Bellett). The Lord evidently accompanied this final word with a symbolic movement of going on before. "Then Peter,

turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following, which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?" (John 21:20). What a line in the picture is this, and how true to life! How humbling! Here was a believer, fully restored to communion, there in the presence of Christ, bidden to follow Him; yet here we find him taking his eye off Christ, and turning round to look at John! There is only one explanation possible—the flesh still remains in the believer, and ever lusts against the spirit! Though fully restored, the old Simon still remained. Christ had told him to "follow," not look around. Stier suggests that there was here "a side-glance once more of comparison with others," hardly that we think, rather the old tendency of taking his eye off Christ was manifested. In beautiful contrast from the fleshly turning of Peter, is the spiritual "following" of John. Christ had not commanded him to do so, nor had He even directly addressed him; but true love was ever occupied with its object, and here the Apostle of love could do no other than follow Christ. Blessed is it to mark how the Holy Spirit now refers to him, not only as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," but also as the one who "leaned on his breast at the supper." At the beginning of this Gospel (John 1:18) Christ is seen in the bosom of the Father, here at the end, a redeemed sinner is referred to as one who leaned on the bosom of the Savior! "Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?" (John 21:21). This too, evidenced the flesh in Peter. Christ had announced what awaited him, now the apostle is anxious to know how John—the one with whom he was most intimate and between whom there was a very close bond—should fare. The same curiosity which made him beckon to John that he should "ask who it should be" that would betray Christ (John 13:24), now causes him to say, "what [of] this man?" "Peter seems more concerned for another than for himself. So apt are we to be busy in other men's matters, but negligent in the concerns of our own souls—quick-sighted abroad, but dim-sighted at home—judging others and prognosticating what they will do, when we have enough to mind our own business. Peter seems more concerned about events than duties" (Matthew Henry). "Jesus saith unto him, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (John 21:22). The Lord rebukes Peter's curiosity about John, and presses upon him his own duty. There is an old saying, Charity begins at home, and there is not a little truth in it. We are naturally creatures of extremes, and it is a hard matter to preserve the balance. On the one side is uncharitable selfishness, which makes us indifferent to the interests of others; on the other side is altruism carried to such an extent that we neglect the cultivation of our own souls. Both are wrong. Let us not be weary in well doing to others, but let us also heed that word of Paul's to Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself" (1 Tim. 4:16). Unhappily there are not a few who have reason to say, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; mine own vineyard have I not kept" (Song 1:6). It was to correct this tendency in Peter that the Lord spoke. His business was to attend to his own duty, fulfill his own course, and leave the future of others in the hands of God—cf. Luke 13:23, 24. What good would it do Peter to know whether John was to live a long life or a short one, to die a violent death or a natural one?—cf. Daniel 12:8, 9. A warning is this to us not to be curious about the decrees of God concerning others—cf. Deuteronomy 29:29. "Follow me" is also His word to us: we are to follow Him as Leader of His people, as Shepherd of His flock, as Exemplar for His saints, as Lord of all. "Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21:23). What plain proof does this afford that the Lord's coming does not refer to the decease of His people. How strange that any should have supposed that it did! Death is the believer going to be with Christ, the Lord's return is His coming to be with us. Yet how curious, that even from the beginning, the Lord's word "I come again" in connection with John, was misunderstood and wrested. Another thing which these words of Christ made evident was that His return is an impending event, that is, one which may occur at any time, and one which we should be constantly expecting. Note the "If I will": a majestic declaration was this that Christ is now the Disposer of men's lives: He did not say, if God, or if the Father,

wills, but if I will. Mark how this verse furnishes us with a warning against following human traditions, even though they came from "the brethren": how blessed to have the unerring standard of God's written Word! "If I will that he tarry till I come." What was the deeper meaning in this word of Christ's? First, are we not intended to see in Peter and John representatives of the Church in the early and latter days of this dispensation? Peter, who died a death of violence, points to the first centuries, when martyrdom was almost the common experience of believers. John, who is given the hope that he may (though not the promise that he shall) live on till the Lord's return, points to this last century, when the truth of the Lord's coming has been so widely made known among His people! But this is not all. The ministry of John actually goes on to the end, for in the Revelation he treats at length of those things which are to usher in the Lord's return to the earth, aye, and beyond to the new heaven and the new earth! It is most blessed to observe that there is no account given in this Gospel of the Lord's ascension, and this is in most perfect keeping with the Spirit's design here. The departure of Christ left the disciples behind on earth. But here it is the family, in which—now in spirit, soon in the body—there are to be no separations. The last sight we have of the Savior in John's Gospel, the sons are with Him! So shall we be "forever with the Lord." "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen" (John 21:24, 25). These verses call for little comment. The Gospel closes with the personal seal and attestation of its writer. John, without mentioning his name, vouches for the veracity of what he had recorded, and then adds an hyperbole (cf. Matthew 11:23; Hebrews 11:12; for others) to emphasize the fact that it was not possible for him to fully tell out the infinite glories of that One who is the central figure of his Gospel. The final "Amen"—found at the end of each Gospel—is the Holy Spirit's imprimatur. "The Apostle closes his Gospel with another reminder of the inadequacy of all human words to tell out His glory, of whom he has been speaking. If it were attempted to tell out all, the world would be unable to contain the books that would be written. It would be an impracticable load to lift, rather than a help to clearer apprehension. How thankful we may be for the moderation that has compressed what would be really blessing to us into such a moderate compass! which yet, as we all must know, develops into whatever largeness we may have capacity for. Our Bibles are thus the same, and quite manageable by any. On the other hand, are we burning to know more? We may go on without any limit, except that which our little faith or heart may impose. May God awaken our hearts to test for themselves the expansive power of Scripture, and whether we can find a limit anywhere! Like the inconceivable immensity of the heavens, ever increasing as the power of vision is lengthened, we go on to find that the further we go only the more does the thought of infinity rise upon us; but this infinity is filled with an Infinite Presence; in every leaf-blade, in every atom, yet transcending all His works; and 'to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him'" (Numerical Bible).

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