

CHAPTER 21

The evangelist seemed to have concluded his history with the foregoing chapter; but (as St. Paul sometimes in his epistles), new matter occurring, he begins again. He had said that there were many other signs which Jesus did for the proof of his resurrection. And in this chapter he mentions one of these many, which was Christ's appearance to some of his disciples at the sea of Tiberias, in which we have an account,

- I.** How he discovered himself to them as they were fishing, filled their net, and then very familiarly came and dined with them upon what they had caught (v. 1-14).
- II.** What discourse he had with Peter after dinner,
 - 1.** Concerning himself (v. 15-19).
 - 2.** Concerning John (v. 20-23).
- III.** The solemn conclusion of this gospel (v. 24, 25). It is strange that any should suppose that this chapter was added by some other hand, when it is expressly said (v. 24) that the disciple whom Jesus loved is he which testifieth of these things.

JOHN 21:1-14

CHRIST WITH HIS DISCIPLES

We have here an account of Christ's appearance to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias. Now,

1. Let us compare this appearance with those that *went before*, In those Christ showed himself to his disciples when they were met in a solemn assembly (it should seem, for religious worship) upon a Lord's day, and when they were all together, perhaps expecting his appearing; but in this he showed himself to some of them occasionally, upon a week-day, when they were fishing, and little thought of it. Christ has many ways of making himself known to his people usually in his ordinances, but sometimes by his Spirit he visits them when they are employed in common business, as the *shepherds* who were *keeping their flocks by night* (⁴¹⁷⁸Luke 2:8), even so *here also*, ⁴¹⁸³Genesis 16:13.

2. Let us compare it with that which followed at the mountain in Galilee, where Christ had appointed them to meet him, ⁴¹⁸⁶Matthew 28:16. Thitherward they moved as soon as the days of unleavened bread were over, and disposed of themselves as they saw fit, till the time fixed for this interview, or general rendezvous. Now this appearance was while they were waiting for that, that they might not be weary of waiting. Christ is often better than his word, but never worse, often anticipates and outdoes the believing expectations of his people, but never disappoints them. As to the particulars of the story, we may observe,

I. Who they were to whom Christ now showed himself (v. 2): not to all the twelve, but to seven of them only. Nathanael is mentioned as one of them, whom we have not met with since, John 1. But some think he was the same with Bartholomew, one of the twelve. The two not named are supposed to be Philip of Bethsaida and Andrew of Capernaum. Observe here,

1. It is good for the disciples of Christ to be much together; not only in solemn religious assemblies, but in common conversation, and about common business. Good Christians should by this means both testify and increase their affection to, and delight in, each other, and edify one another both by discourse and example.

2. Christ chose to manifest himself to them when they were together; not only to countenance Christian society, but that they might be joint witnesses of the same matter of fact, and so might corroborate one another's testimony. Here were seven together to attest this, on which some observe that the Roman law required seven witnesses to a testament.

3. Thomas was one of them, and is named next to Peter, as if he now kept closer to the meetings of the apostles than ever. It is well if losses by our neglects make us more careful afterwards not to let opportunities slip.

II. How they were employed, v. 3. Observe,

1. Their agreement to go a fishing. They knew not well what to do with themselves. For my part, says Peter, *I will go a fishing; We will go with thee* then, say they, for we will keep together. Though commonly two of a trade cannot agree, yet they could. Some think they did amiss in returning to their boats and nets, which they had left; but then Christ would not have

countenanced them in it with a visit. It was rather commendable in them; for they did it,

(1.) To redeem time, and not be idle. They were not yet appointed to preach the resurrection of Christ. Their commission was in the drawing, but not perfected. The hour for entering upon action was to come. It is probable that their Master had directed them to say nothing of his resurrection till after his ascension, nay, not till after the pouring out of the Spirit, and then they were to begin at Jerusalem. Now, in the mean time, rather than do nothing, they would go a fishing; not for recreation, but for business. It is an instance of their humility. Though they were advanced to be sent of Christ, as he was of the Father, yet they did not take state upon them, but remembered *the rock out of which they were hewn*. It is an instance likewise of their industry, and bespeaks them good husbands of their time. While they were waiting, they would not be idling. Those who would give an account of their time with joy should contrive to fill up the vacancies of it, to gather up the fragments of it.

(2.) That they might help to maintain themselves and not be burdensome to any. While their Master was with them those who ministered to him were kind to them; but now that the *bridegroom was taken from them* they must *fast* in those days, and therefore their own hands, as Paul's, must *minister to their necessities* and for this reason Christ asked them, *Have you any meat?* This teaches us with quietness *to work and eat our own bread*.

2. Their disappointment in their fishing. That night they caught nothing, though, it is probable, they *toiled all night*, as ~~485~~ Luke 5:5. See the vanity of this world; the hand of the diligent often returns empty. Even good men may come short of desired success in their honest undertakings. We may be in the way of our duty, and yet not prosper. Providence so ordered it that all that night they should catch nothing, that the miraculous draught of fishes in the morning might be the more wonderful and the more acceptable. In those disappointments which to us are very grievous God has often designs that are very gracious. Man has indeed *a dominion over the fish of the sea*, but they are not always at his beck; God only knows the *paths of the sea*, and commands that which passeth through them.

III. After what manner Christ made himself known to them. It is said (v. 1), *He showed himself*. His body, though a true and real body, was raised,

as ours will be, a spiritual body, and so was visible only when he himself was pleased to make it so; or, rather, came and removed so quickly that it was here or there in an instant, *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*. Four things are observable in the appearance of Christ to them: —

1. He showed himself to them seasonably (v. 4): *When the morning was now come*, after a fruitless night's toil, Jesus *stood on the shore*. Christ's time of making himself known to his people is when they are most at a loss. When they think they have lost themselves, he will let them know that they have not lost him. Weeping may *endure for a night; but joy comes*, if Christ comes, *in the morning*. Christ appeared to them, not *walking upon the water*, because, being *risen from the dead*, he was not to be with them as he had been; but *standing upon the shore*, because now they were to make towards him. Some of the ancients put this significancy upon it, that Christ, having finished his work, was got through a stormy sea, a sea of blood, to a safe and quiet shore, where he stood in triumph; but the disciples, having their work before them, were yet at sea, in toil and peril. It is a comfort to us, when our passage is rough and stormy, that our Master is at shore, and we are hastening to him.

2. He showed himself to them gradually. The disciples, though they had been intimately acquainted with him, *knew not*, all at once, *that it was Jesus*. Little expecting to see him there, and not looking intently upon him, they took him for some common person waiting the arrival of their boat, to buy their fish. Note, Christ is often nearer to us than we think he is, and so we shall find afterwards, to our comfort.

3. He showed himself to them by an instance of his pity, v. 5. He called to them, *Children, paidia* — “*Lads, have you any meat? Have you caught any fish?*” Here,

(1.) The compellation is very familiar; he speaks unto them as unto his sons, with the care and tenderness of a father: *Children*. Though he had now entered upon his exalted state, he spoke to his disciples with as much kindness and affection as ever. They were not children in age, but they were his children, the children which God had given him.

(2.) The question is very kind: *Have you any meat?* He asks as a tender father concerning his children whether they be provided with that which is fit for them, that if they be not, he may take care for their supply. Note, *The Lord is for the body*, ⁴⁴¹³1 Corinthians 6:13. Christ takes cognizance of

the temporal wants of his people, and has promised them not only grace sufficient, but food convenient. *Verily they shall be fed,* ^{<127B>}Psalm 27:3. Christ looks into the cottages of the poor, and asks, *Children, have you any meat?* thereby inviting them to open their case before him, and by the prayer of faith to *make their requests known* to him: and then let them *be careful for nothing*; for Christ takes care of them, takes care for them. Christ has herein set us an example of compassionate concern for our brethren. There are many poor householders disabled for labour, or disappointed in it, that are reduced to straits, whom the rich should enquire after thus, *Have you any meat?* For the most necessitous are commonly the least clamorous. To this question the disciples gave a short answer, and, some think, with an air of discontent and peevishness. They said, *No*; not giving him any such friendly and respectful title as he had given them. So short do the best come in their returns of love to the Lord Jesus. Christ put the question to them, not because he did not know their wants, but because he would know them *from them*. Those that would have supplies from Christ must own themselves empty and needy.

4. He showed himself to them by an instance of his power; and this perfected the discovery (v. 6): he ordered them to *cast the net on the right side of the ship*, the contrary side to what they had been casting it on; and then they, who were going home empty-handed, were enriched with a great draught of fishes. Here we have,

(1.) The orders Christ gave them, and the promise annexed to those orders: *Cast the net* there in such a place, and *you shall find*. He from whom nothing is hid, no, not the *inhabitants under the waters* (^{<128B>}Job 26:5), knew on what side of the ship the shoal of fishes was, and to that side he directs them. Note, Divine providence extends itself to things most minute and contingent; and they are happy that know how to take hints thence in the conduct of their affairs, and acknowledge it in all their ways.

(2.) Their obedience of these orders, and the good success of it. As yet *they knew not that it was Jesus*; however, they were willing to be advised by any body, and did not bid this supposed stranger mind his own business and not meddle with theirs, but took his counsel; in being thus observant of strangers, they were obedient to their Master unawares. And it sped wonderfully well; now they had a draught that paid them for all their pains. Note, Those that are humble, diligent, and patient (though their labours may be crossed) shall be crowned; they sometimes live to see their

affairs take a happy turn, after many struggles and fruitless attempts. There is nothing lost by observing Christ's orders. Those are likely to speed well that follow the rule of the word, the guidances of the Spirit, and the intimations of Providence; for this is *casting the net on the right side of the ship*. Now the draught of fishes may be considered,

[1.] As a miracle in itself: and so it was designed to prove that Jesus Christ was *raised in power*, though *sown in weakness*, and that all things were *put under his feet*, *the fishes of the sea* not excepted. Christ manifests himself to his people by doing that for them which none else can do, and things which *they looked not for*.

[2.] As a mercy to them; for the seasonable and abundant supply of their necessities. When their ingenuity and industry failed them, the power of Christ came in opportunely for their relief; for he would take care that those who had left all for him should not want any good thing. When we are most at a loss, *Jehovah-jireh*.

[3.] As the memorial of a former mercy, with which Christ had formerly recompensed Peter for the loan of his boat, ~~see~~ Luke 5:4, etc. This miracle nearly resembled that, and could not but put Peter in mind of it, which helped him to improve this; for both that and this affected him much, as meeting him in his own element, in his own employment. Latter favours are designed to bring to mind former favours, that eaten bread may not be forgotten.

[4.] As a mystery, and very significant of that work to which Christ was now with an enlarged commission sending them forth. The prophets had been fishing for souls, and caught nothing, or very little; but the apostles, who let down the net at Christ's word, had wonderful success. *Many were the children of the desolate*, ~~see~~ Galatians 4:27. They themselves, in pursuance of their former mission, when they were first made *fishers of men*, had had small success in comparison with what they should now have. When, soon after this, three thousand were converted in one day, then the net was *cast on the right side of the ship*. It is an encouragement to Christ's ministers to continue their diligence in their work. One happy draught, at length, may be sufficient to repay many years of toil at the gospel net.

IV. How the disciples received this discovery which Christ made of himself, v. 7, 8, where we find,

1. That John was the most intelligent and quick-sighted disciple. He whom Jesus loved was the first that said, *It is the Lord*; for those whom Christ loves he will in a special manner manifest himself to: his secret is with his favourites. John had adhered more closely to his Master in his sufferings than any of them: and therefore he has a clearer eye and a more discerning judgment than any of them, in recompence for his constancy. When John was himself aware that it was the Lord, he communicated his knowledge to those with him; for this *dispensation of the Spirit is given to every one to profit withal*. Those that know Christ themselves should endeavor to bring others acquainted with him; we need not engross him, there is enough in him for us all. John tells Peter particularly his thoughts, that it was the Lord, knowing he would be glad to see him above any of them. Though Peter had denied his Master, yet, having repented, and being taken into the communion of the disciples again, they were as free and familiar with him as ever.

2. That Peter was the most zealous and warm-hearted disciple; for as soon as he heard it was the Lord (for which he took John's word) the ship could not hold him, nor could he stay till the bringing of it to shore, but into the sea he throws himself presently, that he might come first to Christ.

(1.) He showed his respect to Christ by *girding his fisher's coat* about him that he might appear before his Master in the best clothes he had, and to rudely rush into his presence, stripped as he was to his waistcoat and drawers, because the work he was about was toilsome, and he was resolved to take pains in it. Perhaps the fisher's coat was made of leather, or oil-cloth, and would keep out wet; and he girt it to him that he might make the best of his way through the water to Christ, as he used to do after his nets, when he was intent upon his fishing.

(2.) He showed the strength of his affection to Christ, and his earnest desire to be with him, by casting himself into the sea; and either wading or swimming to shore, to come to him. When he walked upon the water to Christ (¹⁴³Matthew 14:28, 29), it was said, *He came down out of the ship* deliberately; but here it is said, *He cast himself into the sea* with precipitation; sink or swim, he would show his good-will and aim to be with Jesus. "If Christ suffer me," thinks he, "to drown, and come short of him, it is but what I deserve for denying him." Peter had had much forgiven, and made it appear he loved much by his willingness to run hazards, and undergo hardships, to come to him. Those that have been

with Jesus will be willing to swim through a stormy sea, a sea of blood, to come to him. And it is a laudable contention amongst Christ's disciples to strive who shall be first with him.

3. That the rest of the disciples were careful and honest hearted. Though they were not in such a transport of zeal as to throw themselves into the sea, like Peter, yet they hastened in the boat to the shore, and made the best of their way (v. 8): *The other disciples*, and John with them, who had first discovered that it was Christ, came slowly, yet they came to Christ. Now here we may observe,

(1.) How variously God dispenses his gifts. Some excel, as Peter and John; are very eminent in gifts and graces, and are thereby distinguished from their brethren; others are but ordinary disciples, that mind their duty, and are faithful to him, but do nothing to make themselves remarkable; and yet both the one and the other, the eminent and the obscure, shall sit down together with Christ in glory; nay, and perhaps *the last shall be first*. Of those that do excel, some, like John, are eminently contemplative, have great gifts of knowledge, and serve the church with them; others, like Peter, are eminently active and courageous, are strong, and do exploits, and are thus very serviceable to their generation. Some are useful as the church's eyes, others as the church's hands, and all for the good of the body.

(2.) What a great deal of difference there may be between some good people and others in the way of their honouring Christ, and yet both *accepted of him*. Some serve Christ more in acts of devotion, and extraordinary expressions of a religious zeal; and they do well, *to the Lord they do it*. Peter ought not to be censured for casting himself into the sea, but commended for his zeal and the strength of his affection; and so must those be who, in love to Christ, quit the world, with Mary, to *sit at his feet*. But others serve Christ more in the affairs of the world. They continue in that ship, drag the net, and bring the fish to shore, as the other disciples here; and such ought not to be censured as worldly, for they, in their place, are as truly serving Christ as the other, even in serving tables. If all the disciples had done as Peter did, what had become of their fish and their nets? And yet if Peter had done as they did we had wanted this instance of holy zeal. Christ was well pleased with both, and so must we be.

(3.) That there are several ways of bringing Christ's disciples to shore to him from off the sea of this world. Some are brought to him by a violent

death, as the martyrs, who threw themselves into the sea, in their zeal for Christ; others are brought to him by a natural death, dragging the net, which is less terrible; but both meet at length on the safe and quiet shore with Christ.

V. What entertainment the Lord Jesus gave them when they came ashore.

1. He had provision ready for them. When they came to land, wet and cold, weary and hungry, they found a good fire there to warm them and dry them, and fish and bread, competent provision for a good meal.

(1.) We need not be curious in enquiring whence this fire, and fish, and bread, came, any more than whence the meat came which the ravens brought to Elijah. He that could multiply the loaves and fishes that were could make new ones if he pleased, or turn stones into bread, or send his angels to fetch it, where he knew it was to be had. It is uncertain whether this provision was made ready in the open air, or in some fisher's cabin or hut upon the shore; but here was nothing stately or delicate. We should be content with mean things, for Christ was.

(2.) We may be comforted in this instance of Christ's care of his disciples; he has wherewith to supply all our wants, and *knows what things we have need of*. He kindly provided for those fishermen, when they came weary from their work; for *verily those shall be fed who trust in the Lord and do good*. It is encouraging to Christ's ministers, whom he hath made fishers of men, that they may depend upon him who employs them to provide for them; and if they should miss of encouragement in this world, should be reduced as Paul was to *hunger, and thirst, and fastings often*, let them content themselves with what they have here; they have better things in reserve, and shall *eat and drink with Christ at his table in his kingdom*, ^{<22:30>}Luke 22:30. Awhile ago, *the disciples* had entertained Christ with a *broiled fish* (^{<24:42>}Luke 24:42), and now, as a friend, he returned their kindness, and entertained them with one; nay, in the draught of fishes, he repaid them more than a hundred fold.

2. He called for some of that which they had caught, and they produced it, v. 10, 11. Observe here,

(1.) The command Christ gave them to bring their draught of fish to shore: "Bring of the fish hither, which you have now caught, and let us have

some of them;” not as if he needed it; and could not make up a dinner for them without it; but,

[1.] He would have them eat the labour of their hands, ~~ART~~ Psalm 128:2. What is got by God's blessing on our own industry and honest labour, if withal *God give us power to eat of it, and enjoy good in our labour*, hath a peculiar sweetness in it. It is said of the slothful man that *he roasteth not that which he took in hunting*; he cannot find in his heart to dress what he has been at the pains to take, ~~ART~~ Proverbs 12:27. But Christ would hereby teach us to use what we have.

[2.] He would have them taste the gifts of his miraculous bounty, that they might be witnesses both of his power and of his goodness. The benefits Christ bestows upon us are not to be buried and laid up, but to be used and laid out.

[3.] He would give a specimen of the spiritual entertainment he has for all believers, which, in this respect, is most free and familiar — that *he sups with them, and they with him*; their graces are pleasing to him, and his comforts are so to them; what he works in them he accepts from them.

[4.] Ministers, who are fishers of men, must bring all they catch to their Master, for on him their success depends.

(2.) Their obedience to this command, v. 11. It was said (v. 6), *They were not able to draw the net to shore, for the multitude of fishes*; that is, they found it difficult, it was more than they could well do; but he that bade them bring it to shore made it easy. Thus the fishers of men, when they have enclosed souls in the gospel net, cannot bring them to shore, cannot carry on and complete the good work begun, without the continued influence of the divine grace. If he that helped us to catch them, when without his help we should have caught nothing, do not help us to keep them, and draw them to land, by *building them up in their most holy faith*, we shall lose them at last, ~~ART~~ 1 Corinthians 3:7. Observe,

[1.] Who it was that was most active in landing the fishes: it was Peter, who, as in the former instance (v. 7), had shown a more zealous affection to his Master's person than any of them, so in this he showed a more ready obedience to his Master's command; but all that are faithful are not alike forward.

[2.] The number of the fishes that were caught. They had the curiosity to count them, and perhaps it was in order to the making of a dividend; they were in all *a hundred and fifty three*, and all *great fishes*. These were many more than they needed for their present supply, but they might sell them, and the money would serve to bear their charges back to Jerusalem, whither they were shortly to return.

[3.] A further instance of Christ's care of them, to increase both the miracle and the mercy: *For all there were so many, and great fishes too, yet was not the net broken*; so that they lost none of their fish, nor damaged their net. It was said (~~and~~ Luke 5:6), *Their net broke*. Perhaps this was a borrowed net, for they had long since left their own; and, if so, Christ would teach us to take care of what we have borrowed, as much as if it were our own. It was well that their net did not break, for they had not now the leisure they had formerly had to mend their nets. The net of the gospel has enclosed multitudes, three thousand in one day, and yet is not broken; it is still as mighty as ever to bring souls to God.

3. He invited them to dinner. Observing them to keep their distance and that *they were afraid to ask him, Who art thou?* because they *knew it was their Lord*, he called to them very familiarly, *Come, and dine*.

(1.) See here how free Christ was with his disciples; he treated them as friends; he did not say, *Come, and wait, Come, and attend me*, but *Come, and dine*; not, *Go dine by yourselves*, as servants are appointed to do, but *Come, and dine with me*. This kind invitation may be alluded to, to illustrate,

[1.] The call Christ gives his disciples into communion with him in grace here. *All things are now ready; Come, and dine*. Christ is a feast; come, dine upon him; his flesh is meat indeed, his blood drink indeed. Christ is a friend; come, dine with him, he will bid you welcome, ~~and~~ Song of Solomon 5:1.

[2.] The call he will give into the fruition of him in glory hereafter: *Come, ye blessed of my Father; come, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob*. Christ has wherewithal to dine all his friends and followers; there is room and provision enough for them all.

(2.) See how reverent the disciples were before Christ. They were somewhat shy of using the freedom he invited them to, and, by his

courting them to their meat, it should seem that they stood pausing. Being *to eat with a ruler*, such a ruler, *they consider diligently what is before them. None of them durst ask him, Who art thou?* Either,

[1.] Because they would not be so bold with him. Though perhaps he appeared now in something of a disguise at first, as to the two disciples when *their eyes were holden that they should not know him*, yet they had very good reason to think it was he, and could be no other. Or,

[2.] Because they would not so far betray their own folly. When he had given them this instance of his power and goodness, they must be stupid indeed if they questioned whether it was he or no. When God, in his providence, has given us sensible proofs of his care for our bodies, and has given us, in his grace, manifest proofs of his good-will to our souls, and good work upon them, we should be ashamed of our distrusts, and not dare to question that which he has left us no room to question. Groundless doubts must be stifled, and not started.

4. He carved for them, as the master of the feast, v. 13. Observing them to be still shy and timorous, *he comes, and takes bread himself, and gives them*, some to each of them, *and fish likewise*. No doubt he craved a blessing and gave thanks (as ^{<240>}Luke 24:30), but, it being his known and constant practice, it did not need to be mentioned.

(1.) The entertainment here was but ordinary; it was only a fish-dinner, and coarsely dressed; here was nothing pompous, nothing curious; plentiful indeed, but plain and homely. Hunger is the best sauce. Christ, though he entered upon his exalted state, *showed himself alive by eating*, not showed himself a prince by feasting. Those that could not content themselves with bread and fish, unless they had sauce and wine, would scarcely have found in their hearts to dine with Christ himself here.

(2.) Christ himself began. Though, perhaps, having a glorified body, he needed not eat, yet he would show that he had a true body, which was capable of eating. The apostles produced this as one proof of his resurrection, that *they had eaten and drank with him*, ^{<400>}Acts 10:41.

(3.) He gave the meat about to all his guests. He not only provided it for them, and invited them to it, but he himself divided it among them, and put it into their hands. Thus to him we owe the application, as well as the purchase, of the benefits of redemption. He gives us power to eat of them.

The evangelist leaves them at dinner, and makes this remark (v. 14): *This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself alive to his disciples, or the greater part of them. This is the third day; so some. On the day he rose he appeared five times; the second day was that day seven-night; and this was the third. Or this was his third appearance to any considerable number of his disciples together; though he had appeared to Mary, to the women, to the two disciples, and to Cephas, yet he had but twice before this appeared to any company of them together. This is taken notice of,*

[1.] For confirming the truth of his resurrection; the vision was doubled, was trebled, for the thing was certain. Those who believed not the first sign would be brought to believe the voice of the latter signs.

[2.] As an instance of Christ's continued kindness to his disciples; once, and again, and a third time, he visited them. It is good to keep account of Christ's gracious visits; for he keeps account of them, and they will be remembered against us if we walk unworthily of them, as they were against Solomon, when he was reminded that the Lord God of Israel had appeared unto him twice. *This is now the third; have we made a due improvement of the first and second? See ^{<4724>}2 Corinthians 12:14. This is the third, perhaps it may be the last.*

<4315> JOHN 21:15-19

CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH PETER

We have here Christ's discourse with Peter after dinner, so much of it as relates to himself, in which,



I. He examines his love to him, and gives him a charge concerning his flock, v. 15-17. Observe,

1. When Christ entered into this discourse with Peter. — It was after they had dined: they had all eaten, and were filled, and, it is probable, were entertained with such edifying discourse as our Lord Jesus used to make his table-talk. Christ foresaw that what he had to say to Peter would give him some uneasiness, and therefore would not say it till they had dined, because he would not spoil his dinner. Peter was conscious to himself that he had incurred his Master's displeasure, and could expect no other than to

be upbraided with his treachery and ingratitude. “Was this thy kindness to thy friend? Did not I tell thee what a coward thou wouldest prove?” Nay, he might justly expect to be struck out of the roll of the disciples, and to be expelled the sacred college. Twice, if not thrice, he had seen his Master since his resurrection, and he said not a word to him of it. We may suppose Peter full of doubts upon what terms he stood with his Master; sometimes hoping the best, because he had received favour from him in common with the rest; yet not without some fears, lest the chiding would come at last that would pay for all. But now, at length, his Master put him out of his pain, said what he had to say to him, and confirmed him in his place as an apostle. He did not tell him of his fault hastily, but deferred it for some time; did not tell him of it unseasonably, to disturb the company at dinner, but *when they had dined* together, in token of reconciliation, then discoursed he with him about it, not as with a criminal, but as with a friend. Peter had reproached himself for it, and therefore Christ did not reproach him for it, nor tell him of it directly, but only by a tacit intimation; and, being satisfied in his sincerity, the offence was not only forgiven, but forgotten; and Christ let him know that he was as dear to him as ever. Herein he has given us an encouraging instance of his tenderness towards penitents, and has taught us, in like manner, to restore such as are fallen with a spirit of meekness.

2. What was the discourse itself. Here was the same question three times asked, the same answer three times returned, and the same reply three times given, with very little variation, and yet no *vain repetition*. The same thing was repeated by our Saviour, in speaking it, the more to affect Peter, and the other disciples that were present; it is repeated by the evangelist, in writing it, the more to affect us, and all that read it.

(1.) Three times Christ asks Peter whether he loves him or no. The first time the question is, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?* Observe,

[1.] How he calls him: *Simon, son of Jonas*. He speaks to him by name, the more to affect him, as  Luke 22:31. *Simon, Simon*. He does not call him *Cephas*, nor *Peter*, the name he had given him (for he had lost the credit of his strength and stability, which those names signified), but his original name, *Simon*. Yet he gives him no hard language, does not call him out of his name, though he deserved it; but as he had called him when he pronounced him blessed, *Simon Bar-jona*,  Matthew 16:17. He calls

him *son of Jonas* (or *John* or *Johanan*), to remind him of his extraction, how mean it was, and unworthy the honour to which he was advanced.

[2.] How he catechises him: *Lovest thou me more than these?*

First, Lovest thou me? If we would try whether we are Christ's disciples indeed, this must be the enquiry, Do we love him? But there was a special reason why Christ put in now to Peter.

1. His fall had given occasion to doubt of his love: "Peter, I have cause to suspect thy love; for if thou hadst loved me thou wouldst not have been ashamed and afraid to own me in my sufferings. How canst thou say thou lovest me, when thy heart was not with me?" Note, We must not reckon it an affront to have our sincerity questioned, when we ourselves have done that which makes it questionable; after a shaking fall, we must take heed of settling too soon, lest we settle upon a wrong bottom. The question is affecting; he does not ask, "Dost thou fear me? Dost thou honour me? Dost thou admire me?" but, "Dost thou love me? Give but proof of this, and the affront shall be passed by, and no more said of it." Peter had professed himself a penitent, witness his tears, and his return to the society of the disciples; he was now upon his probation as a penitent; but the question is not, "Simon, how much hast thou wept? how often hast thou fasted, and afflicted thy soul?" but, Dost thou love me? It is this that will make the other expressions of repentance acceptable. The great thing Christ eyes in penitents is their eyeing him in their repentance. *Much is forgiven her*, not because *she wept much*, but because *she loved much*.

2. His function would give occasion for the exercise of his *love*. Before Christ would commit his *sheep* to his care, he asked him, *Lovest thou me?* Christ has such a tender regard to his flock that he will not trust it with any but those that love him, and therefore will love all that are his for his sake. Those that do not truly love Christ will never truly love the souls of men, or will naturally care for their state as they should; nor will that minister love his work that does not love his Master. Nothing but the love of Christ will constrain ministers to go cheerfully through the difficulties and discouragements they meet with in their work, ⁴¹⁸³2 Corinthians 5:13, 14. But this love will make their work easy, and them in good earnest in it.

Secondly, Lovest thou me more than these? pleion touton.

1. “*Lovest thou me more than thou lovest these*, more than thou lovest these persons?” Dost thou love me more than thou dost James or John, thy intimate friends, or Andrew, thy own brother and companion: Those do not love Christ aright that do not love him better than the best friend they have in the world, and make it to appear whenever they stand in comparison or in competition. Or, “*more than thou lovest these things*, these boats and nets — more than all the pleasure of fishing, which some make a recreation of — more than the gain of fishing, which others make a calling of.” Those only love Christ indeed that love him better than all the delights of sense and all the profits of this world. “*Lovest thou me more than thou lovest these occupations thou art now employed in?* If so, leave them, to employ thyself wholly in feeding my flock.” So Dr. Whitby.

2. “*Lovest thou me more than these love me*, more than any of the rest of the disciples love me?” And then the question is intended to upbraid him with his vain-glorious boast, *Though all men should deny thee, yet will not I*. “Art thou still of the same mind?” Or, to intimate to him that he had now more reason to love him than any of them had, for more had been forgiven to him than to any of them, as much as his sin in denying Christ was greater than theirs in forsaking him. *Tell me therefore which of them will love him most?* ^{and} Luke 7:42. Note, We should all study to excel in our love to Christ. It is no breach of the peace to strive which shall love Christ best; nor any breach of good manners to go before others in this love.

Thirdly, The second and third time that Christ put this question,

1. He left out the comparison *more than these*, because Peter, in his answer, modestly left it out, not willing to compare himself with his brethren, much less to prefer himself before them. Though we cannot say, *We love Christ more than others do*, yet we shall be accepted if we can say, *We love him indeed*.

2. In the last he altered the word, as it is in the original. In the first two enquiries, the original word is *Agapas me* — *Dost thou retain a kindness for me?* In answer to which Peter uses another word, more emphatic, *Philo se* — *I love thee dearly*. In putting the question the last time, Christ uses that word: And dost thou indeed love me dearly?

(2.) Three times Peter returns the same answer to Christ: *Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee*. Observe,

[1.] Peter does not pretend to love Christ more than the rest of the disciples did. He is now ashamed of that rash word of his, *Though all men deny thee, yet will not I*; and he had reason to be ashamed of it. Note, Though we must aim to be better than others, yet we must, *in lowliness of mind, esteem others better than ourselves*; for we know more evil of ourselves than we do of any of our brethren.

[2.] Yet he professes again and again that he loves Christ: “*Yea, Lord, surely I love thee*; I were unworthy to live if I did not.” He had a high esteem and value for him, a grateful sense of his kindness, and was entirely devoted to his honour and interest; his desire was towards him, as one he was undone without; and his delight in him, as one he should be unspeakably happy in. This amounts to a profession of repentance for his sin, for it grieves us to have affronted one we love; and to a promise of adherence to him for the future *Lord, I love thee, and will never leave thee*. Christ *prayed that his faith might not fail* (^{<422>}Luke 22:32), and, because his faith did not fail, his love did not; for faith will work by love. Peter had forfeited his claim of relation to Christ. He was now to be re-admitted, upon his repentance. Christ puts his trial upon this issue: *Dost thou love me?* And Peter joins issue upon it: *Lord, I love thee*. Note, Those who can truly say, through grace, that they love Jesus Christ, may take the comfort of their interest in him, notwithstanding their daily infirmities.

[3.] He appeals to Christ himself for the proof of it: *Thou knowest that I love thee*; and *the third time* yet more emphatically: *Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*. He does not vouch his fellow-disciples to witness for him — they might be deceived in him; nor does he think his own word might be taken — the credit of that was destroyed already; but he calls Christ himself to witness, *First*, Peter was sure that Christ knew all things, and particularly that he knew the heart, and was a *discerner of the thoughts and intents of it*, (^{<450>}John 16:30. *Secondly*, Peter was satisfied of this, that Christ, who knew all things, knew the sincerity of his love to him, and would be ready to attest it in his favour. It is a terror to a hypocrite to think that Christ knows all things; for the divine omniscience will be a witness against him. But it is a comfort to a sincere Christian that he has that to appeal to: *My witness is in heaven, my record*

is on high. Christ knows us better than we know ourselves. Though we know not our own uprightness, he knows it.

[4.] *He was grieved* when Christ asked him the *third time, Lovest thou me?* v. 17. *First,* Because it put him in mind of his threefold denial of Christ, and was plainly designed to do so; *and when he thought thereon he wept.* Every remembrance of past sins, even pardoned sins, renews the sorrow of a true penitent. *Thou shalt be ashamed, when I am pacified towards thee.* *Secondly,* Because it put him in fear lest his Master foresaw some further miscarriage of his, which would be as great a contradiction to this profession of love to him as the former was. “Surely,” thinks Peter, “my Master would not thus put me upon the rack if he did not see some cause for it. What would become of me if I should be again tempted?” Godly sorrow works carefulness and fear, ^{<471>}2 Corinthians 7:11.

(3.) Three times Christ committed the care of his flock to Peter: *Feed my lambs; feed my sheep; feed my sheep.*

[1.] Those whom Christ committed to Peter's care were his lambs and his sheep. The church of Christ is his flock, *which he hath purchased with his own blood* (^{<408>}Acts 20:28), and he is *the chief shepherd* of it. In this flock some are lambs, young and tender and weak, others are sheep, grown to some strength and maturity. The Shepherd here takes care of both, and of the lambs first, for upon all occasions he showed a particular tenderness for them. *He gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom.* ^{<301>}Isaiah 40:11.

[2.] The charge he gives him concerning them is to feed them. The word used in v. 15, 17, is *boske*, which strictly signifies to *give them food*; but the word used in v. 16 is *poimaine*, which signifies more largely to do all the offices of a shepherd to them: “*Feed the lambs* with that which is proper for them, and *the sheep* likewise with *food convenient.* *The lost sheep of the house of Israel,* seek and feed them, and *the other sheep* also *which are not of this fold.*” Note, It is the duty of all Christ's ministers to feed his lambs and sheep. *Feed them*, that is, teach them; for the doctrine of the gospel is spiritual food. *Feed them*, that is, “Lead them to the green pastures, presiding in their religious assemblies, and ministering all the ordinances to them. Feed them by personal application to their respective state and case; not only lay meat before them, but feed those with it that are wilful and will not, or weak and cannot feed themselves.” *When Christ*

ascended on high, he gave pastors, left his flock with those that loved him, and would take care of them for his sake.

[3.] But why did he give this charge particularly to Peter? Ask the advocates for the pope's supremacy, and they will tell you that Christ hereby designed to give to Peter, and therefore to his successors, and therefore to the bishops of Rome, an absolute dominion and headship over the whole Christian church as if a charge to serve the sheep gave a power to lord it over all the shepherds; whereas, it is plain, Peter himself never claimed such a power, nor did the other disciples ever own it in him. This charge given to Peter to preach the gospel is by a strange artifice made to support the usurpation of his pretended successors, that fleece the sheep, and, instead of feeding them, feed upon them. But the particular application to Peter here was designed, *First*, To restore him to his apostleship, now that he repented of his abjuration of it, and to renew his commission, both for his own satisfaction, and for the satisfaction of his brethren. A commission given to one convicted of a crime is supposed to amount to a pardon; no doubt, this commission given to Peter was an evidence that Christ was reconciled to him else he would never have reposed such a confidence in him. Of some that have deceived us we say, "Though we forgive them, we will never trust them;" but Christ, when he forgave Peter, trusted him with the most valuable treasure he had on earth. *Secondly*, It was designed to quicken him to a diligent discharge of his office as an apostle. Peter was a man of a bold and zealous spirit, always forward to speak and act, and, lest he should be tempted to take upon him the directing of the shepherds, he is charged to feed the sheep, as he himself charges all the presbyters to do, and not *to lord it over God's heritage*, [¶]1 Peter 5:2, 3. If he will be doing, let him do this, and pretend no further. *Thirdly*, What Christ said to him he said to all his disciples; he charged them all, not only to be fishers of men (though that was said to Peter, [¶]Luke 5:10), by the conversion of sinners, but feeders of the flock, by the edification of saints.

II. Christ, having thus appointed Peter his doing work, next appoints him his suffering work. Having confirmed to him the honour of an apostle, he now tells him of further preferment designed him — the honour of a martyr. Observe,

1. How his martyrdom is foretold (v. 18): *Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands*, being compelled to it, and *another shall gird thee* (as a prisoner that is pinioned) *and carry thee whither naturally thou wouldest not*.

(1.) He prefaces the notice he gives to Peter of his sufferings with a solemn asseveration, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee*. It was not spoken of as a thing probable, which perhaps might happen, but as a thing certain, *I say it to thee*. “Others, perhaps, will say to thee, as thou didst to me, *This shall not be unto thee*; but I say it shall.” As Christ foresaw all his own sufferings, so he foresaw the sufferings of all his followers, and foretold them, though not in particular, as to Peter, yet in general, that they must take up their cross. Having charged him to feed his sheep, he bids him not to expect ease and honour in it, but trouble and persecution, and to suffer ill for doing well.

(2.) He foretels particularly that he should die a violent death, by the hands of an executioner. The stretching out of his hands, some think, points at the manner of his death by crucifying; and the tradition of the ancients, if we may rely upon that, informs us that Peter was crucified at Rome under Nero, A.D. 68, or, as others say, 79. Others think it points at the bonds and imprisonments which those are hampered with that are sentenced to death. The pomp and solemnity of an execution add much to the terror of death, and to any eye of sense make it look doubly formidable. Death, in these horrid shapes, has often been the lot of Christ's faithful ones, who yet have *overcome it by the blood of the Lamb*. This prediction, though pointing chiefly at his death, was to have its accomplishment in his previous sufferings. It began to be fulfilled presently, when he was imprisoned, ~~Acts~~ Acts 6:3; 5:18; 12:4. No more is implied here in his being carried whither he would not than that it was a violent death that he should be carried to, such a death as even innocent nature could not think of without dread, nor approach without some reluctance. He that puts on the Christian does not put off the man. Christ himself prayed against the bitter cup. A natural aversion to pain and death is well reconcilable with a holy submission to the will of God in both. Blessed Paul, though longing to be unloaded, owns he cannot desire *to be unclothed*, ~~2 Cor~~ 2 Corinthians 5:4.

(3.) He compares this with his former liberty. “Time was when thou knewest not any of these hardships, *thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest*.” Where trouble comes we are apt to aggravate it with this, that it has been otherwise; and to fret the more at the grievances

of restraint, sickness, and poverty, because we have known the sweets of liberty, health, and plenty, ^{<830>}Job 29:2; ^{<940>}Psalm 42:4. But we may turn it the other way, and reason thus with ourselves: “How many years of prosperity have I enjoyed more than I deserved and improved? And, having received good, shall I not receive evil also?” See here,

[1.] What a change may possibly be made with us, as to our condition in this world! Those that have *girded themselves with strength and honour*, and indulged themselves in the greatest liberties, perhaps levities, may be reduced to such circumstances as are the reverse of all this. See ^{<915>}1 Samuel 2:5.

[2.] What a change is presently made with those that leave all to follow Christ! They must no longer gird themselves, but he must gird them! and must no longer walk whither they will, but whither he will.

[3.] What a change will certainly be made with us if we should live to be old! Those who, when they were young, had strength of body and vigour of mind, and could easily go through business and hardship, and take the pleasures they had a mind to, when they shall be old, will find their strength gone, like Samson, when his hair was cut and he could *not shake himself as at other times*.

(4.) Christ tells Peter he should suffer thus in his old age.

[1.] Though he should be old, and in the course of nature not likely to live long, yet his enemies would hasten him out of the world violently when he was about to retire out of it peaceably, and would put out his candle when it was almost burned down to the socket. See ^{<1487>}2 Chronicles 36:17.

[2.] God would shelter him from the rage of his enemies till he should come to be old, that he might be made the fitter for sufferings, and the church might the longer enjoy his services.

2. The explication of this prediction (v. 19), *This spoke he to Peter, signifying by what death he should glorify God*, when he had finished his course. Observe,

(1.) That it is not only *appointed to all once to die*, but it is appointed to each what death he shall die, whether natural or violent, slow or sudden, easy or painful. When Paul speaks of so *great a death*, he intimates that

there are degrees of death; there is one way into the world, but many ways out, and God has determined which way we should go.

(2.) That it is the great concern of every good man, whatever death he dies, to glorify God in it; for what is our chief end but this, *to die to the Lord, at the word of the Lord?* When we die patiently, submitting to the will of God, — die cheerfully, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, — and die usefully, witnessing to the truth and goodness of religion and encouraging others, we glorify God in dying: and this is *the earnest expectation and hope* of all good Christians, as it was Paul's, *that Christ may be magnified in them living and dying,* ^{<10>}Philippians 1:20.

(3.) That the death of the martyrs was in a special manner for the glorifying of God. The truths of God, which they died in the defence of, are hereby confirmed. The grace of God, which carried them with so much constancy through their sufferings, is hereby magnified. And the consolations of God, which have abounded towards them in their sufferings, and his promises, the springs of their consolations, have hereby been recommended to the faith and joy of all the saints. The blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church, and the conversion and establishment of thousands. *Precious therefore in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints,* as that which honours him; and those who thereby at such an expense honour him he will honour.

3. The word of command he gives him hereupon: *When he had spoken thus,* observing Peter perhaps to look blank upon it, *he saith unto him, Follow me.* Probably he rose from the place where he had sat at dinner, walked off a little, and bade Peter attend him. This word, *Follow me,* was

(1.) A further confirmation of his restoration to his Master's favour, and to his apostleship; for *Follow me* was the first call.

(2.) It was an explication of the prediction of his sufferings, which perhaps Peter at first did not fully understand, till Christ gave him that key to it, *Follow me:* “Expect to be treated as I have been, and to tread the same bloody path that I have trodden before thee; *for the disciple is not greater than his Lord.*”

(3.) It was to excite him to, and encourage him in, faithfulness and diligence in his work as an apostle. He had told him to *feed his sheep,* and let him set his Master before him as an example of pastoral care: “Do as I

have done.” Let the under-shepherds study to imitate the Chief Shepherd. They had followed Christ while he was here upon earth, and now that he was leaving them he still preached the same duty to them though to be performed in another way, *Follow me*; still they must follow the rules he had given them and the example he had set them. And what greater encouragement could they have than this, both in services and in sufferings?

[1.] That herein they did follow him, and it was their present honour; who would be ashamed to follow such a leader?

[2.] That hereafter they should follow him, and that would be their future happiness; and so it is a repetition of the promise Christ had given Peter (~~436~~ John 13:36), *Thou shalt follow me afterwards*. Those that faithfully follow Christ in grace shall certainly follow him to glory.

~~437~~ JOHN 21:20-25

CHRIST'S DISCOURSE WITH PETER

In these verses, we have,

I. The conference Christ had with Peter concerning John, the beloved disciple, in which we have,

1. The eye Peter cast upon him (v. 20): Peter, in obedience to his Master's orders, followed him, and *turning about*, pleased with the honours his Master now did him, *he sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following* likewise. Observe here,

(1.) How John is described. He does not name himself, as thinking his own name not worthy to be preserved in these records; but gives such a description of himself as sufficiently informs us whom he meant, and withal gives us a reason why he followed Christ so closely. *He was the disciple whom Jesus loved*, for whom he had a particular kindness above the rest; and therefore you cannot blame him for coveting to be as much as possible within hearing of Christ's gracious words during those few precious minutes with which Christ favoured his disciples. It is probable that mention in here made of John's having *leaned on Jesus's breast* and his enquiring concerning the traitor, which he did at the instigation of

Peter (~~4824~~John 13:24), as a reason why Peter made the following enquiry concerning him, to repay him for the former kindness. Then John was in the favourite's place, lying in Christ's bosom, and he improved the opportunity to oblige Peter. And now that Peter was in the favourite's place, called to take a walk with Christ, he thought himself bound in gratitude to put such a question for John as he thought would oblige him, we all being desirous to know things to come. Note, As we have interest at the throne of grace, we should improve it for the benefit of one another. Those that help us by their prayers at one time should be helped by us with ours at another time. This is the *communion of saints*.

(2.) What he did: he also followed Jesus, which shows how well he loved his company; where he was there also would this servant of his be. When Christ called Peter to follow him, it looked as if he designed to have some private talk with him; but such an affection John had to his Master that he would rather do a thing that seemed rude than lose the benefit of any of Christ's discourse. What Christ said to Peter he took as said to himself; for that word of command, *Follow me*, was given to all the disciples. At least he desired to have fellowship with those that had fellowship with Christ, and to accompany those that attended him. The bringing of one to follow Christ should engage others. *Draw me and we will run after thee*, ~~2104~~Song of Solomon 1:4.

(3.) The notice Peter took of it: *He, turning about, seeth him*. This may be looked upon either,

[1.] As a culpable diversion from following his Master; he should have been wholly intent upon that, and have waited to hear what Christ had further to say to him, and then was he looking about him to see who followed. Note, The best men find it hard to *attend upon the Lord without distraction*, hard to keep their minds so closely fixed as they should be in following Christ: and a needless and unseasonable regard to our brethren often diverts us from communion with God. Or,

[2.] As a laudable concern for his fellow-disciples. He was not so elevated with the honour his Master did him, in singling him out from the rest, as to deny a kind look to one that followed. Acts of love to our brethren must go along with actings of faith in Christ.

2. The enquiry Peter made concerning him (v. 21): "*Lord, and what shall this man do?* Thou hast told me my work — to feed the sheep; and my lot

— to be *carried whither I would not*. What shall be his work, and his lot? Now this may be taken as the language,

(1.) Of concern for John, and kindness to him: “Lord, thou showest me a great deal of favour. Here comes thy beloved disciple, who never forfeited thy favour, as I have done; he expects to be taken notice of; hast thou nothing to say to him? Wilt thou not tell how he must be employed, and how he must be honoured?”

(2.) Or of uneasiness at what Christ had said to him concerning his sufferings: “Lord, must I alone be *carried whither I would not*? Must I be marked out to be run down, and must this man have no share of the cross?” It is hard to reconcile ourselves to distinguishing sufferings, and the troubles in which we think we stand alone.

(3.) Or of curiosity, and a fond desire of knowing things to come, concerning others, as well as himself. It seems, by Christ's answer, there was something amiss in the question. When Christ had given him the charge of such a treasure, and the notice of such a trial, it had well become him to have said, “Lord, and what shall I do then to approve myself faithful to such a trust, in such a trial? *Lord, increase my faith*. As my day is, let my strength be.” But instead of this,

[1.] He 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 do to *prove our own work, and understand our own way*.

[2.] He seems more concerned about events than about duty. John was younger than Peter, and, in the course of nature, likely to survive him: “Lord,” says he, “what times shall he be reserved for?” Whereas, if God by his grace enable us to persevere to the end, and finish well, and get safely to heaven, we need not ask, “What shall be the lot of those that shall come after us?” Is it not well if peace and truth be in my days? Scripture-predictions must be eyed for the directing of our consciences, not the satisfying of our curiosity.

3. Christ's reply to this enquiry (v. 22), “*If I will that he tarry till I come, and do not suffer as thou must, what is that to thee*. Mind thou thy own duty, the present duty, *follow thou me*.”

(1.) There seems to be here an intimation of Christ's purpose concerning John, in two things: —

[1.] That he should not die a violent death, like Peter, but should tarry till Christ himself came by a natural death to fetch him to himself. The most credible of the ancient historians tell us that John was the only one of all the twelve that did not actually die a martyr. He was often in jeopardy, in bonds and banishments; but at length died in his bed in a good old age. Note, *First*, At death Christ comes to us to call us to account; and it concerns us to be ready for his coming. *Secondly*, Though Christ calls out some of his disciples to resist unto blood, yet not all. Though the crown of martyrdom is bright and glorious, yet the beloved disciple comes short of it.

[2.] That he should not die till after Christ's coming to destroy Jerusalem: so some understand his tarrying till Christ comes. All the other apostles died before that destruction; but John survived it many years. God wisely so ordered it that one of the apostles should live so long as to close up the canon of the New Testament, which John did solemnly (~~628~~ Revelation 22:18), and to obviate the design of the enemy that sowed tares even before the servants fell asleep. John lived to confront Ebion, and Cerinthus, and other heretics, who rose betimes, *speaking perverse things*.

(2.) Others think that it is only a rebuke to Peter's curiosity, and that his tarrying till Christ's second coming is only the supposition of an absurdity: “Wherefore askest thou after that which is foreign and secret? Suppose I should design that John should never die, what does that concern thee? It is nothing to thee, when or where, or how, John must die. I have told thee how thou must die for thy part; it is enough for thee to know that, *Follow thou me*.” Note, It is the will of Christ that his disciples should mind their own present duty, and not be curious in their enquiries about future events, concerning either themselves or others.

[1.] There are many things we are apt to be solicitous about that are nothing to us. Other people's characters are nothing to us; it is out of our line to judge them, ~~640~~ Romans 14:4. Whatsoever they are, saith Paul, it makes no matter to me. Other people's affairs are nothing to us to intermeddle in; we must quietly work, and mind our own business. Many nice and curious questions are put by the *scribes* and *disputers of this world* concerning the counsels of God, and the state of the invisible world, concerning which we may say, *What is this to us?* What do you think will

become of such and such? is a common question, which may easily be answered with another: *What is that to me?* To his own Master he stands or falls. What is it to us to *know the times and the seasons?* Secret things belong not to us.

[2.] The great thing that is all in all to us is duty, and not event; for duty is ours, events are God's — our own duty, and not another's; for every one shall bear his own burden — our present duty, and not the duty of the time to come; for sufficient to the day shall be the directions thereof: a *good man's steps are ordered by the Lord*, (¹³⁷²Psalm 37:23); he is guided step by step. Now all our duty is summed up in this one of following Christ. We must attend his motions, and accommodate ourselves to them, follow him to do him honour, as the servant his master; we must walk in the way in which he walked, and aim to be where he is. And, if we will closely attend to the duty of following Christ, we shall find neither heart nor time to meddle with at which does not belong to us.

4. The mistake which arose from this saying of Christ, that *that disciple should not die*, but abide with the church to the end of time; together with the suppressing of this motion by a repetition of Christ's words, v. 23. Observe here,

(1.) The easy rise of a mistake in the church by misconstruing the sayings of Christ, and turning a supposition to a position. Because John must not die a martyr, they conclude he must not die at all.

[1.] They were inclined to expect it because they could not choose but desire it. *Quod volumus facile credimus* — *We easily believe what we wish to be true*. For John to abide in the flesh when the rest were gone, and to continue in the world till Christ's second coming, they think, will be a great blessing to the church, which in every age might have recourse to him as an oracle. When they must lose Christ's bodily presence, they hope they shall have that of his beloved disciple; as if that must supply the want of his, forgetting that the blessed Spirit, the Comforter, was to do that. Note, We are apt to dote too much on men and means, instruments and external helps, and to think we are happy if we may but have them always with us; whereas God will change his workmen, and yet carry on his work, that the *excellency of the power may be of God, and not of men*. There is no need of immortal ministers to be the guides of the church, while it is under the conduct of an eternal Spirit.

[2.] Perhaps they were confirmed in their expectations when they now found that John survived all the rest of the apostles. Because he lived long, they were ready to think he should live always; whereas *that which waxeth old is ready to vanish away*, ^{<883>}Hebrews 8:13.

[3.] However, it took rise from a saying of Christ's, misunderstood, and then made a saying of the church. Hence learn, *First*, The uncertainty of human tradition, and the folly of building our faith upon it. Here was a tradition, an apostolical tradition, a saying that *went abroad among the brethren*. It was early; it was common; it was public; and yet it was false. How little then are those unwritten traditions to be relied upon which the council of Trent hath decreed to be received with a *veneration and pious affection equal to that which is owing to the holy scripture*. Here was a traditional exposition of scripture. No new saying of Christ's advanced, but only a construction put by the brethren upon what he did really say, and yet it was a misconstruction. Let the scripture be its own interpreter and explain itself, as it is in a great measure its own evidence and proves itself, for it is light. *Secondly*, The aptness of men to misinterpret the sayings of Christ. The grossest errors have sometimes shrouded themselves under the umbrage of incontestable truths; and the scriptures themselves have been wrested by the unlearned and unstable. We must not think it strange if we hear the sayings of Christ misinterpreted, quoted to patronise the errors of antichrist, and the impudent doctrine of transubstantiation — for instance, pretending to build upon that blessed word of Christ, *This is my body*.

(2.) The easy rectifying of such mistakes, by adhering to the word of Christ, and abiding by that. So the evangelist here corrects and controls that saying among the brethren, by repeating the very words of Christ. He did not say that the disciple should not die. Let us not say so then; but he said, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* He said so, and no more. *Add thou not unto his words*. Let the words of Christ speak for themselves, and let no sense be put upon them but what is genuine and natural; and in that let us agree. Note, The best end of men's controversies would be to keep to the express words of scripture, and speak, as well as think, according to that word, ^{<880>}Isaiah 8:20. Scripture language is the safest and most proper vehicle of scripture truth: the *words which the Holy Ghost teacheth*, ^{<403>}1 Corinthians 2:13. As the scripture itself, duly attended to, is the best weapon wherewith to wound all dangerous errors (and therefore deists, Socinians, papists, and enthusiasts do all they can to derogate the authority of scripture), so the scripture itself, humbly

subscribed to, is the best weapon-salve to heal the wounds that are made by different modes of expression concerning the same truths. Those that cannot agree in the same logic and metaphysics, and the propriety of the same terms of air, and the application of them, may yet agree in the same scripture terms, and then may agree to love one another.

II. We have here the conclusion of this gospel, and with it of the evangelical story, v. 24, 25. This evangelist ends not so abruptly as the other three did, but with a sort of cadency.

1. This gospel concludes with an account of the author or penman of it, connected by a decent transition to that which went before (v. 24): *This is the disciple which testifies of these things to the present age, and wrote these things for the benefit of posterity, even this same that Peter and his Master had that conference about in the foregoing verses — John the apostle.* Observe here,

(1.) Those who wrote the history of Christ were not ashamed to put their names to it. John here does in effect subscribe his name. As we are sure who was the author of the first five books of the Old Testament, which were the foundation of that revelation, so we are sure who were the penmen of the four gospels and the Acts, the pentateuch of the New Testament. The record of Christ's life and death is not the report of we know not who, but was drawn up by men of known integrity, who were ready not only to depose it upon oath, but, which was more, to *seal it with their blood.*

(2.) Those who wrote the history of Christ wrote upon their own knowledge, not by hearsay, but what they themselves were eye and ear witnesses of. The penman of this history was a disciple, a beloved disciple, one that had leaned on Christ's breast, that had himself heard his sermons and conferences, had seen his miracles, and the proofs of his resurrection. This is he who testifies what he was well assured of.

(3.) Those who wrote the history of Christ, as they testified what they had seen, so they wrote what they had first testified. It was published by word of mouth, with the greatest assurance, before it was committed to writing. They testified it in the pulpit, testified it at the bar, solemnly averred it, stedfastly avowed it, not as travellers give an account of their travels, to entertain the company, but as witnesses upon oath give account of what they know in a matter of consequence, with the utmost caution and

exactness, to found a verdict upon. What they wrote they wrote as an affidavit, which they would abide by. Their writings are standing testimonies to the world of the truth of Christ's doctrine, and will be testimonies either for us or against us according as we do or do not receive it.

(4.) It was graciously appointed, for the support and benefit of the church, that the history of Christ should be put into writing, that it might with the greater fulness and certainty spread to every place, and last through every age.

2. It concludes with an attestation of the truth of what had been here related: *We know that his testimony is true.* This may be taken either,

(1.) As expressing the common sense of mankind in matters of this nature, which is, that the testimony of one who is an eye-witness, is of unspotted reputation, solemnly deposes what he has seen, and puts it into writing for the greater certainty, is an unexceptionable evidence. *We know*, that is, All the world knows, that the testimony of such a one is valid, and the common faith of mankind requires us to give credit to it, unless we can disprove it; and in other cases verdict and judgment are given upon such testimonies. The truth of the gospel comes confirmed by all the evidence we can rationally desire or expect in a thing of this nature. The matter of fact, that Jesus did preach such doctrines, and work such miracles, and rise from the dead, is proved, beyond contradiction, by such evidence as is always admitted in other cases, and therefore to the satisfaction of all that are impartial; and then let the doctrine recommend itself, and let the miracles prove it to be of God. Or,

(2.) As expressing the satisfaction of the churches *at that time* concerning the truth of what is here related. Some take it for the subscription of the church of Ephesus, others of the angels or ministers of the churches of Asia to this narrative. Not as if an inspired writing needed any attestation from men, or could thence receive any addition to its credibility; but hereby they recommended it to the notice of the churches, as an inspired writing, and declared the satisfaction they received by it. Or,

(3.) As expressing the evangelist's own assurance of the truth of what he wrote, like that (⁴⁰⁵John 19:35), *He knows that he saith true.* He speaks of himself in the plural number, *We know*, not for majesty-sake, but for modesty-sake, as ⁴⁰¹1 John 1:1, *That which we have seen*; and ⁴⁰⁶2 Peter

1:16. Note, The evangelists themselves were entirely satisfied of the truth of what they have testified and transmitted to us. They do not require us to believe what they did not believe themselves; no, they knew that their testimony was true, for they ventured both this life and the other upon it; threw away this life, and depended upon another, on the credit of what they spoke and wrote.

3. It concludes with an *et cetera*, with a reference to *many other things*, very memorable, said and done by our Lord Jesus, which were well known by many then living, but not thought fit to be recorded for posterity, v. 25. There were many things very remarkable and improvable, which, if they should be written at large, with the several circumstances of them, even the world itself, that is, all the libraries in it, could not contain the books that might be written. Thus he concludes like an orator, as Paul (~~812~~ Hebrews 11:32), *What shall I more say? For the time would fail me.* If it be asked why the gospels are not larger, why they did not make the New Testament history as copious and as long as the Old, it may be answered,

(1.) It was not because they had exhausted their subject, and had nothing more to write that was worth writing; no, there were many of Christ's sayings and doings not recorded by any of the evangelists, which yet were worthy to be written in letter of gold. For,

[1.] Every thing that Christ said and did was worth our notice, and capable of being improved. He never spoke an idle word, nor did an idle thing; nay, he never spoke nor did any thing mean, or little, or trifling, which is more than can be said of the wisest or best of men.

[2.] His miracles were many, very many, of many kinds, and the same often repeated, as occasion offered. Though one true miracle might perhaps suffice to prove a divine commission, yet the repetition of the miracles upon a great variety of persons, in a great variety of cases, and before a great variety of witnesses, helped very much to prove them true miracles. Every new miracle rendered the report of the former the more credible; and the multitude of them renders the whole report incontestable.

[3.] The evangelists upon several occasions give general accounts of Christ's preaching and miracles, inclusive of many particulars, as ~~403~~ Matthew 4:23, 24; 9:35; 11:1; 14:14, 36; 15:30; 19:2; and many others. When we speak of Christ, we have a copious subject before us; the reality exceeds the report, and, after all, *the one half is not told us.* St. Paul quotes

one of Christ's sayings, which is not recorded by any of the evangelists (^{<40B>}Acts 20:35), and doubtless there were many more. All his sayings were apophthegms.

(2.) But it was for these three reasons: —

[1.] Because it was not needful to write more. This is implied here. There were many other things, which were not written because there was no occasion for writing them. What is written is a sufficient revelation of the doctrine of Christ and the proof of it, and the rest was but to the same purport. Those that argue from this against the sufficiency of the scripture as the rule of our faith and practice, and for the necessity of unwritten traditions, ought to show what there is in the traditions they pretend to be perfective of the written word; we are sure there is that which is contrary to it, and therefore reject them. By these therefore *let us be admonished, for of making many books there is no end,* ^{<41D>}Ecclesiastes 12:12. If we do not believe and improve what is written, neither should we if there had been much more.

[2.] It was not possible to write all. It was possible for the Spirit to indite all, but morally impossible for the penmen to pen all. *The world could not contain the books.* It is a hyperbole common enough and justifiable, when no more is intended than this, that it would fill a vast and incredible number of volumes. It would be such a large and overgrown history as never was; such as would jostle out all other writings, and leave us no room for them. What volumes would be filled with Christ's prayers, had we the record of all those he made, when he *continued all night in prayer to God,* without any vain repetitions? Much more if all his sermons and conferences were particularly related, his miracles, his cures, all his labours, all his sufferings; it would have been an endless thing.

[3.] It was not advisable to write much; for *the world,* in a moral sense, *could not contain the books that should be written.* Christ said not what he might have said to his disciples, *because they were not able to bear it;* and for the same reason the evangelists wrote not what they might have written. *The world could not contain,* *choresai.* It is the word that is used, ^{<43B>}John 8:37, "My word *has no place* in you." They would have been so many that they would have found no room. All people's time would have been spent in reading, and other duties would thereby have been crowded out. Much is overlooked of what is written, much forgotten, and much made the matter of doubtful disputation; this would have been the case

much more if there had been such a world of books of equal authority and necessity as the whole history would have swelled to; especially since it was requisite that what was written should be meditated upon and expounded, which God wisely thought fit to leave room for. Parents and ministers, in giving instruction, must consider the capacities of those they teach, and, like Jacob, must take heed of over-driving. Let us be thankful for the books that are written, and not prize them the less for their plainness and brevity, but diligently improve what God has thought fit to reveal, and long to be above, where our capacities shall be so elevated and enlarged that there will be no danger of their being over-loaded.

The evangelist, concluding with *Amen*, thereby sets to his seal, and let us set to ours, an *Amen* of faith, subscribing to the gospel, that it is true, all true; and an *Amen* of satisfaction in what is written, as able to make us wise to salvation. *Amen*; so be it.