John 21:20-25 Commentary
King James Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Study Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Study Forum*.

(John 21:20) 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?

Peter turned and saw John following and listening to his conversation with Jesus, which leaves the strong impression that Jesus took Peter aside for a private discussion rather than talk where the others could also listen. Jesus intended to talk to Peter about his future personal ministry after his denial of Him. For reasons unknown to us, Jesus allowed John to follow them.

Perhaps Jesus did so because He intended for John to write this account in his Gospel as an eyewitness; then later, as the Holy Spirit led him, John did so. Perhaps Jesus wanted John to confirm what Peter would later tell the other disciples about his conversation with Jesus. Two witnesses are always important in the Bible whenever testimony is given. Peter and John could both bear witness about Jesus' commission to Peter as a restored leader in the Church. We do know that Peter and John seemed always together, and they were fishing partners. What Jesus told Peter would influence them both.

John learned how the Lord Jesus restored Peter to his apostleship after Peter had denied Him three times. The betrayal by Judas and the denial by Peter were both on John's mind when he wrote these closing verses. Whereas Peter repented and showed he genuinely loved the Lord Jesus and wanted to serve Him, Judas, who also felt remorse for what he had done, chose to hang himself instead of seeking the forgiveness of God (see Matthew 27:5). Jesus knew Peter's sincere remorse and his desire for Jesus' forgiveness, and Jesus also knew how Peter came to feel everything was hopeless after Jesus had died, because He could not forgive him. When Jesus appeared to them again from the seashore, Peter may have jumped into the water before the others so he could be alone to tell Jesus how sorry he felt and how he wanted Jesus' forgiveness. So, after breakfast Jesus took Peter aside to assure him of His forgiveness and restoration. Peter's experiences with Jesus can encourage all who know they

have genuinely followed Jesus and then have sinned and have fallen short of Jesus' and their aims to be a faithful disciple of Jesus. Jesus knew Peter's heart, for as Peter told Jesus, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you" (John 21:17). Jesus knows our hearts. Sincerely repentant disciples can do what Jesus told Peter to do. They can love Him, follow Him, and feed and tend His lambs and sheep as Jesus leads them. In humble prayer with Jesus, any follower of Jesus can take Peter's path to restoration, though Jesus may put them on a different path of service, for Jesus told Peter that he would die as a martyr. In his death, Peter demonstrated what he told Jesus he would do in John 13:37, "I will lay down my life for you." By the way Peter died, Jesus gave Peter the opportunity to do as he said and show the world the depth of his love and commitment to Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

(John 21:21) Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

Like many of us in similar situations, Peter naturally asked Jesus about what would happen to John, a fellow disciple. If he were going to die a martyr's death, would John also die as a martyr? Perhaps since John had listened to everything Jesus had told him, Peter felt like he should know what was going to happen to John. Whatever motivated Peter, Jesus did not tell Peter about John's future. They would take different paths of service. For example, John would write a Gospel, Letters, and

Revelation,

(John 21:22) Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

Hearing Peter's question, Jesus turned the focus back on Peter's relationship with Him as his Lord and Savior. Jesus told Peter that he MUST follow Him! Jesus would decide how and how long one of His followers would serve Him on this earth. Jesus would decide what type of life and death His followers would go through—what type would best glorify Him and influence others to follow Him as their Lord and Savior. Jesus told Peter that what He chose for John to do and how He chose for John to die were not matters that should concern Peter. Jesus, not Peter, was the Lord of them both. Jesus insisted that Peter's concern MUST be about how he faithfully followed and served Jesus, about how he cared for Jesus' people daily regardless of the personal consequences to himself—that was more than enough for Peter to be concerned about. Someone else may be honored or blessed in ways that seem better than what we experience, but loving, following, and obeying Jesus should be our primary concern—not what God is doing or planning to do through someone else.

(John 21:23) 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?

In the Bible, the writers use various ways to dispel rumors or correct them. When John concluded his Gospel, he wanted to correct a mistaken idea in the Church. Jesus did not say that John would be alive when He returned as He promised. Jesus said that if He wanted John to remain alive until He returned that should be of no concern to Peter. John was exiled to Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation, and tradition says that John was the only one of the twelve apostles who did not die a martyr's death. John glorified Jesus in a different way from the other apostles; for example, John wrote a great deal of the New Testament as well as the closing book in the Bible.

(John 21:24) This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.

If my counting is correct, according to the *New International Version* and the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, Matthew and Mark never used the word "true." Among the Gospel writers, John used the word true the most often. Not counting the Book of Acts, Luke used the word true 3 times in the NIV and 1 time in the NRSV. In his Gospel, John used the word true 15 times in the NIV and 19 times in the NRSV. In the NIV, Matthew used the word truth 1 time, Mark used the word truth 2 times, Luke used the word truth 1 time, and John used the word truth 28 times. In the NRSV Matthew used the word

truth 1 time, Mark used the word truth 2 times, Luke used the word truth 3 times, and John used the word truth 26 times. John "testified" to the "truth" as in a court of law under oath with consequences for lying (perjury); John was the one who wrote his Gospel. If John had not written what was true in his Gospel, he knew he would stand before the King and Judge of the universe someday and would give an account. The truth and what is true was of vital and saving importance to John and all the writers of the Bible. Those who knew John also testified that John's testimony was true. The most important reason to become a Christian and a faithful obedient follower of Jesus Christ is because the Bible and Christianity are true. What the Bible tells us about God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the believer's relationship with them by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is true. As Dr. Francis Schaeffer said: "The Bible is true in all it affirms." He also said, "There is only one reason to be a Christian, and not two. The only reason to be a Christian is because Christianity is true." Because the Bible is true, we can believe and trust in all the precious promises of God in the Bible, for God cannot lie. In Numbers 23:19, we read, "God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind." The Bible records many blessings for the followers of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, Paul reminded Christians, "But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him'—these things God has revealed to us through the

Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."

(John 21:25) 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 accurately recorded what the Holy Spirit decided was of most importance about the ministry of Jesus Christ and for our coming to believe the truth about Jesus and accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. In John 1:3, we learn that "all things came into being through Jesus;" therefore, the many truthful books that fill our world regarding creation and history, whether they mention Jesus or not, in some sense reveal His glory as the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. Some scientists know that when they study and research anything that exists, that they are studying the works of the Father and the Son, and they give glory to God. An infinite number of books could be written about how Jesus Christ, from before the beginning of creation and time, has blessed, cared for, healed, rescued, and saved His people from a countess variety of trials and tribulations and divine judgment—as well as bless believers beyond all human expectations now and forever. Jesus is our Creator, the Creator of all that exists. Jesus is the One who came into our world to live, to teach, to die, to rise again, and to ascend to the right hand of the Father to save us from our sins and grant us the

undeserved gift of eternal life—not to mention the blessed honor of serving Him in this world! So yes, the whole world would not have room for all the books that could be written about Jesus. Amazingly, every year thousands of books are still being written about Jesus, and many more could be written about Jesus and His work in our world and in the life of every person who loves and follows Him. No one loves us like the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord Jesus continue to bless the reading and study of the Gospel of John and the Bible that many might be saved from the power of sin and death, that many might come to know and believe the truth of God's Word, the Bible, and that many might enjoy everlasting friendship and eternal life with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Maranatha! Our Lord Come!

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think Peter was concerned about the future of John?

2. When Peter asked about the future of John, how did Jesus answer him?

3. Can you think of one or more ways Peter and John differed as Apostles?

4. Why do you think John wrote about the circulating rumor?

5. What do you think was the most important declaration that John made about his gospel?

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