

God's People Fed in Order to Feed

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[0 : 0 0] And it'd be worth keeping that passage, that final chapter of John open in front of you. It was back in 2021, I checked this week, that we started this journey through John's gospel.

! We've been looking at a section every year since. And this morning we finish off this great and unique book together. It's worth noting, as we saw last week, if you were here last week, we looked at James at the very end of chapter 20.

You can just look up there and see it in your Bibles as well. We have there John's purpose statement, John's reason for writing his gospel account.

These are words that we've looked at quite a number of times over the course of the years as we've tried to make sense of what John is writing and why he writes it. And he tells us in those verses, These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And that by believing, you may have life in his name. So this is a book all about who Jesus is and all about what he's done so that we might believe in him and have life.

[1 : 1 2] John tells us that. And in a lot of ways, it feels, doesn't it, like the end of chapter 20 would have been an obvious place for John to kind of put down his pen, to finish up there, to kind of land the plane, as it were.

Here's what I've written, and here is why. Good night. And so in some ways, chapter 21 that we look at this morning is almost a bit like an epilogue, some people have called it.

And yet that is certain, and I hope we're going to see this, that is certainly not because it is in any way less important or significant. Rather, these are the very thoughts that John wants to leave us with as we conclude his gospel.

And more than that, I think in particular, it's a chapter that shows us how John's gospel is a story that continues. The work of Jesus, that the mission of Jesus continues in his church and in his people.

We don't come to the end of John, kind of close the book, and say, oh, well, that was a great story. What next? No, we recognize that the belief that we are invited to have in Jesus through this book is something we continue to live in, and that continues to shape our lives moving forward.

[2 : 3 2] So what two things then does John want us to remember as we come to the end of this gospel? Two kind of main headings we're going to look at things under this morning. And the first one is this, that the risen Lord Jesus cares for his people.

The risen Lord Jesus cares for his people. This is really verses 1 to 14. Verse 1, we read, After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples.

And verse 14 kind of closes that section. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. We've spoken again in the last couple of weeks, looking through chapter 20 about the reality of the resurrection, about the evidence for the resurrection.

Again, we're seeing here that Jesus really did rise from the dead. And here is, once more, the eyewitness testimony to that. And yet I think as John draws this gospel to a close, he's trying to show us more than that.

He's trying to show us something in particular about the risen Jesus. Not just that he is alive again, but that he has this ongoing care for his followers.

[3 : 52] That's what we see in this scene. The disciples are out fishing. That's their background in some ways. That's kind of a natural thing for them to be doing. And Jesus stands on the shore.

They don't know it's him. And he says to them, you see that in verse 5, Children, do you have any fish? Even that word children, that's literally what the word means.

But it was also used as a kind of a term of endearment. You could translate it as friends or, you know, lads. Someone you feel some affinity and responsibility toward already.

There's that word showing Jesus' care. Have you caught anything? I love the disciples' kind of one-word answer. This is the same answer I always get if I ask anyone if they've caught a fish.

No. They say, kind of simple and to the point. And then Jesus tells them, cast the net on the right side of the boat. They do so. And miraculously, they have this huge catch of fish.

[4 : 50] Jesus miraculously revealing his power. And through that, the disciples come to recognize who it is that's standing on the shore.

Verse 7, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Remember, that's John's way of speaking about himself. John said to Peter, it is the Lord.

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. Simon Peter, as kind of enthusiastic as ever, dives in, clothes and all, to get to Jesus.

And we read as he and the boats with the other disciples arrive, they find Jesus. Fire already going, fish already cooking, inviting them to add from their catch to the meal.

In verses 12 to 14, Jesus serves them breakfast. And again, in the middle of that, verse 13, it's as Jesus serves them, we're told, they knew it was the Lord.

[5 : 51] Notice there how there's two times in those verses we're told that the disciples recognized Jesus. First, in the miraculous catching of the fish.

Second, in his serving them the food. First, in his power. Second, in his provision. That in both of these ways, the risen Lord Jesus is familiar, is recognizable in his actions toward his disciples.

And I think John is wanting to make a point as he concludes his gospel that in Jesus we continue to have a risen Savior who through his great power, the power we see in almost just a small way in these verses, but the power and the authority he has been given over all things, continues to provide for, continues to care for his children, to care for us.

That as we continue to live in the gospel story, we do it with Jesus' powerful provision for us as the risen Lord Jesus cares for his people.

And that's what we see then, I think, in the first half of this chapter. Now, obviously, the question perhaps or the response that's most likely to come to your mind is to say, well, hang on.

[7 : 17] Hang on a minute. You know, Jesus has never cooked me a meal of fish like this. This particular picture of Jesus caring for his people, this barbecue on the beach, that doesn't perhaps seem like our experience of the Christian life, that the physical presence of Jesus.

We don't have that anymore, do we? And John, as he writes the gospel, is completely aware of that. John is aware of Jesus' ascension.

John writes after Jesus' return to heaven, when he is no longer physically present with his people, he knows that that physical presence of Jesus isn't going to be the normal experience moving forward.

And yet he's already recorded Jesus speaking about this so we can make sense of it. Back in chapter 14, the night before the cross, Jesus has already told his followers, verse 18, I will not leave you as orphans.

I will come to you. He says that in the context of sending the Holy Spirit, another helper, he says, to be with and to be in his people forever.

[8 : 28] The fact is, however much we talk about it, it's so hard for us, isn't it, to believe that things wouldn't be better if Jesus was physically here.

Things wouldn't be better if we weren't having barbecues on the beach with him. And yet Jesus promises that it's actually better that he goes so that we can have the Holy Spirit through whom Jesus is present with all his people all the time, caring for us with his powerful provision.

Again, as we come to the end of John, we can be confident that we go out this week, if we've believed in Jesus, that he is the Christ, the Son of God, as John has been laying out for us.

If we have life in his name, we go out not as orphans left alone to deal with the struggles of this world and the hardships it contains.

But we go as those who Jesus calls children, those who Jesus calls friends, and those for whom the risen Lord continues to care for as his people.

[9 : 40] All of us, even as we sit here this morning, we have different things on our minds, don't we? There are always things kind of worrying about. It might be deadlines. It might be family concerns.

It might be how are we going to look after the kids over the long summer holidays. It could be physical or mental health struggles. There are a whole host of things, things I've not mentioned there.

And yet the encouragement is that in all of these things, Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, goes with us to support and care for us. Today and every day, the risen Lord Jesus continues to care for his people.

And so I think one of the ways that we can really apply this passage to our lives then is to be reminded of that this morning but also to take the time to remind ourselves of that each and every day.

Again, keep coming back to this. John wants this in our heads as we finish reading his gospel but not just as a one-off thing. We can't just say that, you know, the way we work as humans, we can't just say, well, I've read this chapter, therefore I know this fact and it's always there.

[10 : 46] I'll always remember. No, we are so prone to forget, to functionally forget Jesus' care for us. We take back on ourselves worries and burdens as if we have to carry them with no help.

We're so prone to neglect this. And yet each day we can start the day in prayer reminding ourselves of what is true and shown to us in these verses.

So here's a really kind of simple, almost mundane, but very concrete encouragement or challenge for us for this week that each day before we launch ourselves into the busyness of lives, before we kind of check our phone and head down that kind of rabbit warren of notifications and alerts, before we turn our focus to all the things that we need to do and all the things that are in store for us, that actually we would just take that time, maybe it's only 60 seconds, let's begin our day though, whatever it might contain, by dwelling on this wonderful truth, by seeing everything and being prepared to see all of the unexpected things even in light of this wonderful truth that the risen Lord Jesus cares for his people.

That is the truth for all those who have believed in him based on that evidence that John has laid out in his gospel. And that is the truth, that is the care that Jesus carries out through the ongoing presence of his Holy Spirit with us each and every day and in each and every situation.

Because that's the first half of this passage, the risen Lord Jesus cares for his people. Let's move into the second half. Probably most of the kind of the weight of this passage then comes in the second half, verse 15 onwards.

[12 : 36] We see here that the risen Lord Jesus sends his people. And so do have a look there. We have this conversation between Jesus and Peter in verses 15 to 19.

Three times Jesus asks Peter, do you love me? Three times Peter's answers, yes Lord, you know I love you. Three times Jesus tells Peter, feed my sheep.

This three times repetition from Jesus to Peter deliberately corresponds to the three times denial of Jesus from Peter that we saw in chapter 18 a few weeks ago as Jesus goes to the cross.

At that point, Peter abandons Jesus at his time of greatest need, denies he's ever even met him. And yet following the cross, following his resurrection, here is Jesus reinstating Peter after that event.

In some ways, this is almost a specific case of the ongoing care that Jesus has for his people as the greatest provision Jesus makes for Peter and for each one of us is that forgiveness is available.

[13 : 49] Here's a picture of being worked out of this amazing truth that is true for all of us this morning just as it was true for Peter that we have never blown it.

We've never done the straw that breaks the camel's back when it comes to Jesus. Rather, Jesus always welcomes us back in to restore us. Jesus restores Peter and although we read how painful that was for Peter, having Jesus question his love, we see ultimately Jesus' kindness as despite Peter having turned his back on Jesus, Jesus still forgives, as we've said, but more than that, gives Peter this purpose.

Feed my sheep, Jesus says, or tend my lambs in the middle. The force there is the same in each of these three times. And this is how the two halves of this chapter fit together then.

The risen Lord Jesus calls his people in. Jesus cares for them. As we saw here, in a very literal way, Jesus feeds them in order that he might send them to feed others.

That's what's happening here in this final chapter. Jesus shows his care in order that his care might be shared to others. Jesus feeds in order that others might then be fed.

[15 : 12] And to really get to grips with this, I think it's important to recognize that Jesus is dealing here in the first place with his original disciples. And so we've been, in some ways, fairly general so far.

I think what we've said has been true and in line with this chapter. But we want to see here, I think, the particular significance of who it is that Jesus cares for and who it is that Jesus sends in this chapter, in this particular event.

because in the first place, these are the apostles. These are those who are chosen by Jesus to continue his mission as he returns to heaven.

We see that played out through the book of Acts. We also see that day by day as these are the guys who the Holy Spirit inspires to write the Bible.

We spent a good amount of time earlier this year looking through, or last year, looking through 1 Peter, written by Peter who we're talking about here. Again, we're looking here at the eyewitness account of John, again, who is involved in this meal with Jesus.

[16 : 19] Jesus is saying to Peter, and really here is elsewhere, Peter is kind of a representative of the other apostles as well. He's saying, I'm bringing you in. I'm restoring you. I'm forgiving you so that you can go out and feed others.

So that you can go out and feed my sheep, feed my people. And again, historically, that is what happened. As Jesus taught day by day his original disciples, they then passed that truth on to others and the gospel spread that others might know all that God has done, might know his perfect care for them, might know the forgiveness that he offers.

And again, Peter is very clear with Peter this will be costly. Ultimately, it will cost him his life. Verses 18 and 19 there, he'll be led where he doesn't want to go, showing the kind of death he will suffer.

It's most likely Peter was martyred for his faith under Emperor Nero in a fierce persecution of the early church. And Peter was martyred as the majority of the other apostles were, martyred because he was carrying out this calling that Jesus gave to him here to feed his sheep, to keep on sharing the good news of who Jesus was and what he achieved, that others might believe and have eternal life.

And so really, kind of at the base level here, John is showing us that we should listen to the words of the apostles like Peter, like John himself, whose gospel we're reading.

[17 : 52] And again, we're reminded at the close of the book how in these verses that this is eyewitness testimony from John who saw this and so much more as all the apostles did.

How does Jesus particularly then care for us as his people? Will he, how does he ensure that we're not left hungry? Well, he's done that. He's provided that we might be fed through his word, the Bible.

He has given his first apostles that task that when we read the Bible then, we're not just reading a few kind of random people's recollections of what happened back then. We're reading the words of those that Jesus gave this particular authority and this particular calling to.

Words that we can really trust. Words that we can really build our lives upon. Words that really point us back to Jesus. Words that are really inspired by his Holy Spirit.

God's word, the Bible, can be trusted. It is the official, the authorized biography as it were. Authorized by Jesus himself here and so we continue to listen to it.

[19 : 02] That's why as a church we gather around God's word week by week because it's how Jesus organized for us to be fed. That's how we want to make sure that our church aligns with what we believe the Bible says rather than the common wisdom of our day.

That's why we're so blessed that the vast majority of us have a Bible in our homes, often more than one. because what we have there, even though we might take it for granted in this country, what we have is God's word which we're able to feed on day by day as it points us to Jesus.

And Jesus uses this language of feeding really deliberately and it's elsewhere in the Bible as well because it's being fed, it's eating that causes us to grow, isn't it?

When we're trying to get our youngest to eat at the moment that's what I keep on saying to him, eat this, it will make you big and strong. Sometimes it works or he's kind of getting wise to that tactic now.

But we're aware aren't we that physically speaking our diet is really important and it's the same spiritually. And that's why Jesus uses this language of feeding.

[20 : 15] He gives us in the apostles' teaching in our Bibles the food we need so that we can grow, so that our faith can develop, so that we can mature.

We said then one of the takeaways in terms of God's care for us was day by day to remind ourselves, take that time to appreciate God's care over us whatever the day holds.

Here's another kind of practical takeaway in the same vein that just as we wouldn't go a day without eating because we know we would get hungry, we know we would get weak, we know we would get grumpy, that in just the same way we wouldn't want to go a day without the spiritual food that God provides through the apostolic word that we have in our Bibles that we might grow strong in Him, that we might grow and mature and strengthen in our faith.

Here's the great encouragement that Jesus has given us the means we need to do that as we continue to walk with Him. The risen Lord Jesus sends His people in the first instance we've seen here that's His apostles who in this chapter are brought in, fed, forgiven and then sent out with His word and yet also a kind of a second layer as it were that's also the pattern for each one of us as well that just like them we are brought in as we hear about Jesus in God's word, the Bible we are cared for, we are fed, we are forgiven and we too are sent out with His word.

We too are fed in order to feed others. Our role is different to that of the apostles and we're not here to write inspired scripture as they were. We're not providing new insight or teaching on Jesus.

[22 : 06] We're not adding to the truths of His word that is complete. that was a particular role that Jesus' apostles had but still building on that foundation of the apostles' teaching of God's word as we are fed by it as it points us to Jesus as it teaches us of His life, His death, His resurrection of the forgiveness that is available of the eternal life that He promises of how we can live that out day by day.

It says we're fed by that that in turn we are able to feed one another. What does that look like? It looks different for all of us. In fact John here highlights how Jesus himself makes that point that John's ministry is going to look different to Peter's ministry.

The important thing Jesus says, verse 22, is you follow me. As we follow Jesus whatever particular life circumstances or responsibilities we might have, as we follow Jesus trusting in His care strengthened by His word.

We're also called to support others in this by sharing that word with them. For some of us, we've ordained elders today. For some of us that will be a specific and more formal teaching role to feed the church God's word.

Peter himself later on in the Bible speaks about elders shepherding the flock. No doubt he has this conversation with Jesus and His call to feed His sheep, vivid in His memory, ringing in His ears.

[23 : 41] Again, that role of elder is to pray and teach God's word to His people, whether one to many, like on a Sunday morning, whether one to one, whether one to few in small groups, whatever it might be.

There might be other responsibilities we have that involve this having been fed feeding others. It could be those who are out teaching our children or those here this morning who are not rooted on this morning.

It could be as parents, that responsibility to teach our children at home, to bring them up to know God and to trust in Jesus. There might be specific roles we have here, but as we've already mentioned this morning, all of us have this role of feeding one another.

We mentioned that book that we're encouraging people to read side by side. It's all about how we are to encourage and care for one another, and we can do that in a whole host of ways. But the foundation has to be sharing Jesus through his word with one another.

Because that is the greatest hope, and that is the greatest encouragement we have that we're able to share. And actually, finally, when we take that seriously, I think that really shapes how we approach the Bible, doesn't it?

[24 : 58] This truth given to us through the apostles that actually we don't just read for our good, but we read for the good of others as well. We are fed by God's word, we are built up, we need that, but it's as we do that that we have something then to share with other people.

It's like the airport safety instruction, you put on your own oxygen mask before you're then able to help those around you with theirs. If we're not feeding ourselves then, it's not just us who suffer, it's not just us who grow weak.

It means ultimately that we don't have anything to share with others, we're kind of an empty well. We're left perhaps with our own slightly empty feeling words or our slightly worldly advice.

We end up parroting what we see on Instagram or Facebook because we've spent plenty of time there, but very little soaked in God's word for us in order to be able to pass that on to others.

And yet as we've seen in God's sovereignty has been something we've been speaking about all morning this morning, that is how Jesus organises his church. That is the responsibility that he gives to each one of us.

[26 : 12] Jesus gathers in his apostles, he feeds them and sends them out that we can be fed through their words in our Bibles. And that chain continues as in the Bible and as we gather around God's word, whether individually or together on a Sunday, again we are shown God's care, we are fed, we are reminded of the forgiveness that comes only in him.

And then we are given that immense privilege and responsibility to go out and to feed one another by sharing the goodness of God together, revealed to us through his inspired word, the work of the apostles in the Bible.

And so we wrap up John's gospel here. this incredible eyewitness record, this book that we can have real confidence in, theological confidence, historical confidence, personal confidence, this book written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name, that eternal life we've spoken about, which we live in his ongoing care for us.

we live that in his strength as he feeds us through his word, given through John, given through Peter, given through the apostles in scripture, that we might also share that with others too, who Jesus is and all that he has done, that they too might enjoy this life, eternal life that he offers.

We come to the end of this book then and yet we continue in the life of faith, believing in Jesus, resting in the word of Jesus and encouraging one another as we journey together as his people.

[27 : 59] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that Jesus did not leave us as orphans, yet cares for us as his children and has particularly done that through providing us with the record and teaching of the apostles in the New Testament.

that as he fed them, they feed us as we are able to come and see the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

Lord, we thank you for John's eyewitness account which not only gives us the facts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, but also interprets them for us, showing him as the lamb who takes away the sins of the world, the son of God who reconciles us to you, our heavenly father, who prepares an eternal place with you.

These words inspired by the Holy Spirit himself to offer us peace and forgiveness and life. Lord, we thank you for those incredible truths and we pray that we would be reminded of them each day and through that we would find great comfort in Jesus' ongoing care for us as his people, his power and his provision, most of all his forgiveness which welcomes us home time and time again.

We thank you that you have given us your word to reveal that to us. We pray that you would help us to listen and also to share that word with others, that we'd be encouraging one another with Jesus' care for them, that we would have biblical truth at the front of our minds and ready to share through our lips as you use us to encourage one another and to speak of Jesus to those in the world around us.

[29 : 52] And Lord, our goal in all of this is that we would walk as your people, becoming more like Jesus, representing him well, that you might receive the glory that you and you alone deserve.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.