



## **A Final Conversation**

### **John 21:15-25**

- 1. Confirming a Calling (verses 15-19)**
- 2. Quieting a Rumor (verses 20-24)**
- 3. Closing this Gospel (verse 25)**

One of the great joys that I have as a pastor is that I am forced to live in a passage of Scripture each week of my life. Then, each Sunday morning, I have the opportunity to stand before you and share some of the things that I have learned from this passage of Scripture this week. This has been a weekly blessing to me for almost three decades now.

Every passage of Scripture is different. Some are filled with a narrative story of action. Others are filled with some rich wisdom. Some are easy to understand. Others are more difficult. Some are easy to apply. Others are more difficult.

But each week, I have a task before me, to figure out a passage, and then on Sunday morning to read it for you, and to explain it, and to apply it, and then to watch the Holy Spirit do his work, of using this word in your lives to conform you to the image of Jesus. What the Lord does in your lives as a result of my preaching is encouraging to me, and it is what gives me strength to press on each week in this task of preaching.

This morning, we come to the last chapter in the gospel of John, chapter 21. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bibles to John, chapter 21. Lord willing, we will finish our exposition of the gospel of John with this message. What we started in June of 2024, we finish today. But for me this morning, I'm not merely finishing the gospel of John. I'm finishing all of John's writings in the Bible. John wrote 5 books of the Bible. He wrote the gospel of John, that we will finish today. And the book of Revelation. And three epistles, 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. I preached through the book of Revelation from April of 2023 to April of 2024. Many of you were around to hear those expositions as well. But I have also

preached through the epistles of John, beginning in August of 2015 and spilling over into 2016, some 10 years ago. And some of you were around to hear those expositions as well.

And so, as we say goodbye to the gospel of John today And so, as we say goodbye to the gospel of John today, I'm saying goodbye to John as well. Now, of course, it's not that we won't ever consider a passage from John again at Rock Valley Bible Church. It's just that they will come by way of a single message or series, not as a continuous exposition. For me, it has been a great joy to work through every verse of the gospel of John. I trust that this is the same for you all as well.

Some of these passages of John have been filled with action! We have seen Jesus turn water into wine (John 2). We have seen Jesus drive out the money-changers in the temple (John 2). We have seen Jesus heal the invalid (John 5). We have seen Jesus feed the 5,000 by the Sea of Galilee (John 6). We have seen Jesus walk on water (John 6). We have seen Jesus give sight to the blind (John 9), and raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

We have seen the great conflict that Jesus had with the religious leaders of the day, who saw his miracles and could not deny them, but hated Jesus so much that they objected to the miracles on the ground that they were done on the Sabbath day! Gasp! We have seen how this conflict eventually resulted in the death of Jesus, as he was crucified on the cross for our sins, but was raised from the dead. We have been witness to some great conversations.

We have listened in to the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus (John 3), and with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), and with the disciples in the upper room (John 13-17), and with Pontius Pilate in his headquarters (John 18).

This morning, we come to one of those conversations. In fact, this morning we come to the final conversation in the gospel of John. It's a conversation between Jesus and Peter.

My message this morning is entitled "A Final Conversation." It comes from John 21:15-25. Because this is what we see in our text. We see Jesus and Peter having a final conversation. This conversation gives us a closing word about Peter, a closing word about John, and a closing word about the entire gospel.

This conversation takes place on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. Remember, Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem, and risen from the dead. While in Jerusalem, Jesus

appeared to the disciples on several occasions. But now the disciples were together in Galilee, where about half of the ministry of Jesus took place.

Jesus appears to them again along the beach. If you remember from last week, the story is that Peter said to the disciples, “I am going fishing” (John 21:3). And a handful of the disciples said, “We will go with you” (John 21:3). They fished all night long and they caught nothing. Then Jesus showed up. He shouted to them from the shore, “Children, do you have any fish?” (John 21:5). They answered him, “No” (John 21:5). So Jesus said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some” (John 21:6). So they did, and they did. They found so many fish that they were not able to haul in the net, for it was so full of fish!

John discerned what took place. He said, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:7). So Peter jumped in and swam to shore in his eagerness to see Jesus as soon as possible. So, there, on the shore of Galilee, Jesus and the disciples had “Breakfast on the Beach.” In verse 15, the breakfast has finished, and we get to hear this conversation. So, let’s read our passage.

#### John 21:15-25

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple

was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

For my first point this morning, let us consider what Jesus says to Peter. I believe that Jesus is confirming his call upon the life of Peter.

## **1. Confirming a Calling (verses 15-19)**

At this point in the gospel, we have seen much of Peter. Jesus called him in chapter 1 (John 1:42). Peter was a faithful disciple of Jesus throughout his ministry. In John chapter 6, when all the crowds left Jesus after he refused to feed them in perpetuity, Jesus said to the disciples, “Are you going to go too?” And Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” He was a faithful disciple throughout all the ministry of Jesus.

In the upper room, Peter pledged his fidelity to Jesus, even unto death. He said, “I will lay down my life for you” (John 13:37). Yet, in a few short hours, Peter would deny Jesus three times. After the arrest of Jesus, Peter followed him from a distance, arriving at the door of the courtyard of the high priest. He was asked by a servant girl, “You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?” (John 18:17). And Peter replied, “I am not” (John 18:17). He then stood with the other servants and officers near the charcoal fire they had made to keep warm. And there, one of the other servants said to Peter, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” (John 18:25). Peter denied it and said, “I am not.” Then, another servant said to Peter, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” (John 18:26). Peter again denied it. At that point a rooster crowed, exactly as Jesus had foretold (John 13:38).

That’s the last we hear of Peter, until the resurrection. He who had professed his fidelity to Jesus was nowhere to be seen during the hours of the death of Jesus. We don’t see him in the gospel of John at the cross. We don’t see him helping with the burial. He’s gone.

In John 20, we read of Jesus appearing to Peter and the other disciples on several

occasions after the resurrection. But I think that the question that is lingering in our minds about Peter is this: he was a faithful disciple of Jesus. But he denied him on three occasions, which was made especially bad when Peter had strongly pledged the opposite: “I will lay down my life for you” (John 13:37). What’s his role among the disciples going to be?

It seems as if Peter was still a bit confused as to the calling of God upon his life. In verse 3, we find Peter going back to work: “I am going fishing” (John 21:3). But in this final conversation with Peter, Jesus directs him, not to be a fisherman, but to be a shepherd. He’s not to be on the seas. He’s to be on the land with the people. Let’s look again at verse 15.

#### John 21:15

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

The question for us at this point is this: what is Jesus referring to when he says “more than these”? More than what? More than fishing? More than the disciples? If it means “more than the disciples,” another question comes. What is the comparison? Is it the love? “Do you have more love for me than the disciples have for me?” Or is it the person? “Do you love me more than you love the disciples?”

Whatever it is, Peter affirms his love for Jesus: “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” This is a strong affirmation of his love for Jesus. Peter knows that he loves Jesus. And Peter says that Jesus knows that he loves him. Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

At this point, Jesus is confirming the calling upon the life of Peter. He is saying, “Peter, I don’t want you to be a fisherman. I want you to be a shepherd. I want you to shepherd my lambs. I want you to feed my lambs.” As the conversation continues, we see that it continues along the same line. Verse 16.

#### John 21:16

He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”

The question is almost exactly the same. But rather than Jesus asking Peter of some comparison of love, “more than these,” Jesus asks the raw question: “Do you

love me?” The answer that Peter gives is exactly the same. Peter appeals to the knowledge of Jesus: “You know that I love you.” And Jesus responds with a parallel statement from before: “Tend my sheep.”

Again, Jesus is telling Peter the same thing: “Peter, I don’t want you to be a fisherman. I want you to be a shepherd. I want you to tend my sheep.” The word translated here, “tend,” means “shepherd.” “I want you to care for my sheep and watch over them like a shepherd would.”

And the conversation continues along the exact same line as before.

### John 21:17

He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

The question was the same: Jesus asks Peter about his love. The response of Peter was the same: “Yes, I love you.” But added in here was the grief of Peter, that he would be asked the question for now a third time. Peter also added that Jesus not only knew that Peter loved him, but that Jesus knows everything!

Peter says, “Why are you even asking the question?” I agree with Peter. Jesus does know all things. But Jesus isn’t asking the question for Jesus. Jesus is asking the question for Peter.

Peter had denied Jesus three times, and now Jesus is affirming his call upon Peter’s life on three occasions. He said, “Feed my sheep.” This is a practical synonym to what he has said for now the third time. This third time brings the emphasis. “Peter, I don’t want you to be a fisherman. I want you to be a shepherd. I want you to feed my lambs. I want you to tend my sheep. I want you to feed my sheep.” This is a clear confirmation of the calling of Peter.

This is the calling that every pastor has. He is called to the work of caring for the flock of Jesus. This is the calling that I have upon the flock that God has entrusted to me. God has called me (and the other elders) to be a shepherd to you all, to care for you as a shepherd would care for his sheep, watching over them, guarding them, guiding them.

Peter pressed his fellow elders to do this in a humble way. He wrote,

### 1 Peter 5:1-3

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

This is how shepherds are called to do their work. Peter says, "not under compulsion," because they freely want to shepherd the sheep, without any external motivations. It's not because they are paid that they do the work. Rather they do the work, "willingly," because it is their great desire.

Peter says, "not for shameful gain, because they are not looking for earthly profit, but "eagerly," because the task requires it. Peter says, "not domineering," because Jesus the great shepherd came as a servant, "being examples," because Jesus was our model.

Now, in this case, Jesus emphasizes the feeding of the flock in his words to Peter. This burden, among the elders, falls mostly upon me, as I have done the majority of the teaching here at Rock Valley Bible Church. This is my desire: to feed you. I want to feed your souls from the word of God. I want to feed you the whole counsel of God.

That's why I have, and always will have, as the thrust of my ministry, the verse-by-verse exposition of Scripture. Teaching you what the Bible says. Explaining to you what the Bible says. Applying to you what the Bible says. Over and over, week by week, year by year. This has been, and by God's grace will be for years to come, how I will serve you all in feeding you from the word of God.

For the past year and a half, this feeding of you has been daily. Yvonne and I have read the Bible to you every day, for the past year and a half, in our podcast, "Read Thru the Bible." You have the opportunity to listen to my voice, fresh every day, with the word of God. The last thing that I want for any of you to say of my ministry to you all is that I didn't feed you well.

This is the common wording of a common complaint that I have heard over the years of those who have left other churches to come to ours. They say, "I wasn't being fed at my previous church." Now, in many cases, that may well be true. The preaching and teaching of the church isn't really feeding the souls of the people.

This can come through lack of content, with the teaching being light and fluffy, merely tickling the ears of those who hear. But it can also come through dry content as well, with teaching that is unappetizing to the people, because it hasn't been cooked or it just tastes bad.

My aim, day after day in our podcast, is to read the Scriptures in an engaging way that they are understood, that you might be fed your daily food. My aim, week after week, is to preach in such a way that I teach your mind and touch your soul, that I encourage you with the hope of heaven, to press on in your faith, that following Jesus is worth it all.

I want you to be strong for the journey. I want you to be like the wife who feeds her laboring husband a hearty breakfast, and who packs a nutritious lunch for him, so that he will be well nourished for the work of the day ahead of him.

That's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to feed you well. May it never be said of those who leave Rock Valley Bible Church, "I wasn't fed by pastor Steve."

I listened to a great sermon this week on this passage. In the message, the preacher gave an application, not to the preacher to feed the sheep, but to the sheep, to be easily fed. [\[1\]](#)

I would like to press that upon you as well. "Are you easily fed?" Are you coming to the table, wanting to be fed by the word of God? There are many who come to church to learn what they can and soak in the Scriptures, that their souls may be nourished, that their spirits may be encouraged.

There are plenty who attend church week after week, just looking for something to criticize, just looking for the debatable matters on the fringe, finding any reason to criticize. Such people aren't easily fed. If that's you, I'm not sure that I can feed you either. But I'm trying. Such people are often those who go away saying, "I wasn't being fed at my previous church." Oh, may the Lord help you to overlook the ways in which I fail to love you, fail to serve you, fail to teach you.

Now there is something else going on in this passage. It is not just about feeding. There is the issue of love. We need to talk about the Greek text. Normally I try not to bring out the nuances of the original languages, lest you think that you cannot understand the Bible without knowing Greek and Hebrew. You can understand the Bible without the original languages. But there is a subtle difference in the words for love spoken here in this passage.

There are two Greek words for love in this conversation. The first is "agapao," the verb form of "agape." This is love in its highest form, the heavenly love that explains how God loves us. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3: 16). That is "agapao" love. It is the sacrificial love of God demonstrated in his giving his only Son, Jesus, to come to earth and die for our sins, that by faith in him we might have everlasting life.

The second word for love is "phileo," the verb form of "philos." This is often referred to as human or brotherly love. It is easy to remember: Philadelphia is the city of brotherly love, because "philos" is love and "adelphos" is brother.

There are different words used in this conversation between Jesus and Peter. In verse 15, Jesus says to Peter, "Do you (agapao) me?" That is, "Do you love me with a heavenly love?" Peter replied, "Yes, Lord; you know that I (phileo) you." That is, "You know that I love you with a brotherly love." In the third exchange, Jesus comes down to Peter's level and asks, "Do you (phileo) me?" And Peter, grieved, says, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I (phileo) you."

Some people make a big deal of this difference, and some do not. If you have a New American Standard Version of the Bible in your laps, the translators there felt so strongly about this difference that they footnoted the different words that were used, so that you as the reader can see the different Greek words that were used. The difference rings like this in the text. Looking at verse 15.

#### John 21:15

"Simon, son of John, do you love (agapao) me more than these?" Do you love me with a heavenly love? He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love (phileo) you." You know that I love you with a brotherly love. He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

#### John 21:16

He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love (agapao) me?" Do you love me with a heavenly love? He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love (phileo) you." You know that I love you with a brotherly love. He said to him, "Tend my sheep."

#### John 21:17

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love (phileo)

me?” Do you love me with a brotherly love? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love (phileo) me?” Do you love me with a brotherly love? and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love (phileo) you.” You know that I love you with a brotherly love. Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

The idea that people try to bring out here is that Peter could never quite say that he loved Jesus with a heavenly love (agapao), and that we need to have such a heavenly love for God, not merely a human love. Personally, I'm not so sure of this distinction. Certainly it's true that we should love (agapao) God with a heavenly love, a self-sacrificial love that will give our all to the Lord. But I'm simply not sure that this distinction is quite the point, either. We are to (phileo) love God as well. Jesus is our brother who took on flesh and blood to become like us. Jesus calls us his brother (Hebrews 2:11). Our affection for Jesus should be like a brother.

I tell you these Greek words because others will tell you this when coming to this passage. It will be helpful to you to understand what the text says. But don't lose the main point: that love for Jesus is crucial to serving Jesus. Regardless of the particular words, the thrust is still the same. Do you love the Lord? Then serve the Lord.

The overflow of love to Jesus is certainly service to Jesus. But also, the love to Jesus is the power of service to Jesus. You show me one who loves Jesus deeply and intimately, and I'll show you one who will serve Jesus unto death! I would also add this: the love for Jesus is also the power of your service to others. That is why Paul prayed in Ephesians chapter 3 that you might know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, because it is that love that empowers you for the ministry and empowers you to serve other people.

But it doesn't work the other way. You can “serve” the Lord without a “love” for the Lord. Because service can be all external. Just read the book of Malachi. In that book, the Lord is chastising the people of Israel, not for what they were doing, because in fact they were “serving” the Lord, but for the ways that they were doing it. They were offering up lame and sick animals upon the altar (Malachi 1:13). They were offering up the second best. They were going through the motions. They weren't motivated by love to God, but boy, they were busy in offering up their sacrifices. The same is true of the Pharisees. With great zeal they sought to keep all of the commandments of God, but they were doing so without a love for God.

I heard a preacher this week describe the difference well.<sup>[2]</sup> He said, “Imagine your children. Imagine one of your children saying, ‘Mom and Dad, I’m going to obey your every word, because God tells me to, but I’m not going to love you.’” Would you want that? As a parent, would you want that?

Then he said, “What if your child said, ‘Mom and Dad, I love you deeply. I know that I will fail you in many ways, but my desire is to show you my love for you all of my days.’” Would you want that? Of course! Every parent would want that. So likewise, this is what Jesus is getting at with Peter here. “Do you love me?” Then serve me.

I heard this same preacher talk about love, especially to help the men of his congregation who hear the word “love” and think of romantic love, as if Jesus were like a girlfriend. He said, “This isn’t romantic love. This is the love of commitment. This is the love that is willing to self-sacrifice, and die if needed.” “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

This is the love to which Jesus calls us. He calls us all to lay down our lives in love for Jesus. This is what Jesus was calling Peter to do. Indeed, this is what Peter did. Look at verse 18.

#### John 21:18

“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.”

Jesus was telling Peter there was going to be a day when he would lose his freedom. Someone would take him, stretch out his hands upon a cross, and take him to a place of death. Now, it may seem as if that is reading a lot into verse 18. But I say that because of verse 19.

#### John 21:19

(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

According to the tradition of the church, this is exactly what happened to Peter. He was crucified upon a cross, just like Jesus, with arms stretched out, taken where he

didn't want to go. Only church tradition tells us that Peter insisted that he be crucified upside down, because he felt unworthy to die the same way that Jesus did. In dying in this way, Peter demonstrated his love for Jesus.

We may not die by crucifixion, but this is what we all are called to do. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). This is love to Jesus! Following Jesus, even unto death! This was the final word that Jesus told Peter: "Follow me" (John 21:19). Peter did this very thing until his dying day. This is what we all are called to do until our dying days. Follow Jesus.

Are you following Jesus? Perhaps you have failed Jesus in some way. Join the club. Perhaps you have denied Jesus with your words and actions. Join the club. Join Peter's club. But join his club in being confirmed in your calling. Jesus restored Peter to what he called him to do. Peter went on to be the predominant preacher in the first part of Acts, and he wrote his epistles to feed the people of God. He fulfilled the calling. You may be called to other things: to be a faithful mom or dad, a faithful worker at your workplace, one who speaks the gospel where you can, one who serves and loves others in the church. Whatever God has called you to, he can restore you to it, despite your sins and failures. And know that the Lord can and will restore you to what he has called you to do.

Let's move quickly on.

## **2. Quieting a Rumor (verses 20-24)**

### John 21:20-22

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"

Notice that in verse 20, Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. Maybe at this point they are up and walking along the way. Jesus had said "follow me," and perhaps he got up and started walking, and Peter began following after him, and when Peter turned, he saw John coming along behind them as well.

The key to understanding these words is to understand when John wrote his

gospel. He wrote them near the end of the first century. Somewhere around 90 AD is our best guess. And there was this rumor going around that Jesus had said that John would not die until the Lord returns. By 90 AD, John was getting pretty old! Perhaps some would take the rumor and believe that Jesus was coming back soon, like in the next year or two or three! Such people would be prone to make unwise decisions based upon an unsubstantiated rumor.

I think about the story of William Miller, who lived in the 1800s.<sup>[3]</sup> He studied the Bible carefully (especially the prophecies of Daniel). He became convinced that he had discovered the timing of Christ's return. He calculated and calculated and concluded that Jesus would come back somewhere between 1843 and 1844. His message spread quickly. Tens of thousands of people across the United States believed him. This movement became known as the Millerite Movement. People sold property, left jobs, and reordered their lives in expectation of Christ's imminent return.

Eventually, a specific date was settled upon: October 22, 1844. But that day came and went. Nothing happened. What followed is known as the Great Disappointment. Can you imagine the emotional and spiritual weight of that moment? People who had staked everything on a confident expectation were left confused, disillusioned, and in many cases devastated. Some abandoned their faith altogether. Others tried to reinterpret what had happened. But the central truth remained: they had been certain about something Jesus had never clearly said.

And that is exactly the kind of situation John is trying to address in verse 23.

#### John 21:23-24

So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

In other words, Jesus is saying to Peter: don't worry about what happens to John. I will deal with him. You, Peter, you follow me. Where I am going, you just follow after me. Don't build your life on rumors or timelines. Trust Jesus and follow him. This is what Jesus was calling Peter to do in this "Final Conversation."

Again the message comes to Peter: "Follow Me" (verse 22). This is the final message of John. Let's follow Jesus. If we finish the gospel of John, and you have

not believed in him, so that you follow him, so that you have life, then my preaching has been in vain. This is the message that John leaves us with: “Follow him!!”

OK, let's finish up really quick with verse 25.

### **3. Closing this Gospel (verse 25)**

#### John 21:25

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

This verse sounds very much like John 20:30-31: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these 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.” There are lots of other things that could have been written. John chose these things for a purpose. Here in chapter 21, he even expands it: there are so many other things that Jesus did that perhaps the world itself could not contain the books.

We see this expansive work of Jesus in the very first verse in Acts, where we read, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do" (Acts 1:1). The idea is that the work of Jesus only began that in the book of Luke, but Jesus continues his work in the book of Acts. John Stott wrote about the book of Acts that it is "the continuing words and deeds of Jesus by his Spirit through the apostles."<sup>[4]</sup>

So I don't think John is talking only about the earthly life of Jesus when he writes verse 25. I think he has in mind everything that Jesus has done in building his church and all the stories that can be told of what Jesus did in the early church.

But I think that you can extend this to the lives of people across all the centuries. Every one of you could fill many books by the things that God has done for you. There are things you know about. But there are also things you don't even know he has done for you. It is just a deep well. Can you echo the words of the Psalmist?

#### Psalm 40:5

You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;

none can compare with you!  
I will proclaim and tell of them,  
yet they are more than can be told.

Will you proclaim the wondrous deeds of God, realizing that however much you say, the wondrous deeds of God "are more than can be told"?

Consider what the hymn writer says about the love of God:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
and were the skies of parchment made,  
were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill,  
and ev'ry man a scribe by trade,  
to write the love of God above  
would drain the ocean dry;  
nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
tho' stretched from sky to sky.<sup>[5]</sup>

We end the gospel of John today. We end it the way John himself would want us to. We end with the exhortation: "Believe, so that you may have life in his name!"

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 3, 2026 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org](http://www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org).

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[1] Adam Wilson, "The Great (Re)Commission" (sermon, Third Avenue Baptist Church, July 6, 2014), audio, <https://thirdavenue.libsyn.com/adam-wilson-john-21-15-22-the-great-re-commission>.

[2] David Guzik, "Restoration and Relationship" (sermon, Calvary Chapel Santa Barbara, August 25, 2024), video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnG26Iy7kFY>.

[3] See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Miller\\_\(preacher\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Miller_(preacher)).

[4] John Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 34.

[5] Frederick M. Lehman, "The Love of God," (1917).