

Gospel of John Chapter 21

This is one of my favorite narratives in all of the Gospel of John. It clearly demonstrates Christ's persistent love for those he has chosen even in the face of their failures.

- Reading it, I find myself in awe of the Lord's patience, his kindness and the gentleness that he exhibits as he restores the Big Fisherman to fellowship and service.

We are familiar with Peter's impetuous personality: It was exhibited in His confession of faith when Jesus asked, **Who do you say that I am? You are the Christ!**

Remember Peter's bold declaration on the night of Jesus arrest: **"Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."**

And then of course we remember Peter's failure: his denial and the shame that gripped his soul. (3 times he declared, "I don't know him.")

- Here in Chapter 21 we find Peter and some of the others back in the region of Galilee. This is the place, after his resurrection where Jesus told the disciples he would meet them.

Matthew 28:9 **And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."**

- By now some time has passed; the question had to arise, what should we be doing? Should we return to our homes and go on with life?
- Was this just a religious experience that we will tell our children and grandchildren about in the years to come?

HOW would the disciples live now that Jesus is not personally leading them on a daily basis?

- For 3 ½ years they relied on the Lord to direct them. He lead the way, He initiated every ministry experience. BUT now He told them that he was returning to the Father and they haven't seen him for a few days. What should they do?

Well Peter the natural leader made a decision: **Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you."**

- I would contend with you that this was a decision made out of necessity?
- Jesus wasn't there to personally direct them, their treasurer, Judas left with the bag of money and killed himself. They do needed to eat, so they did what they knew how to do, they went fishing.

If Peter was anything like me, at this point he was feeling like a total failure. I have no doubt that he was still wrestling with a tremendous weight of guilt. The words of his denial, the crow of the rooster and that look, that glance of the Lord Jesus at the very moment when Peter proclaimed, **"I don't know what you are talking about! I don't know him!"**

- The words and emotions of that moment still echoing in his mind.
- What do you do when you are languishing in a prison of shame? SOME stay in bed! Some drink to deaden the pain, ME: Go to work.. If you are Peter you go fishing.

John 21:1 **After this** (after the appearances of Christ in Jerusalem) **Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, (Sea of Galilee) and he revealed himself in this way.**

2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

- To add insult to injury, these professional fishermen have fished all night and caught nothing.
- At the end of a fruitless night the disciples are about 100 yards from the shore and someone yells from the beach:
- The only thing worse than failure is failure with an audience.

John 21:4 Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No."

- They don't recognize the person or the voice. Mary didn't recognize the Lord at first, the 2 on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize him.

6 He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.

- NOW you might think that Peter would immediately recognize the familiarity of these circumstances.
- In the Gospel of Luke, after using Peter's boat as a make-shift pulpit Jesus tells Peter to go out into the sea and drop the nets.

Luke 5: 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.

- Same sea, same fruitless night, same command from a helpful onlooker, ending with the same miraculous catch of fish.
- There is one thing that is different: Peter's response. The first miraculous catch:

Luke 5:8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

R.C. Sproul

"It is the universal response of the creature who beholds the unveiled glory of the holy. Our basic nature is to put as much space between Christ and ourselves as we can. When Peter realized the One with whom he was dealing, he was overwhelmed with a sense of his guilt. He wanted relief from that guilt more than anything else, and that meant he wanted space between Jesus and himself. So he said, "Jesus please leave, I can't stand it."

- Peter's response in the Gospel of John is quite different:

John 21: 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore 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.

- In spite of his failures, knowing that he was still a sinner, Peter immediately jumps in the water and swims to the Lord Jesus. What is the difference?
- Peter had walked with the Lord Jesus for 3 ½ years:

Peter was with Jesus when the paralyzed man was lowered from the rooftop by his friends and placed at the center of the gathering.

Luke 5:20 *And when he saw their faith, Jesus said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."*

Not long after that, in Luke 7 a renowned sinful woman interrupted a Pharisee's dinner party to which Jesus and his disciples were invited.

- Peter remembers how the woman anointed Jesus' feet with anointment and wiped them with her hair.
- The Pharisees were indignant with the interruption and they grumbled, "*If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.*" Jesus turned to the woman and said, "*Your sins are forgiven.*"

Peter was there when Jesus spoke to the woman who was caught in the very act of adultery and he heard him say, "*Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.*"

Three and a half years of hearing Jesus proclaim good news to the poor,

Three and a half years of watching Jesus bind up the brokenhearted healing their wounds.

Three and a half years seeing Jesus opening the prison for those who are bound;

- NOW he finds himself bound in a prison of shame, This time instead of pushing away the one who holds the key to his freedom he jumps into the water and swims to the shore.

8 The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. 9 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

- This is the same loving Lord, the same faithful servant that they knew and loved. Death and resurrection had not changed who he was.
- The very one who wrapped a towel around his waist and served them at the Passover, now served them a breakfast on the shore.
- The same faithful provider who multiplied the loaves and fish at the miraculous feeding was once again passing out bread and fish.

As the meal draws to a close Jesus turns to Peter: This is the first written account of a one on one conversation between Jesus and Peter since the crucifixion.

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." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 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." 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.

You will note that Jesus addresses Peter as “Simon” rather than “Peter”

- The name Peter means “Rock” Simon has been anything but a rock.

Jesus asks him: “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

- Do you love me MORE THAN WHO, (the fish? More than the other disciples?)
- I believe that Jesus is taking Peter back to the night of his betrayal.
- Uncovering the prideful attitude that was behind his denial.

ON the night that Jesus was betrayed, Peter made 3 BOLD declarations of his loyalty and commitment to the Lord.

(Upper room) When Jesus told the disciples they could not follow him where he was going.

John 13:37, 37 Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”

- After Jesus foretells that ALL of them would fall away just as the scripture said: Peter boldly objected:

Matthew 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night.

33 Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”

Luke 22: 31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” 33 Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”

THREE bold declarations of undying allegiance.

- I will lay down my life for you!
- I will never fall away!
- I am ready to die for you!

We all know how quickly those bold declarations can change given the right circumstances:

The arrest of Jesus with so great a show of force, the Roman cohort, the temple guards, quieted Peter’s fleshly confidence. And the sifting of Peter began,

- The Lord was taken,
- He was beaten
- He was crucified

Jesus said, Luke 22:32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

- The unfruitfulness of Peter’s running left him as empty as the nets that he used to fish all night.
- As if with poetic justice, once again sitting by the coals of a fire, the same surroundings wherein Peter denied the Lord Jesus, the process of full restoration begins.

Jesus asked, “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.”

- Jesus probes the inmost recesses of Peter’s heart to draw out the humility necessary for service.

Peter responds: “Lord you know that I love you.”

- Peter makes no claim here to superior love and passes by the "more than these" and he refuses to use Christ’s word *αγαπαω* for high and devoted love.
- Instead Peter uses the more humble word *φιλεω* for love as a friend. He insists that Christ knows this in spite of his conduct.
- A second time and then a Third Time Jesus asks the same question and Peter grows more and more uncomfortable with each passing inquiry.

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.

What I want you to take to heart from Jesus’ conversation with Peter is this:

- Christ’s restoration is FULL, it is thorough, it is complete:
 - 3 Times Peter boasted of his loyalty.
 - 3 Times Peter denied the Lord, claiming that he never knew him.
 - 3 Times the Lord brought forth a humble confession of love from a broken man.

The restoration is both relational and vocational

- Peter’s relationship with the Lord Jesus is made whole.
 - A child is disciplined by his parents, his parents explain the infraction, the parents provide the proper discipline for the crime, THEN there is a clear and full restoration of the parent-child relationship.
- The vocation that was ordained by the Lord for Peter is fully restored by the words, “Feed my sheep.

When we have sinned: The Lord SEEKS us out, HE labors to bring about the complete restoration of our relationship with him and he restores us to loving service.

LAST SCRIPTURE: One of the greatest examples of total restoration found in the O. T. is the restoration of David after he had taken Bathsheba to himself and had her husband killed.

God sent the Prophet Nathan to confront David in his sin.

Psalm 51: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

FIRST: The restoration initiated by the Lord is Relational... FULL... Like the child who, after receiving correction is reunited with the family in full loving fellowship

The restoration is Vocational.... *Feed my sheep*.... David, Then I will teach sinners the ways of God... after all I myself am a restored sinner.

Surely in a gathering like this one there is SOMEONE who is under the discipline of the Lord.

- You are living under a weight of guilt and shame.
- As I read the account of Peter's restoration there is measure of hope that arises within you.
- BUT you feel unworthy.... YOU ARE!
- God deals with us in GRACE because we are broken. That is not meant to minimize our offenses.
- SIN has ravaged the heart of man to the point where we cannot do the things that we want to do and the things that we DON'T want to do those are the things that we find ourselves doing... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
- His death was my atonement; his life is my salvation...