

If Peter Was Restored, I Can Be Restored

John 21:1-17; Luke 22:31-33

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Many try to deal with past sins in various unbiblical and destructive ways. Some do so by punishing themselves as did Martin Luther with a whip to his back when he was a monk. Others go to the other extreme of drowning themselves with food, wine, sex, money, and clothing, or by indulging themselves in the very sin of every kind. Others go to a priest and receive various acts of penance which they are told will purge away their guilt and make them feel better. Others simply push the sin into the background of their memories or contrive various excuses to justify their sin. Finally, there are those who deal with past sins by lashing out at others, and making life generally miserable not only for themselves, but for everyone around them.

The Lord does not endorse any of the methods above in dealing with our sins. However, we will fall into these dangerous ways of dealing with sin in our lives, if we do not heed and follow the example of Christ who through His infinite mercy and love restored Peter, who had denied the Lord Jesus three times. The main points from our text are these: (1) Jesus Restores Peter Despite His Sin (John 21:1-14); (2) Jesus Confronts Peter with His Sin (John 21:15-17); (3) Jesus Commissions Peter Despite His Sin (John 21:15-17).

I. Jesus Restores Peter Despite His Sin (John 21:1-14).

A. Jesus had appeared twice to His disciples after His crucifixion and resurrection (the evening of the same day that He was raised and eight days later). Again He appears to strengthen their faith (John 21:1). Seven of Christ's disciples were together (John 21:2), and Pete announces his intention to go fishing, and the others join him (John 21:3).

1. Something strange happens as they fished all night: they caught no fish (John 21:3). Here were experienced fishermen who caught nothing all night. Why had they caught nothing the whole night? Because Jesus had ordained to meet with Peter, in order to deal specifically with Peter's fall into sin and his restoration into fellowship and service.

2. How many times might Peter have replayed in his mind the three denials of His Lord? It was Peter who had boasted with pride that not only would he never deny Christ, but that he would die for him, even if everyone else forsook Him. Jesus had appeared to the disciples collectively as a group (twice), but this appearance of the Lord was in a special way designed for Peter's benefit (just as a previous appearance of Christ in John 20 was especially for Thomas's benefit).

a. As Christians we struggle daily with sins we have committed against Christ, against a loved one, friend, or co-worker. Does Jesus cast us away wanting nothing more to do with us ever again? Does He abandon us altogether due to our proud, vile, foolish, and rebellious sins committed against Him and others?

b. The consequences of sin are very painful and miserable. However, our Savior is so mighty, so wise, and so loving, that even the devastating sins into which we fall are used by the Lord to break our stubborn pride, our vain foolishness, and willful rebellion, and to send us to Him for His forgiveness, to repent and look to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and to renew our loving obedience to walk in His ways. This is not an excuse to continue in sin that grace may abound, but is simply how the Lord demonstrates His sovereignty and love even through our sins as Christians.

B. As morning dawns, there on the shoreline can be seen a human figure, but one whom the apostles did not yet recognize, possibly due to the distance they were from the shore or due to the lack of full sunlight. That person figure is the resurrected Christ (John 21:4) who takes the initiative to come to His

struggling, faltering disciples. Peter had the opportunity on at least two previous resurrection appearances of Jesus (in John 20) to talk with the Lord about his grievous backsliding in denying Him, but apparently he had not done so. Peter had repented with tears in having denied Jesus (Luke 22:61-62). But the resurrected Christ appears again for the express purpose to remove all doubt as to Christ's forgiveness and restoration of Peter.

1. Jesus comes to Peter and the other disciples in tenderness (John 21:5). Though Peter had denied even knowing Jesus three times, Peter is included among Christ's "children" for whom He suffered the everlasting condemnation of a holy God. Jesus calls not to the Disciples as the children of wrath (as we all are by nature), but as the children of God (as we are by grace through faith in Christ). We may feel at times that Christ could not possibly love us due to the number of times we have sinned in grievous ways against Him, but He continues to come to us calling us, "Children." Jesus always initiates our restoration to fellowship with Him. If He did not first come to us, we would not come to Him.

2. Jesus comes to Peter and the other disciples as in power (John 21:6). The Lord knew the futile night they had spent fishing. He miraculously filled their nets with so many fish that they were unable to draw it into the boat.

a. Without Jesus we can do nothing (John 15:5). We can't even fish, or perform our ordinary duties or callings in life apart from His blessing. We can't be the men, women, and children of God that we are called to be without Him. We are absolutely dependent upon Him for faith, repentance, love, and obedience. All the work that we do to become a godly husband/father, a godly wife/mother, or a godly child, will be as futile as fishing all night and catching nothing if we do not daily draw from Christ's infinite supply of grace and power.

b. It may appear that we are wasting our time by fishing all night and catching nothing (looking for work and catching nothing, or praying for the Lord to change a heart of a family member or friend and catching nothing, or pleading with the Lord to grant victory over a besetting sin and catching nothing), and yet that the Lord is using those waiting periods (or seeming futile nights of fishing) to reveal to us His that without Him we can do nothing. But that is not the end of the story.

C. Now after this miracle, John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, makes the connection with all that has just happened, and identifies the stranger on the shore as Jesus (John 21:7).

1. What does Peter do? He strips down to his undergarments and dives into the water, swimming about 100 yards (200 cubits) to shore, while all the other disciples stay in the boat and row it to shore (John 21:7-8). All of the disciples had all in some way forsaken the Lord (Mark 14:50). Thomas (who was in the boat) had stubbornly refused to believe that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead until he touched His wounds, but he did not jump into the water and swim 100 yards to shore. It's as if Peter was saying, "Lord, look how much I love you, though I miserably failed you. I want to be the first one to greet you."

a. Is it not common for us all to want to do something very special for our spouse or for our children or for our parents, if we have miserably failed them? We want to demonstrate our love for someone we have greatly offended. However, we must be careful that what we do is not done merely to cover the guilt and shame that we feel.

b. We must first deal with our guilt and shame by way of earnest repentance and humbly seeking forgiveness and then by showing our love, lest we fall into the trap of mere penance in seeking to purchase forgiveness by the things that we do (this is the Romish view of penance).

2. Peter does something else above and beyond the rest of the disciples in order to show Jesus His love. Once the boat has arrived at shore, they find that Jesus is preparing a love feast for them, and He invites them to come and fellowship with Him around this prepared meal (John 21:9). Jesus is once again taking the initiative to demonstrate His love for them despite their failures. He commands all seven of the apostles to bring some fish from the net that full of fish (John 21:10). The verb ("bring") and the pronoun ("ye") are both in the plural number, rather than in the singular number. Though this command is given to all

of them, who alone immediately jumps up (without hesitation), and all by himself pulls that heavy net of fish to the shore? Peter of course (John 21:11). Again, is Peter not seeking to demonstrate to the Lord that he loves Him despite His great failure? That is why Jesus asks him the question in John 21:15.

II. Jesus Confronts Peter with His Sin (John 21:15-17).

A. Jesus did not confront Peter with his sin in order to be cruel and vindictive. Jesus rather confronted Peter with his sin in order that Peter might by God's grace move beyond his failure and enjoy Christ's love.

1. Likewise, we who correct others who have sinned must have the same reason as Christ for going to them: to humbly restore them in love to fellowship and communion—to help and encourage them with hope rather than to discourage them with our vengeance and bitterness (where we take the opportunity to get even with them) or in pride exalt ourselves over them at the expense of their fall.

2. And yet we who are corrected must learn to appreciate such correction, for it is a way of life to all who love it and heed it (Proverbs 15:31-32). We must understand that the instruction and correction we receive from others (even when it is not delivered to us in the most gracious way) is God's way of maturing us and sanctifying us. If we despise correction or become defensive when we are corrected, we despise one of the means by which the Lord sanctifies us.

B. Jesus now confronts Peter not once with his sin, but three times (John 21:15,16,17), just as Peter had denied Jesus three times. In raising the question of Peter's love for Him three times, Jesus is focusing on the sin that led Peter to deny Christ: pride (Mark 14:29-31). For it was pride that had led Peter to boast that he would never forsake Him even to the point of death (1 Corinthians 10:12).

1. What is the significance of the two different words used for love in John 21:15-17? *Agapao* is a self-sacrificial love and *phileo* is a brotherly affection. It may be that Peter was humbled and ashamed and could not use the higher form of Christian love for Christ and Christ finally condescended to Peter and merely used the word for brotherly affection which Peter had been using.

2. That may be the case, but note John 21:17, "Peter was grieved...." As Christ asked the same question the SECOND time in John 21:16, so Christ now asks the same question the THIRD time. These words may simply be used interchangeably as synonyms or parallel to one another—"the one whom Jesus loved"—John 19:26 (*agapao*); John 20:2 (*phileo*). These may be stylistic changes meaning the same thing not contrasts meaning different things.

C. Note that Peter hears loud and clear that Jesus is confronting him with his pride. Peter doesn't proclaim, "Yes, I love thee MORE THAN THE REST OF THESE APOSTLES", but humbly affirms, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." He is no longer in competition with the other disciples, but speaks for himself. Peter is grieved and his pride is shattered (John 21:17). The Lord knows how to humble us with our sin in order to bring us into the fullness of His joy and forgiveness.

III. Jesus Commissions Peter Despite His Sin (John 21:15-17).

A. In each case where Peter humbly affirms his love for Jesus, Jesus likewise commissions him to care for the sheep given to him. Jesus had already commissioned the apostles as a group (John 20:21). Why this further commissioning of Peter in particular? Not because Peter was the first Pope, but because Jesus wanted Peter to be certain that he was restored despite his grievous sin. Jesus would yet use him.

B. God delights to take those who have fallen and to make them trophies of His grace. The public restoration of Peter gives to us hope that Christ is not finished with us though we may have miserably failed Him. Jesus does not excuse our sin, nor can we. He confronts it, and so must we repent of it. But He is a

merciful, loving Savior to all that flee to Him. Our hope is always in the restoring love of Christ.

C. Jesus shows to Peter His desire to enjoy fellowship with him in spite of his past unfaithfulness in denying Him. This is absolutely amazing. Jesus comes to us; He initiates. We do not have to force His hand or to bend His arm as it were. We do not have to pull mercy from a reluctant Savior. He wants to enjoy us, even more than we want to enjoy Him. He is praying for us (as He did for Peter) that our faith will not fail (Luke 22:31-33). Jesus comes to you even now to dispel your doubts, for He is the Good Shepherd that delights to go out and to find that one sheep that has wandered astray and He rejoices over that one sheep when he/she is found more than over the 99 that never wandered astray. That is the restoring love of our Good Shepherd.

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