

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus Christ

The Restoration of Simon, Son of John

John 21.1-19
4.28.19

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and 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 also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

⁴ But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." ⁶ And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. ⁷ Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.

⁹ So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." ¹¹ Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. ¹⁴ This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ So 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, "Tend My lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him again 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, "Shepherd 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 all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

¹⁸ "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹ Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"

This is the final sermon in THIS year's look at the Twelve Disciples of Jesus Christ. We hope to return to the series next year after Christmas.

This episode is sort of famous. It contains one of the best-known “Q & A sessions” in all the Bible as the resurrected Christ asks Peter, “Do you love Me?” – not once but three times.

A lot of issues confront scholars as they try to interpret this chapter e.g. it’s a kind of second ending to John’s Gospel (an epilogue of sorts) and some other mysteries and we’ll look at some of these but the MAIN MYSTERY that concerns us today is how grace changes the disciples of Jesus (ancient disciples and modern disciples).

Peter was slowly being initiated into grace – he even undergoes a kind of initiation or baptism as he swims to Jesus and emerges from the waters of birth ... And this will represent another dawning (note that it all takes place at DAWN) this will be another dawning for Peter and the others about grace. They had known the holiness of God from their childhood (all raised in Judaism) but they were slowly (3 years!) learning/experiencing the GRACE of God.

And today, the disciples, especially Peter (as he’s called here, “Simon, Son of John”) Peter will be plunged into grace; he’ll eat it and it will hurt him and then heal him... and change him.

It’ll do the same for you (US!) and that’s why we love Peter – we find him and his experience relatable. How the grace of Jesus leads to change:

- 1) A Forgiven Disciple**
- 2) A Restored Disciple and**
- 3) A Commissioned Disciple**

There are a lot of very specific details in this chapter that bear the marks of eye-witness reporting. This is at the Sea of Tiberias, normally called Galilee (place). It’s the third appearance of Jesus (after Easter Sunday and eight days later when Thomas was present). The time of day is given, v. 4: daybreak/dawn. The names of those present (five named disciples and two unnamed) are included.

The specific number of fish they caught is given. Details like “the little boat”, the “100 yards”, the “charcoal fire” are all included.

Three episodes are included. The miraculous catch of fish, the conversation with Peter and then another conversation (not printed today; starting in v. 20) involving the Apostle John.

Peter and all the disciples, as we saw last week, they all doubted that Jesus Christ would die and were shocked when He rose. And when He came to them in Jerusalem (on Easter evening) He apparently knew that they all denied Him by NOT trusting Him and He approaches them with the words, “Peace” – “Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” (20.19) And it’s repeated...and repeated again when He came to see Thomas, “Jesus

came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, 'Peace be with you.'" (20.26)

Apparently Jesus Christ is saying, "I'm NOT mad at you for your failings... The spirit was willing but your flesh was weak (Mk 14.38) and so He emphasizes that He has forgiven them. "Peace be with you." (3x)

That was the reason for His coming. He came to make peace between sinful people and the Holy God and His death ACCOMPLISHED that "Shalom".

These very men would go on to write about it and later St Paul would join the chorus and he would write, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom 5.1)

The Hebrew Scriptures said atonement was coming, (not just symbolized in the sacrifices of animals) but actualized and accomplished by the Messiah.

So the Prophet Micah wrote (700BC), "He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD... And this One will be our peace." (Mic 5.4-5)

And the disciples had been with Him... they'd seen His character and kindness and how quick He had been to forgive and NOW THEY WERE CONNECTING THE DOTS – "He died to pay our debt...even to pay for our cowardice and betrayals and unbelief": "Peace..."

It's why when John told Peter, "I think that Man on the shore – that fish-finder giving us advice – I think that's the Lord." And Peter said, "Someone start the motor – let's get out'a here FAST – He's gonna be really furious..."

No, instead, Peter tucks his tee-shirt into his shorts and plunges into that water and swims the 100 yards as if to say, "Whoop! It's our best Friend... it's the Lover of our souls... It's JOY HIMSELF! Let's party!"

Peter wasn't running away...wasn't cowering...not sheepish or ashamed...ONLY HAPPY and EXCITED! He and the disciples were forgiven – at peace with God!

And when he got there, the party had already begun. There was breakfast (fish and bread) waiting for those hungry young men who'd been fishing all night.

Then the boats arrive with all those fish and the Lord says, "Bring some more. Let's keep this breakfast party going!" And it's Peter who's like a superman and pulls that full net of 153 fish up on shore.

And then ...after the meal...Jesus says..."Hey, Simon, Son of John...Wanna talk?" ("Uh...ok...[gulp!] sure.")

Did your mother ever call you by your first, middle and last name? "Theodore Joseph Campo" – you knew you were in for it!

How long, do you suppose, before Peter began to add up what was going down – before he remembered that OTHER charcoal fire... where a powerless servant girl blurted out, "Hey! Don't I know you? I recognize that accent and...yeah...aren't YOU one of His disciples?"

And Luke records that after Peter's final denial in that courtyard, warming himself at a charcoal fire (John 18.18) and as the final betrayal was still coming out of his mouth, "immediately, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter." (Luk 22.60-61)

Did you know that the word for "charcoal fire" is used only twice in the entire Bible – here and in John 18 where Peter was betraying his best Friend?

And how long was it before Peter, at that seaside breakfast party began to put it together, "Uh-oh! I know what's going on here: it's an INTERVENTION!"

Like when friends sit down with an addict and say, "Hey, we have to talk to you... you have a problem."

Peter's seeing the charcoal fire...remembers the last time He saw Jesus Christ at a charcoal fire...he hears his full name ("Theodore Joseph Campo") – "Simon Son of John" and then the question, "Do you love Me?"

Now here's where some of those mysteries come in.

Jesus said, "Do you 'agape' Me more than these?" and "Simon, Son of John" said, "Yes, Lord; You know I 'philia' You.": two different words for love...until we get to the third question and Jesus uses Peter's word as if to say, "OK...do you philia Me?"

Two Issues: 1) Do you love me more than "these" – to what do "these" refer? And 2) Why the different words for love?

And I have to say, "NO ONE REALLY KNOWS!"

But here's my best guess. Jesus is saying, "Once you said that even if all the others fall away YOU WOULD NOT (Mark 14.29) – do you still think YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN ALL THE OTHER DISCIPLES LOVE ME?"

And Peter says, "I'm not even going to use the word YOU just used – I'll go with a synonym (means basically the same thing) but AS YOU KNOW, Lord, I got nothin'. I am DONE with comparisons AND YOU KNOW IT BETTER THAN I DO."

And the third time, Jesus Christ says, "OK – I'll come to you and your word, if you're unwilling to use My word... 'Do you 'philia' Me?"

"Yes, Lord, You know everything...and You know I love You."

And Jesus is saying... "I see you've gone back to fishing...and fishing is good...a noble profession if ever there was one (Ps 107.23-24) but I told you that I would make you a fisher of people..."

"Well, yeah...but I just assumed, Lord... that even though I'm forgiven... I can't be a fisher of people..."

Peter Leithart has suggested that "Simon, Son of John" is a reference to John the Baptist. The designation is used at the start and at the finish of John's Gospel. At the start, Peter was a disciple of John the Baptist and Jesus called him "student OR son of John."

Now at the end, He's saying, "Peter, you failed Me and you failed your first teacher, John...John pointed to Me, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world... and for that witness John, your teacher was killed..."

When you denied Me, you also denied John the Baptist: you... YOU didn't point to Me, the Lamb of God, because you were afraid to follow John into martyrdom... and the only reason I bring it up – THREE TIMES – is to say, "I forgive you and YOU WILL BE BOTH A FISHER OF PEOPLE and a SHEPHERD of My precious sheep... Tend My lambs, Shepherd My Sheep... Tend My Sheep..."

It's a three-fold restoration – "My calling is still on your life. Your sin will not spoil My plan for you (or the other disciples!) AND IN FACT I WILL GLADLY ENTRUST even My precious lambs into your care and feeding... In fact, My Spirit will so possess/empower you that YOU WILL INDEED END UP LIKE JOHN – so enraptured by My grace that YOU'RE WILLING TO DIE...like John the Baptist did "signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God..."

Now, you have to wonder what might've happened to ol' "Simon, Son of John" had he not had this very painful but deeply healing "re-commissioning session" with Jesus Christ.

He may have just gone back to fishing – it's a good and noble way to earn a living... and when his fellow disciples would later attempt to engage him in "fishing for people" (evangelism) or in "tending the sheep" (i.e. soul-care and tending to people's spiritual needs and feeding) he would've said, "I'm forgiven...just not qualified...but thanks anyway."

Of course the world would have really missed out... on that Pentecost sermon (Acts 2) and we wouldn't have the Letters of Peter in the NT (esp the section on being a shepherd – 1st Peter CH 5 where he wrote, “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight ... nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. [5.2-3])

OR Peter may have done what so many people do – they just double-down on their efforts. “I may have messed up once but it'll never happen again!” (Peter probably would've called it, “messed up” not “betrayed my best Friend”)

And if Simon Son of John had gone that way – what Gary Burge called, “Protestant Penance” – Simon Peter would have been super strict with himself (probably would've avoided all charcoal fires because that's where sin happens!) And avoided all kinds of other situations...and had lots of principles and policies, and rules, and moral guidelines, scruples and a deep sense of duty... and judgment...you know the type?

Maybe YOU are in one of these categories. You had some sort of big moral failing or a series (like most people I know) and you've never let Jesus Christ debride the self-inflicted wound.

You may need to sort it out (conduct a searching and fearless moral inventory!) You may need the help of someone like Peter, someone with the heart of a shepherd who knows what it is to fail in a colossal way and then be forgiven and restored NOT BECAUSE he/she has amended their way but because this shepherd-person really knows and has experienced the GRACE OF GOD IN Jesus Christ.

Maybe WE need to be that to one another – people open and honest about our failings, our self-hatred and self-condemnation and real guilt – but people who know what it is to see Jesus and dive in the water and run into His nail-scarred Hands...

People who have known real personal failure and real forgiveness from the crucified, risen Man who is our “Shalom” (peace) and people who have had those painful and beautiful interventions where Jesus calls you by your whole name and says, “Psssh! Your sin can't nullify My calling in your life... Have another piece of fish... tend My sheep...follow Me.”