

## Peter's Restoration

John 21:15-25

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I once read a commentary on John's gospel by Leon Morris who said that this gospel was shimmering: every time he studied this book, he discovered new and amazing things. "It's a pool so shallow, any child could play in it safely and it's an ocean so deep that no one could ever get to the bottom." And so we conclude this series on John.

I am probably ill-equipped to preach in the 21st century because I don't know all the comic book lore. In so many movies there is an awesome hero leading a band of heroes and at some point, the hero loses his vision and gives up. Perhaps Thor is an example of this.

Likewise, the last part of John 21 is the part of the story where Jesus's disciples get deflated, leaving them with a lack of mission. They had seen the signs and the glorification of Jesus through the cross and resurrection and believed and worshiped but there was still **no sense of mission**: this brings us to the end of chapter 21. Previous to this, Jesus cooked the fish: I don't know exactly how he did that but he had a mix of the miraculous (Jesus said to "try the other side of the boat" and they caught 153 fish) and the mundane (Jesus cooked them fish). They all ate but I want to know what this was like for Peter: they finished eating, maybe they threw the bones in the campfire, and they cleaned up but Peter was preoccupied. Have you ever let down or betrayed someone down to the point where "sorry" wasn't enough? I realized how hard this is when I recently reconnected with someone I had an issue with 30 years ago. Clearing the air was very healing.

Peter remembered how he had been given a warning:

### **John 13:31-38**

**31** When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.

**32** If God is glorified in him,<sup>[a]</sup> God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

**33** "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

**34** "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **35** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

**36** Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?"

Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."

**37** Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”

**38** Then Jesus answered, “*Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!*”

Peter was probably thinking this would never happen to him yet Jesus warned him. What happened? I spend too much time over-thinking things...Peter was probably not able to really enjoy the fish.

### **John 18:15- 17**

Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, **16** but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

**17** “You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?” she asked Peter.

He replied, “I am not.”

This girl knew John was a disciple so she thought Peter was, too. Now it was cold:

**18** It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

Peter was probably thinking about this: he was around a fire and now he was around a fire again eating fish. Further on:

**John 18:25** Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?”

He denied it, saying, “I am not.”

**26** One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” **27** Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

If I were Peter I would have been lost in this situation, oblivious to everything else. I think this was what Peter was thinking about at the end of the fish breakfast meal:

**John 21: 15** When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

This is in front of others. Peter once said that even if everyone else denied him, he would not.

How would an actor read this line: “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Notice that Peter didn't answer the “more than these” part of the question? Peter just answers, “Yes, I love you.” He doesn't compare himself and offer evidence to back this up. He just states he loves him.

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again Jesus asks him again:

**16** Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

This is getting more awkward, feeling more like a dagger.

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

Peter was hurt because he asked him 3 times! He denied him three times and Jesus was asking him three times. Or, on reflection, was Jesus letting him respond three times?

**17** The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.

Is there a difference between lambs and sheep? At one point in the gospel, Jesus talks about his followers as sheep and himself as the shepherd:

**John 10: 11** “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. **13** The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

**14** “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— **15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. **17** The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I

have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.

And so Jesus says feed his lambs, take care of his sheep and feed his sheep. He never tells Peter he accepts his apology, nor does he make him the head of his church. He doesn't "rehire" Peter. Instead, He tells him to take care of HIS sheep. The closest comparison is to think of a parent telling someone if anything happens to them, would they take care of his children?

You have probably heard that there are several Greek words for Love: **Eros** is romantic, attraction love, **storge** is a family love, **philia** is love as a brother, and **agape** (love unconditionally).

In the context of John 21, all three times, Jesus says Peter do you **agape** me? And three times Peter replies Lord, I **philia** you. John deliberately put these words in this passage but I think the two words were used interchangeably in passages like Lazarus. In the Sepatuigent, the same word is used in the same verse interchangeably. God's love is unconditional but I don't think there is a huge difference between these words in this passage. ***The key is that Peter was given three chances to say he loved Jesus.***

Each time, Jesus tells Peter what to do: **Care and feed**. This reflects back to John 10:

This is the picture of what Jesus is invited Peter into:

1. It's not far away
2. There's no running away
3. There is a laying down of his life

Jesus hints at this when he asks Peter to be a shepherd. But he now gives more details:

**John 21:18** Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

This was probably a proverb of the aging process. Many of us have watched age take its toll on a loved one: This is different because stretching out hands is an image of crucifixion. Jesus carried his cross and was led to where he didn't want to go. In case we aren't sure about this, John clarifies it:

**19** Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Jesus is inviting Peter to follow him as a good shepherd, the one who sacrifices his life and ultimately glorifies God.

Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

He wants Peter to be a shepherd who lays his life down, not just a good shepherd who doesn't quit.

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus says he will make Peter a fisher of men. John doesn't repeat this but is expecting us to make this connection, I think. John mentions following Jesus many times:

- **1:43** The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”
- **8:12** When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
- **10:27** My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.
- **12:26** Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

So this is yet another invitation to Peter to follow Jesus: the prophecy about death was not so sweet, though.

**20** Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”)

**21** When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

Jesus tells him this is not his business:

**22** Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”

This is hypothetical and hyperbolic: John clarifies this:

**23** Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

Once again, as Jesus makes this point about following him. The call to serve is a call to the very end, similar to the way Jesus loved his own to the very end and washed their feet.

**24** This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

John is saying that this beloved disciple that you have been reading about is also telling you this story; it's John, son of Zebedee and brother of James. There are theories that others may have

written this but right here it states who wrote it. John may have dictated this to others but it is from him. Why is it in the 3rd person? It could be the Ephesian elders affirming who wrote it originally.

John's testimony jumps out in the following verses:

**1:14** The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John says he has seen Jesus.

**19:35** The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.

This was after Jesus died and he saw the water and blood come out of his side.

**20:8** Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

John again and again wants us to believe him and know that he is standing behind his words: These are not carefully invented stories.

This brings us to the last verse of this gospel:

**25** Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

This may be hyperbole: maybe a few terabytes would cover it digitally today. But this is a continuation of John's challenge of telling us the depth and power of Jesus's love, his authority. John wants us to know he could have told us many things but he cherry picked these details to for his purposes. This is so you might believe:

**20:30-31** Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe<sup>[a]</sup> that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John is telling us enough for us to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that by believing, we may have life in his name. He doesn't want us to wonder if Jesus really was the Messiah: he is telling us that he WAS the Messiah and offers us life in his name.

Recall the 7 signs in John:

1. Water in wine: (John 2:1-11)
2. Cleansing the Temple: (John 2:12-17)

3. Healing the Nobleman's Son: (John 4:46-54)
4. Healing the Lame Man: (John 5:1-15)
5. Feeding the Multitudes: (John 6:1-15)
6. Healing the Blind man: (John 9)
7. Raising Lazarus: (John 11)

As we close this gospel, we see how Jesus is brought to the front through these final instructions. He was the God/man who had power far beyond our sin and authority to take his life up again. He recommissions Peter (and you and me!). John leaves us with a calling that is given to all of us to tend His sheep. None of us is sufficient for this: restoration is the key.

I have had many failures and have wondered if there is anything left for me to do: this is not the invitation here. Studying the passage has shown me that **Jesus still calls each of us, asking, “Do you love me?”**

The key is not that we are good enough but that our heart is tuned to him.