

Jesus Restores Peter

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John 21. I want to speak this morning, the Lord helping me, on Jesus restores Peter. Jesus restores Peter. John 21:15-23. Lord, help us now. John 21:15-23. "And 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 a 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, 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 (that is Peter) 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 had been reclining at table close to Him, who had said, 'Lord, who is it that will 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 remains until I come, what is that to you?"

During the 40 days between the resurrection and the ascension of Christ, where was Jesus? Well, He was not as commonly thought on earth continually for 40 days in Jerusalem. He's now after the resurrection what has been called the Heavenly Man in Paradise. And He will now over 40 days make appearances in and around Jerusalem. He appears to many. That is, He surprised unannounced appearances. He just pops into locked rooms. He just suddenly appears here and there. Two guys walking on the Emmaus road, grieving, sharing, suddenly this Stranger appears, starts walking with them - He's making appearances. Resurrection appearances. The Gospels say that when they were in the upper room at one point, He came and stood among them.

How many appearances were there? After the resurrection, before the ascension? Well, 14 are mentioned in the Gospels, in the book of Acts, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians 15. Different days and different times the Lord appeared. First to Mary Magdalene, second to some women returning from the tomb, third to Peter, fourth appearance was to the two on the Emmaus road, fifth appearance was to 10 of the disciples in the upper room, the sixth appearance was 11 of them - remember Thomas wasn't there the first time - 11 disciples in the upper room, the seventh appearance is this one - John 21. The disciples fishing on the Sea of Tiberias. This is here in John 21. And there are six more, including appearances to James, Stephen, Saul of Tarsus, and John on the isle of Patmos. And then the biggest group Paul interestingly mentions in 1 Corinthians 15, how the Lord appeared to over 500 at one time.

So here in John 21 is His 7th appearance where the disciples are fishing, they've gone fishing. And virtually all of this chapter of John 21 records this appearance, this event, this

experience of the Lord with the disciples and particularly with Peter. The entire scene - He comes to all of them and He's on the shore, they're fishing, He says come, let's have breakfast together. And they recognize that it's the Lord. So this account is about Him appearing to all of them, but then He's got His eye particularly on one of them. And the entire scene is especially meant to restore Peter fully, where Peter knows it - and not only where he knows it, where he feels it and he experiences full restoration.

You know, I'm a baseball fan. My son was a good baseball player, and Philip Neeley and I, we have an annual trip to watch one pro baseball game. I enjoy baseball. We usually talk more about the Gospel and the kingdom than we do watch baseball, but I like baseball. A triple in baseball is more rare even than a home run. Well, Peter had a triple denial of Jesus. And remember he went out and did what? He wept bitterly. If you documented all of Peter's major responses to the Lord Jesus in 3 years, where he was right or he was wrong, where he was victorious or he was a failure, at the calming of the sea in the boat, his response was: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." That's a victory. That's a right response. And then he says later when the Lord asked him: "Who do men say that I am?" "Peter, what about you?" "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Victory. Right. "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you. My Father in heaven revealed this to you."

And then, Peter turns around this same hour when the Lord has told them plainly He's going to be rejected, He's going to suffer and die. Peter takes Him aside, and Mark says that Peter began to rebuke Him. And the Lord interrupts him and rebukes him and says, "Get behind Me, Satan!" Failure. Peter's failure. Walking on the water, sinking in unbelief. Failure. Discussing who's going to be the greatest. Failure. Self-confidently affirming: "I will never fail. I will never deny You. Even if everyone else does, I will not." Failure. He denies the Lord three times with an oath, failure, failure, failure. Seven of these nine times were failures, like a necklace that you might have strung together - two nice pearls with seven ugly thorns on the necklace. Well, the pearls are nice and they're wonderful, but it would be better if there weren't the ugly thorns, right? What would that final massive failure of denials do to Peter's heart? And where did it leave him spiritually? We don't know. The Gospel writers don't give us an insight. They don't give us details. They don't give us Peter's testimony about it. But what happens in the heart and mind and emotions and in the soul of a believer who stumbles so much? Who fails? Who in weak moments makes wrong choices? And is not even themselves? And they sin so miserably? You know, if the other disciples had been around the fire that night with Peter warming himself and had heard Peter, they would have all been shocked. Perhaps if they had been there he would have been strengthened to not deny the Lord, but he does.

What does a Christian experience within the walls of his own heart and his own thoughts? All Christian experience - good or bad - involves and never lacks true human emotion, feelings. The human drama of experiential realities that go on that God sees, that you experience, and nobody knows it's going on when it's happening. Wounded, hurting, reeling, doubting. What all was Peter experiencing? We don't know. What is certain is this: All Christian experience - both victories in obedience and failures in sin - all Christian experience has woven into it the human fabric of every real human emotion, struggle, and battle. Anger. Fear. Frustration. Weak moments of compromise. An unrenewed mind that in moments doesn't view things right and you believe a lie. Deep feelings. The pull of wrong desires. When you know it's

wrong and you're pulled more toward it than away from it. Defeat in your heart by wrong choices. Hope and sadness, small and big consequences. Small and big compromises. And the sadness with feelings of defeat and failure. A believer can be left in such a condition. It's like getting the breath knocked out of you severely. You can't function. You can't even think clearly for awhile. You can't respond, you can't talk about it. The heavens are brass. Your mind is clouded with feelings and thoughts and struggles. You don't even know how to see reality. You're left stunned and passive and unable to do anything except feel pain.

So Peter's condition - probably some of this and much of this in there after the resurrection. When he realizes the Lord is raised, he's astounded, he's amazed. You know he had joy. But he had to still have baggage. And isn't that the process of sanctification when the Lord saves us? Sanctification is the Holy Spirit dealing with all our baggage. A lot of baggage. Still regrets that will hinder Peter's future had to have been there. If not, why would Jesus pull him aside here not to remind him of his past, not to say, hey Peter, remember the fire? Remember what you did? Remember when our eyes met? Remember, Peter? The Lord didn't do that. Not to remind him of his past, but to call him to the future and heal him with His love. That's what's involved here. That's what's going on.

How does the Lord do this? There is nothing more beautiful and wise; there is no more beautiful and wise approach in the Bible of personal restoration and revival than the Lord's dealings with Peter here. What is the Lord's approach and process? Well, it's wonderful. Look at v. 12. Let's go to IHOP (breakfast restaurant). Let's have breakfast, guys. What was Peter thinking? Apparently, he and the Lord had not had a sit down yet. They had not been able to discuss things. And Peter it seemed - we don't know what was said - but here's a post-resurrection restoration breakfast party. And they're just going to eat together first. What an approach! It breaks the ice. Let's have breakfast. This is relational. This is time together. And after a fellowship meal with all of them, and an atmosphere of welcome and acceptance and peace, Jesus then turns His attention one-on-one, He turns His heart and His attention to Peter for one-on-one ministry. And we're going to see beginning in v. 15 the Lord's call of Peter not to look back, but His call of Peter to go forward. Onward, upward, out of the lowlands of a blistering defeat. The higher ground of love and grace.

What does the Lord say to Peter to restore him? First of all: Love Me. Verses 15-17, "When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, do you love Me more than these?' 'Yes Lord, You know I love You.'" Verse 16, "Simon, do you love Me?" "Yes Lord, You know I love You." Verse 17, "Simon, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved, but he said, "Yes Lord, You know everything. You know that I love You." Why this broken record of love? Peter had a triple denial, and here the Lord hits a triple too. Do you love Me? Whatever failure you've had - distance or last week - the Lord's word to you right now is: Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Isn't it obvious that Jesus is gently blowing on the embers of Peter's wounded heart to rekindle a mutual love relationship? Breakfast is finished with all of them. And He sits down with Peter: Peter, do you love Me?

Do you love Me more than these? Now what did He mean by that? More than these things? No, obviously, that's not what He's saying. Do you love Me more than you love these other disciples? That's not it either. It's this: Do you love Me more than these other disciples love Me? Why would the Lord do that? Because Peter, remember, had confidently boasted days

before: If they all forsake You, I won't. I'm further along in my sanctification than these guys are. I'll never do it. I'll die with You before I deny You. Peter confidently stated he would have devotion that exceeds theirs.

Well, you know, it didn't take death to deny Jesus. It only took a servant girl by the fire glancing at him and then taking a second look and realizing: Hey, you were with Him! You're one of them! It only took that for Peter suddenly to deny the Lord three times even with an oath. That's all it took. Peter didn't have the devoted love he thought he had. He wasn't as far along as he thought. He didn't see that he was yet capable of this. He thought more highly of himself than he should. He boasted of greater love, but he failed the first test. And even did what others did not do. He denied the Lord three times. So certainly, the Lord is saying to Peter and to us: Peter, what about your love for Me now? Do you still believe you love Me more than the others love Me? What's the Lord doing here? He's doing heart surgery on Peter here to begin the healing balm of restored love. It would be hard and humiliating to be in Peter's place because those feelings and human thoughts and emotions of how does the Lord really view me now? We've not really yet talked about this. It's hard to look Him in the eye. Because He looked at me after I denied Him and that look has haunted me ever since. How could I have done it? What a fool I was! What a failure I've been! Where do I stand now? Do the other disciples even want me around? Do they trust me? Things can't ever be the same. As the song says, that was then, but this is now. What all did Peter feel? Well, we're not clear, but what is clear is wounded Peter wasn't healed yet and Jesus is healing him here. In light of his denials, his humiliation, his seeing his own heart, his tears of repentance, where does his love for the Savior stand now? Now, how is loving the Savior when you've sinned against Him and you've failed Him so much? Restored love is the need. And isn't that the need for all of us? Always. And it's always the remedy for restoration and for being turned again. The Lord Jesus Christ here loves Peter tenderly, patiently, and perfectly, and not only wants Peter to know it, He wants Peter to love Him right then. That's why He's saying: Do you love Me, Peter? Come on, give Me your love. Give Me your heart afresh. He wants Peter's love restored so Peter will be healed.

Now after the third question (Peter, do you love Me?), Peter is grieved. What kind of grief was this? It was not the grief of embarrassment or hurt feelings. It was the grief of a sad, tender heart who had failed his Lord. Feelings of loving sorrow mixed with longing for the Lord. Christ is drawing Peter with cords of love here. A threefold cord of a question of love. Christ - the goodness of God is bringing Peter fully back and it's painful. It's painful. This is Gospel surgery at its best. Someone said, "Gospel surgery's always free, but it's not always easy."

Lee Dodd in our church weeks ago one Sunday morning speaking about Peter, he said, "It's as if Jesus is applying the healing ointment of His love, but it's going to sting a bit." Have you ever had a nurse or a doctor tell you that? Now this is going to hurt a little. The Lord Jesus' questions were stinging a bit. So Jesus is going for Peter's heart, and guess what, He's going to get it. He's going to get it fully back. Peter, where does your love stand with Me now? Because love is stronger than death. Love is stronger than a denial. Love is stronger than a failure. Love's stronger than you blowing it and not knowing if you can recover. Could Peter now truly say or not: If ever I love Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now. Peter must face it and answer it. Do you really love Me, Peter? Not just with human sentiment and human love, but with divine love. The call to love Him.

Secondly, verses 15-17. The Lord says to Peter, "Shepherd My sheep." "Shepherd My sheep." The Lord is not only restoring Peter's love for Him, He's restoring Peter's call to future ministry. But don't you think Peter felt inside: I'm done. I'm disqualified. How could I? Who could ever listen to me again? Who could ever trust me again? Isn't it profound in a way that the triple denier of Jesus becomes the Apostle to the Jews? I think that's pretty amazing. The Lord links the threefold call to love Him with a threefold call to now shepherd His sheep. If you love Me, feed My lambs. If you love Me, tend My sheep. If you love Me, feed My sheep. Now the word "tend" there means to act as a shepherd toward them in all that it means. In every way it means to shepherd and care for them, you do that. If you love Me, this is My love expressed through you. Tend the sheep. To feed means just that. Give them the rightful nourishment for spiritual health and growth. So, Peter's sermon at Pentecost is the fruit of this exhortation. 1 and 2 Peter is the fruit of this exhortation: Peter, feed My sheep. Care for My lambs.

Two words used about the sheep here: The first one (sheep) is not the older, more mature sheep. It's the younger smaller sheep. They're not lambs, but they're younger, smaller sheep. Distinct from the older, bigger ones. Peter, you are to give special care to the smaller sheep who have growing needs. You love Me? You care for these smaller sheep. This is the word "lambs." My lambs - young, new converts. The word is only used in the plural form in the New Testament. These smaller sheep and even the little lambs - your love for Me involves your heart having endearment to them, tenderness toward them, care for them - loving, tender care of My sheep and My lambs. My young ones are of a special concern to My heart, Peter. And if you love Me, you take care of My sheep. I want them on your heart. Your love for Me is real and applied especially toward the care of My sheep. This says something that's major: Love for the Savior that translates into real love for His sheep is the first requirement of a pastor. Love for the Savior that translates into real love for His sheep is the first requirement of a pastor. For every Christian also toward their brethren, because we cannot love God whom we haven't seen, if we don't love the brothers and sisters we do see. Love Me, Peter! Shepherd My sheep.

Third, v. 18-19. Die for Me. You're going to die for Me. When you were young, you went about wherever you wanted - you could go fish, you could come in, you could go wherever you want to, you were independent, you were free. When you're old, it's going to be a different story. Others are going to gird you and they're going to take you where you in the natural realm would not want to have to go. They're going to take you where you don't want to go. And John's commentary: This He said signifying to Peter what kind of death he was going to die. Peter's here called to be a martyr. Peter's crucifixion is affirmed in the early centuries by Eusebius, Tertullian, and others. And it's prophesied by Jesus here and it's commented on later by Peter in 2 Peter 1:14. "Since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me." In two epistles, Peter is shepherding, feeding, tending to the sheep and the lambs in love as his last ministry before he knows where he's going. Called to die as the Lord died. Now we're all called to live unto the Lord and we're all called to be willing to die, and some will be called to die. But whether we live or whether we die, we're the Lord's.

But Peter, this is in your future. So love Me, feed My sheep, care for them, and then, you're going to die like I died. God is glorified in the death of martyrs. If you've never read "Fair Sunshine," get it and read it. Two ladies in that book - maybe they were both Margaret's - do you remember? One was about 60, one was a teenager or 20's - two Margaret's. They were caught

by the persecuting authorities in Scotland for attending a church meeting or for owning a Bible. They took them out in the sea and they chained the older one out in the water so she would be drowned first with the tide. They chained the younger one in a little more shallow water, but it was strategic - so she would have to face and see her sister in the faith die first. And they died victoriously. Some are called to die. Peter's called to die here. Love Me. Feed My sheep. Die for Me.

Fourthly, verse 22. Really, 21, "When Peter saw him (that is John) he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?' Jesus said to him, 'If it's My will that he remains until I come, what's that to you? Follow Me.'" Verse 23, "So the saying spread abroad among the brethren..." Here's bad hermeneutics; here's bad Bible interpretation. The saying spread among the brothers that this disciple was not going to die. So it went viral. Things could go viral in that day too. The saying spread abroad among the brethren that John wasn't going to die. He was going to live till the Lord comes back. "Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not going to die, but He said 'if it's My will that he remains until I come, what is that to you?'" The fourth truth in being a disciple: Don't misunderstand the Lord's teaching. Don't misunderstand the Bible. They were guilty of bad hermeneutics here, wrong interpretation of one statement. And it's amazing that even though John clarified this, Augustine even into the 4th and 5th centuries, Augustine said there were those in the Christian world that still believed John was somewhere in hiding alive and wasn't dead yet. Heresy is hard to kill. Heresy often begins right from Scripture. Deceiving spirits, misinterpretation, misunderstanding of Bible verses, listening out of carnal curiosity to bad teachers.

I spoke to a Jehovah's Witness recently, in recent weeks, and I said I've got a question for you. Why is it that you don't believe Jesus was bodily raised from the dead even though the Bible clearly shows that He was? He was physical. They touched Him. And his answer was this: Well, He couldn't have been that way when He went to heaven. It had to be spiritual because the Bible says flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God. What a proof text of heresy! So we must take heed how we hear. We must take heed what we hear. We must understand and understand and be clear so as not to be misled or mislead. That's why John puts his commentary here so we won't misunderstand the Lord's teaching.

Fifthly, v. 20-22. The Lord tells Peter: Keep your eyes only on Me. Now where do you find that? Well, notice what the Lord had said to Peter at the end of verse 19. "Follow Me." Follow Me - but what did Peter do? The next sentence says he turned and saw John. The Lord has said, "Follow Me." Peter turns and sees John. Peter is distracted about God's will for John. Think about it, here's this big context of the Lord restoring Peter in love, calls him again to shepherd the sheep, tells him how he's going to die, and then the Lord says, "Follow Me." Wouldn't that be enough for now? Well, apparently not, because Peter turns and looks at John and says what about him? What about him? Why did Peter do that? It may have been if he realizes he's going to die, he was close to John, he wonders is this his fate too. What are You going to do with John? What about John's future? And Jesus in essence said: What about John? Was I talking about John? Is My business about John's future your business? Or as we would say: This is on a need-to-know basis and guess what? What is that to you? Follow Me.

See, we're called not to be distracted by others, and Christ called us - especially by those we love and are closest to. We're not to be distracted by others and their calling, God's

will for them, their situations. And Peter was distracted with a viewpoint, an attitude, nosiness, meddling, wondering about what was not his business. How easy is it for people to become a distracting hindrance to our single-eyed devotion. Our minds can so easily be on other's path more than our own path. If John's future was Peter's responsibility, Jesus would have mentioned it to Peter. He did not say: Peter, here's your new commission. Love Me, feed My sheep, die for Me, and oh, here's information about John because you're responsible for him also. He didn't say that. Jesus restores the fallen Peter, reaffirms his calling, and has to rebuke the nosy Peter. Peter should leave all distractions alone because they weren't his. What is that to you? What business is that of yours? And how often do we need to hear this? Well, I don't think that church over there is quite doing right. What's that to you? You follow Christ. Well, I don't think they have the right view of which translation of the Bible to use. What's that? That's none of your business. You follow Christ. Well, I think they're too young to be going to the mission field. How much are we carnally curious about other people's issues when we haven't even fully dealt with our own and we aren't fully obeying Christ as to what He's shown us to do? Jesus declines to satisfy Peter's curiosity. It is no business of Peter's what's going to happen to John. Even if the Lord wills for John to stay alive even to His return, why would Peter even need to know that? He doesn't need to know. He doesn't need to know anything about John. How much do we need to know about God's purpose and will for others? Even those we're closest to? How much do we really need to know? Elders and pastors need to know. Church leaders need to know more, oftentimes for the protection. But generally speaking, how much do we need to know about God's business in other people's lives? What is that to you, O thou nosy Christian? Mind your own business. Keep to your own stuff.

You know, one of the greatest examples of this mistake is Josiah. He reigned 31 years in Jerusalem. He became king when he was 8 years old. At 16 years old, the Bible says he began to seek the Lord seriously. He began to seek the God of David. And he began purging Jerusalem of idols and carved images. One of the best kings in Israel's history. And 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles gives his record. He kept the Passover in Jerusalem. He appointed priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of God. He put the ark in the temple that Solomon built. He cut down the altars of Baal. And he was present himself when his men cut those altars to Baal down the Bible says. He told the priests: Consecrate yourselves and prepare for your brothers to do according to the Word of the Lord by Moses. The singers, the sons of Asaph, were under Josiah's leadership in Israel. And the Bible says, "...No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet." 2 Chronicles 35 summarizes Josiah's life. The rest of the acts of Josiah and his good deeds are written in the book of the kings. But you know what? You remember his major misstep. One big misstep cost him his life. He didn't apostatize and worship the Baals. He didn't love like Solomon loved a bunch of strange women and let them pull his heart away to false gods like Solomon did. What did Josiah do? He didn't mind his own business. He began meddling in affairs that weren't his. He began to pick a fight with a dog, but the dog didn't want to fight him. But he picked the fight and the dog had to fight him. 2 Chronicles says after Josiah prepared the temple, he heard about Neco, the king of Egypt, who was going to war with someone over near the Euphrates River. And it's not Josiah's business; it's not his battle. He doesn't have a bone to pick. Israel's welfare is not at stake. But he couldn't leave it alone. Josiah goes out to meet Neco basically to pick a fight when

Neco wasn't coming to Israel. And the Bible says, "Neco sent messengers to Josiah," and said this: What do we have to do with you, O king? What do we have to do with each other? I'm not coming against you this day but someone else. Listen, I'm in a hurry. Stop! Because God is with me, lest He destroy you. And here was Josiah's mistake: The Bible says, "Nevertheless, Josiah did not turn away from him." He did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but instead he came to fight, and the archer shot Josiah and he died and was buried. And the Bible says all Jerusalem and all Judah mourned for Josiah and Jeremiah the prophet lamented his death. Neco was saying: What is that to you? You worship Jehovah. What is that to you? This isn't your fight. You're not called to meddle here. Watch meddling.

A dear favorite preacher of mine said one time: Watch out for meddling. Don't meddle in what's not your business. Don't be concerned about stuff that's not for you to fix. You follow Christ. You stay focused on Him and don't let people - even those you love the most - distract you from steadfast, single-eyed obedience. What is that to you, Peter? You follow Me. And that's the final thing the Lord said to him. Not only: Love Me, feed My sheep, die for Me, mind your own business, but "Follow Me." And the Lord says it twice here: Follow Me. And then at the end He says, "You follow Me." Just follow Me. Love Me, care for My sheep, follow Me, feed them, love them, watch out for them, don't let anyone mess with My bride, shepherd My sheep. Follow Me.

And in closing, let's just think about a couple of thoughts here. First lesson is this: Restoration for a backslider - restoration for a failed disciple. Restoration and not defeat is Christ's purpose for every one of us. You may have come here out of a recent fall, out of defeat. Maybe for months, you've been in bad state. Disappointments, failures, secret things. The Lord Jesus Christ says to you this morning in your condition: Love Me! I want your heart's love. Love Me. Forget the past. I'll clean you up. I'm going to have those shepherd you, care for you. You may be the weakest lamb. Just love Me. That's where you start. Just love Him. Just love Him. Restoration, and not defeat, is God's purpose for every child of God - the younger sheep down to the weakest lamb.

Secondly, failures don't disqualify you necessarily from future growth and future ministry. Some failures will put people properly out of the ministry. But that's a small category, isn't it. But failures - the worst of them - don't disqualify you from being restored in the love of Christ, from following Him, and being a blessing to love others because you love Him. Thirdly, it's the Gospel alone, the love of Christ alone for His own that is the healing remedy for anyone who has fallen. Backslider, I'll say what Spurgeon said one time. He lifted up his voice and said there's a backslider here today. Come back home. And I say that to you today. Backslider, love Him. Follow Him. How deep the Father's love for us! Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus. Let's sing that.