

LIFE IN HIS NAME

RESTORATION

John 21

John 21 begins with a fishing story. We are told that this is the third appearance of Jesus after the resurrection. The disciples have gone to Galilee, as Jesus told them to do, and seven of them are fishing. Remember that a lot of the first apostles were fishermen, and seven of them have returned to their former occupation. I don't know that they intend to fish as a career, but that's what they are doing on this night. They are fishing all night, as would have been the practice, so that they could catch fish at night, then in the morning sell them fresh at the market. But they don't catch anything.

Now, here's an interesting fact. In all four gospels (the gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John -- the four biblical books that tell us about the life of Jesus) Jesus calls fishermen, and every time they fish they don't catch fish unless Jesus helps them. Bad fishermen, right? Jesus calls these really simple men to follow him. They are not well educated. In fact, in the book of Acts, that's one of the things that just astounds the religious leaders. They are like, "These guys are not all that bright!" But they are powerful. They have been with Jesus and these individuals changed the world.

So not only were they simple in terms of what they did, apparently they weren't all that good at it. I think, obviously, that that's not the point. There is a spiritual lesson in it that Jesus is teaching them from the very beginning, and that is to trust in him. That really is going to be the takeaway from today's message. We are going to talk about restoration and how that comes through trust in Jesus Christ.

So, they are fishing all night. They don't catch anything, and Jesus says, "Well, children, have you caught anything?" They say no. He says, "Okay, throw the net over on the right side," and they have this massive catch of fish, probably two boats with a net in between. As soon as this happens, John, who is writing the gospel of John, is like, "This is no ordinary person on the bank; this is Jesus." He announces it. And Peter, as only Peter can do (he is stripped down for fishing and work) throws on his outer garment and jumps in the water. He leaves them with this net full of fish, abandons them, goes to Jesus, and we are told that they pull in 153 fish.

These details, in terms of the amount of fish and exactly what happened, are really unique for the time period of writing. It would have been very unusual. You would have never read that in a story that someone was making up. John is letting you know, "I was there! I was an eye-witness. This really happened." So Jesus prepared a fire, a meal, and he eats with them.

Let's pick up in verse 15, after that initial encounter. Please follow along as I read.

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 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. Truly, 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 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 also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to 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 remain until I come, what is that to you?"

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

We come to the end of the book of John. Last week Stefan taught about the resurrection, and as we get to the end of Chapter 20, it feels like the book is over. It feels like the book should be over. Jesus has been crucified. He has been raised from the dead. He commissions his apostles. He tells them basically: "I am sending you on a mission to build the Church. Through your testimony and the power of the Holy Spirit, you will go and transform this world. You will take my message to the world." Then he ends that chapter with a statement of his purpose for writing - why the book of

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John is actually written. It is written so that “by believing you would have life in his name,” life in Jesus. John is making this appeal: Trust in Jesus Christ. Believe in him and you will have life. You will have eternal life. You will have abundant life in Jesus Christ.

Then Chapter 21 continues and you are like, “Oh, wait a minute. We’re not done.” It’s a little bit like when you watch a movie and the screen closes. It goes black, then it pops up and tells you what happens later, after the story, to some of the main characters. That’s sometimes the best part of the movie. You are saying, “Well, did they get married? Did they live happily ever after? Was he successful? Did she get what she wants?” That’s what Chapter 21 is. It’s an epilogue. One of the things you are just wanting to know when you read the gospel of John is what happened to Peter. Peter’s last moment is this massive failure. He denies Jesus three times -- blatantly denies Jesus. You don’t just bounce back from that kind of life failure. What comes of Peter?

So we are told, and it’s magnificent, not just because of what transpires in Peter’s life, but there’s a restoration that takes place. Peter is restored. Peter has lost something. Peter is in anguish and with all his heart would like to go back to that moment and do it again and do it right, but he can’t.

Surely there are some of us here who can identify with: “Something was taken from me. I blew it. I lost it. It was done to me, however we measure it, and it’s just too late. It’s gone.” But there’s a restoration that happens here in John 21 and it speaks back to the message of the entire book of John. Jesus came to restore. He came to restore all that is lost.

You think about personal failure? I think about Adam and Eve. That was a significant mistake, right? God said, “You can have anything you want in the whole garden. You live in paradise. You walk with me. Total innocence. Total purity. Total joy. One thing you can’t do: Don’t eat from this tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You are not to grow in your knowledge in independence from me. It’s all to be done in relationship.”

We looked at this earlier in the book of John. We said there is a need for us to receive the love of God and then to respond. We have a need as God’s creation to respond to his love, to give love back. It’s really that which he’s giving to us. There’s a cycle, right? And one of the ways that we express that love is through obedience. It’s a need of the human heart. It’s not so that we will be accepted by God, it is because we have been accepted by God and we express our love back to the Lord by trusting in him and expressing that in obedience.

Adam and Eve failed in that, right? They failed significantly. They ate of the forbidden fruit, and their actions affected all of humanity. Well, the bible is the story of restoration. It's the story of Jesus coming to restore all things. We see that taking place in Peter's life on a personal level.

Now, we also find out something that I've already told you that you may have already known or figured out. Throughout the book, when John says "the disciple whom Jesus loves" this just happens to be John, who is writing the book, which always seems odd in a way.

We do that in our family. I announce to my brother and sister: "You know, I was Mom's favorite. She did love me more than the two of you." We play those games and we do a good job. He actually writes it in there, "The disciple that Jesus loved," and that's disclosed to us at the very end. After Jesus restores Peter - that's what's happening in this three-fold "Peter, do you love me?" Peter has denied Jesus three times, and three times he is brought to a point of confessing his love to Jesus. Jesus is accepting him, forgiving him, restoring him. That's what's happening. And as soon as that happens, what does Peter do? Well, to set that up, Jesus gives him a prophecy. "The very thing, Peter, that you promised to do, to go to the death for me, you will do, but now out of my strength, out of my calling, out of trust in me, not your own independent strength."

Get the picture. Magnificent moment for Peter. He is restored, brought back into fellowship with the Lord. "Hey, great news! The thing you promised to do, the thing you failed to do, the thing you lack strength to do? You're going to do it and succeed, and rejoice in it through the ages!" What's Peter's next moment? "Well, what about him?" You want to just... "Just stop!" You want to say, "Peter, don't speak. This is the moment for you to be quiet." There is this kind of, "What's his deal?" Really, the response is a gentle rebuke, and there's an important lesson here - that we must depend on Jesus every moment. It's constant, and our need is constant.

So let's jump in. Let's break it down and talk about restoration. I want to start with a point that I think helps convey it the strongest, and it's where we'll spend a little bit more time than on the other points.

1. Your greatest failure is often your greatest blessing.

If you look at the transformation that is taking place in the life of Peter, I'm going to use the word "arrogance," that self-reliance that is there all throughout the gospel of John that we've been reading about -- you know, Peter arguing with Jesus and trying to correct Jesus and telling him it

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won't work this way, it's going to happen this way -- that's gone. Now there is a childlike faith and reliance on Jesus. He has been broken. He has come to a place of brokenness.

Now, when Jesus says, "Peter, do you love me?" it's painful for him. And what does he do? He says, "Jesus, you know everything." His whole tone is different. The lesson here is significant - that we often look at life and think that our greatest mistakes are what's keeping us from life, they are what's keeping us from joy, they are what's keeping us from happiness. But really, there's an opportunity in that brokenness for it to lead you to Jesus, for you to see your need. You were never intended to do this alone. You were never meant to live independently of God. You need a savior. You need Jesus.

I will hear people say, "You know, I went through this divorce," or "I went through this tragedy," and "I had this addiction." "I never would have chosen that. I never want to do it again, but praise God for it! Because through it Jesus met me. I came to a place where I saw my need." That's what happens in the life of Peter.

Here's the simple lesson taught to us. Jesus came to restore everything. He came to restore you. He came to restore your life. You are restored as you trust in Jesus Christ. If we lose sight of that basic, simple truth, it's dangerous. It's really dangerous.

Here in Broward County we've had two significant Christian leaders morally fall. When I say "significant," their moral failure, their sexual failure ended up in the national news. It's been difficult for us regionally because of that, because we have very visible figures who fell. On the one hand, we understand that there's a frailness that we all have to guard against, and guard against a presumption that, "Oh, that could never happen to me." But you know, I believe that oftentimes people fall morally when the real root of the problem is not so much sexual. There is a deeper problem.

You know, there are two sins that are the main sins according to the scripture. They are roots to everything else. One is pride and the other is unbelief. You can trace almost all sin down to those two roots. The idea of "I want to exalt myself. I want to do it my way. I want to do it by my strength. I've got this. I don't need a savior. I don't need God." The other is unbelief, that "If I track with God, if I say yes to God, if I live as a mom the way God wants me to, or as a dad in the way God wants me to, or in my job - however we want to fill in the blank, I'm going to miss out. I'm going to have less of a life." "If God lays out a track for me in terms of what my sex life should look like, and I

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don't believe God's love for me and God's wisdom and God's goodness, I will say, 'Well, I'm going to have less of a life if I follow his will.'" It's unbelief at the root, right?

That's what you see demonstrated in the transformation, the restoration that happens in Peter's life. There's this expression of, "No, I will never deny you. No, no, no, no, no. That will never happen. Jesus, you can count on me. I've got this." And now there's this faith and humility as Jesus restore Peter. The idea here is that your greatest failure is often your greatest blessing.

I want to linger here for a moment if you will allow me to and tell you that Jesus explained something to them. He quoted an ancient prophecy, telling them that he was going to be struck down and that he would really not be available to them in the moment of his crucifixion. That's interesting, because right before Jesus ascended, he made a promise to them. He said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." That's Matthew, Chapter 28, the last phrase of the gospel of Matthew. I want you to look at it just to see it, Matthew 28:20. The very last phrase in the gospel of Matthew: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." One of the reasons you can trust in Jesus is Jesus will never leave you.

What's interesting is, if you roll back to right before Jesus was crucified, he said basically: "I'm going to leave you. I'm not going to be available to you. I'm going to be unavailable so that I can always be available. I'm going to go to the cross. I'm going to be struck down, and when I do that, the sheep will scatter." That's the ancient prophecy. It's Zechariah Chapter 13, verse 7. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered." What's interesting is that Jesus quoted this to his apostles. This is what he's trying to teach Peter. He is saying, "Peter, you have this boisterous confidence. You won't leave me. You won't forsake me. But you don't understand. I'll be cut off from you because I'm going to go to the cross and carry your sin so that you can be forgiven. And when I am cut off from you, you will fall, because you need me. You live in trust and dependence.

Matthew 26 gives an interesting account. We are going to look at this. Here's where that dialog happens in Matthew 26. "Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written (here is the prophecy - he quotes it from Zechariah), 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" Jesus is saying, "Listen, I am preparing you for this moment of failure. It's going to happen. It's unavoidable. Because apart from me you can do nothing" -- John 15. Let's continue in Matthew 26. "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

That's what we are reading here in John 21. They are in Galilee. They are fishing. Jesus is there, making breakfast for them on the beach. Now look at Peter. "Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." He doesn't understand the principle. He doesn't understand it's an impossibility for him to stand apart from Christ, and that Christ will be cut off in fulfillment of this prophecy because he is going to the cross. Notice there in the text, I've emphasized the word "they."

Come now to John 21. Do you remember? It's an odd way that Jesus asked him, "Do you love me?" What does he ask him literally? "Do you love me more than these?" I think he's pointing out the other six. I think this moment is rising up. Jesus is taking him through his failure. He is confronting his arrogance. "Hey, Jesus, these other clowns - yeah, they'll fall away. But I will never fail you."

Continue on in Matthew. "Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.'" This is one of those moments -- "Peter, just don't say anything, alright? Don't speak. Don't say it." "Peter said to him, 'Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!' And all the disciples said the same."

This is that moment of failure - heartbreaking - and he leads everyone into this false confession. Jesus is taking Peter through this in John 21: "Do you love me more than these?" Remember? "They may fail you," right? He is restoring him. Your greatest mistake may very well be your greatest blessing, because it leads you to Jesus.

2. Restoration begins with receiving forgiveness.

That's really what's going on here. There's no going back to that moment and undoing it. There is Jesus granting forgiveness. When we come to Christ we confess our sin. We admit our sin. There is a transparency about our need for Jesus, and apart from that there is really no salvation. There is no helping us, because as Jesus said, "Only the sick need a physician." So through our brokenness we come to a place where we see our need.

You know what? I've heard it from many of you. When you tell your story, many of you will talk about your place before Christ, and appropriately, some of what you experienced that Jesus has saved you from. There is a freedom to be transparent because my hope is not in myself or my perfection or my ability.

Sometimes when preaching, I will talk about some things that the Lord has done in my life and in our life. I'll tell the story of our marriage – that our marriage almost didn't make it. That's not hyperbole. That's not an exaggeration. We went to marriage counseling for a year. It was a tough season, right, dear? That was the first five years of our marriage. I mean, there were a few good days, but there were five years where...that was supposed to be a little funny. We went to counseling for a year, then we got a dog, and the dog had a demon. That's my story. She's like, "Yeah, it was demon-possessed." Then, she got pregnant. And then we got rid of the dog. That's the sequence. That's how it works, okay?

Now, this is the interesting thing. God just miraculously restored our marriage, our love. I'll tell that story and people, especially new people, will come up to me and say, "Oh, it wasn't that bad." I am, "Oh, no, no -- it was worse." "No, no, no, really." They are concerned that I'm looking bad in the moment. And I want to say, "You have no idea how bad it was. Not it, but me, and the magnitude of my pride and selfishness. If my wife had the mike she would probably want to say something about her own sin. Maybe not! I don't know.

But regardless, listen: My hope is in Jesus! It's not in... Yeah, I had some things to figure out, but it's understandable. That moment when you have your worst day as a dad and you have just blown it, you put your head on the pillow and say, "Thank you Jesus that my hope is in you and this kid is not eternally scarred because I got it so wrong today." That's not failing to take responsibility. We take it, but there's a transparency about our need because restoration begins with receiving forgiveness. It doesn't begin with getting it all worked out and having it perfect. That's #2.

3. Obedience always follows forgiveness.

Salvation is a gift. We cannot earn it. If we are trying to earn it, we don't understand how restoration happens. Jesus gives it. It's his grace. That's the brokenness that was missing from Peter's life that happens when he gets restored. There is confusion about that point. Where does obedience come in? After we are restored, after we are forgiven, part of then living out the restoration process is we obey the Lord. I told you we need to express love to the Lord. There is a need for the human heart to obey God and to live in relationship and to express that love back to him.

Jesus immediately begins giving commands to Peter. "Feed my sheep. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. The last thing he says to him is "Follow me." Then Peter's response to this glorious moment

of “Follow me” is “What about him? Does he get old and get led around and carried and killed? Surely he’s going to have to die some gruesome death, right? Not just me.” And what does Jesus say? “It’s none of your business! You follow me!”

Why do I emphasize this as part of the restoration? Because this is part of how you know you’re getting it, how you are experiencing God’s grace. A transformation starts to take place in your heart. “Lord, I want to love you. I want to say I love you. I want to live a life of love to you. I want to please you.” That is the transformation that his gift, his gospel is bringing.

Once in a while, well-meaning people will say, “Hey, I don’t want anything from God. God has done enough. I’m just going to give to him. I don’t need a thing from God.” That will not go well. You need breath. You need everything from God. We constantly are receiving and turning that grace back around as an expression of love, of worship and obedience.

4. The Church is God’s place of restoration.

Because restoration involves a reuniting of me to God, you to God, and because it’s often taking place in a context of broken lives and our relationships are fractured, we have been hurt, Jesus is so wonderful, we are tempted to say, “Okay, God, thank you. Thank you for salvation. Thank you for healing. I receive it, but it’s just you and me. None of this church stuff. No, I don’t like these religious people. I can’t stand preachers. They call dogs demon-possessed. They are a problem. It doesn’t matter. I don’t need any of that.”

In a technical sense, being a part of a church doesn’t save you. Right? The reality is it’s about your personal faith in Jesus. But the Church is God’s place of restoration. It’s where we live out obedience in community. That’s what he is telling Peter. “Feed my sheep. Build my Church.” He has already prophesied to him that he has a key role in the building up of the Church. This is a disappointment to us sometimes, but the Church is God’s strategy. It’s the family and the Church. Both tend to be a mess, right? But we don’t give up on either and Jesus is bringing restoration. We don’t retreat because of pain and hurt. No, we say, “Okay, Jesus is restoring my life and this is the context where I express my love back to him.”

Maybe you’re here and you need healing. That’s okay. Just come. Get healed. We are not going to push you into some role of service prematurely. Take three or four days and get right and get healed and let’s get to work! That was facetious, okay? Whatever it takes – get it. Maybe another way to make this point is to say that unforgiveness is a deal-breaker. Jesus is coming to you and he

is saying, “You are forgiven. I am cleansing you. I am forgiving you. You can’t earn it. You can’t go back to that moment, Peter, and acknowledge me. I love you. Feed my sheep.”

If we say, “Yeah, but what about this guy,” and our focus is on these other people and what they’ve done and we don’t start extending the forgiveness to them that we have received, we cut ourselves off from the forgiveness of God. We don’t understand the magnitude of God’s grace. That moment of brokenness hasn’t come yet. God wants to take us back to it and say, “No, no, no, no. Just trust me.”

It’s hard at times. Some of you are hearing this message and you want to say, “Brian, you don’t understand what was done to me. You don’t understand what happened.” You are exactly right and I don’t want to belittle it. I want to tell you, though, God wants you to live in relationship. He wants you to be free. He wants to heal and restore every part of your life.

Fifth and finally:

5. God uses the circumstances of life to keep you trusting.

The big life lesson is: Live a life of trust to Jesus and he will restore everything in your life. He will restore you. He wants to restore more than you. We are looking at social problems and challenges that are in our country racially, amongst others, which are at the fore. It’s massive. It’s unsolvable. The wound, the hurt is legitimate and deep. You just can’t move past it. You just can’t give a pat on the back and say, “Oh, come on now. Things are better!” You can’t!

Listen, I will just speak to you candidly about this. If you think this is about politics, there is a moral issue at the heart of this nation that has to be faced. It’s impossible. It will only come from the Church when we learn how to love one another, black and white and all kinds of races, in Jesus Christ. It takes a miracle. It takes the gospel. It takes grace!

I’m going to linger here, but friends, there is no way on God’s earth that someone gathers and says, “White people are superior or supreme,” and we are okay with it! Someone say, “Amen!” It’s ludicrous! We are all made in the image of God. I understand that there are political issues. There is a left and there is a right, but some things are just clear.

Friends, I’m sorry, I’m preaching a mini message within the message. From the late 1800’s, after the Civil War until 1950, people were lynched publicly because of the color of their skin. No trial. Nothing. I was born in 1961. I know I look like an 80’s child, but actually tomorrow I’ll be 56. It’s

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almost my lifetime. Some of you were alive. Some of you experienced it. We are not talking here about, “Yeah, it was hard to get into Harvard if you were a minority.” The issues are clear, and I believe God desires to bring restoration. And the only way it happens – it’s massive – it’s the cross of Jesus Christ taking the sin of the world and mankind and paying for it before a righteous and holy God. We can only live that out, friends, by learning to trust in Jesus. God orchestrates the daily circumstances of your life to keep you coming back to him.

So, last Sunday these events had happened in Charlottesville, Virginia, and my kids were all leaving me to go away to college. That was a huge experience for me and for my wife, right? That was my focus. I showed up on Sunday and had no idea what had happened. Someone said to me, “Hey, did you hear about the conflict?” I’m like, “Oh wow, no.” “Well we need to give attention to it.” I had no knowledge, so I gave a prayer -- a powerful...no it wasn’t. I really didn’t know what had happened. I immediately started getting feedback after the service that we did not adequately address that. What made it worse was my response: “Address what?”

Here’s what I want you to see. You don’t come into these moments and always get it right. You don’t always get marriage right. You don’t always get parenting right. You don’t always get being a child right. You don’t get work right. In our condition of alienation from God and the brokenness of the world, we are going to fail. Your response in that moment can be, “Well, I didn’t know about it because I’ve gotten off Facebook. Because I’m so holy, I would never think of doing social media.” Are you buying that? I am off Facebook, but certainly not because I’m holier.

You can offer that justification or you can say, “Hey, alright. Let’s back up. Let’s give attention to this. Let’s say we’re sorry. Let’s try to do better.” That will be our lives until Jesus comes. What is the hope that empowers us to do that? Jesus enables us. He is using those events -- though we don’t want them, we want to get it right -- to draw us back into a place of trust in him.

I’ll end with this application. Whatever the context is – if you’re a parent, if you’re married (I keep coming to that because my heart aches for the brokenness in the family), racially, work, whatever it is – if I were you, I would not take the posture of Peter before the cross. “Well, I do this right. I’ve got it. These other people aren’t really aware.” I would take an attitude of brokenness where we keep pointing people to Jesus Christ. Amen?

Okay, I’ve preached way over my time and we are going to end right here. But in my defense, I didn’t get to preach much in the last six or seven weeks, so I had to make up for some lost time. I’d

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like to say this as we close out the service: If you don't know Jesus Christ, trust in him. He came to restore your life. We want to talk to you about it. Come into the café. Let us talk to you. If you are in a crisis of restoration, you need to do it in relationship. Come in and let us pray with you and talk with you. To all of our first-time guests, we have a gift for you. Stop into the café. Church, let's stand. I want to send us out with God's blessing.