

Jesus: Full of Grace and Truth

John 21:1-25

Failure. Most of us hate it.

- In my youthful, unconverted and overly competitive years, I would cheat at board games and in cards against my own family to ensure victory. Pathetic.
- High School basketball was the thing where I grew up, and we had a great team.... (I was a three-year starter and we won a lot of games). **But I remember more losses than wins.** If I lost a basketball game, I would head straight to the room and shut the door.
- If I had four hits in a *baseball* game, but made an error, I would only talk about the error afterward.
- I had an awful temper. Technical fouls; fights; etc.
- I could have belonged to the Cobra Kai Dojo in Karate Kid, “Failure does not exist in this dojo does it?” “No, Sensei!” “Defeat does not exist in this Dojo, does it?” “No, Sensei!”

Thankfully, in a miracle of mercy, the Lord saved me from my sin and the failures that most grieve him: my rebellion against him.

If you don't have this hatred of failure, then I'm happy for you.

- But for most of you, I would imagine you dislike it.
- Yet, we fail.

Maybe you've failed a class recently.

Maybe you've gone through a painful, failed marriage.

A failed business

A failed friendship

A failed ministry

Failed parenting

Moral Failure

Failed to reach your goals.

The most painful failure for the true Christian is failing Jesus Christ.

If you can identify, then I have good news for you in **John 21.**

This passage is for failures!

Of all the disciple's failures, Peter's failure is most pronounced.

Few people have fallen to the depths of unfaithfulness as Peter, who denied His Lord. Yet, few people have been so powerfully used by God as Peter – after he repented and was restored. His testimony reminds of this truth:

Your failure hasn't put you beyond the reach of Jesus' restoring grace.

Leon Morris represents various other commentators saying, this event “**is meant to show us Peter as completely restored to his position of leadership**” (Leon Morris).

Peter is in **rehab** here, and **Jesus is doing the counseling.**

John 21 is like an **Epilogue** to the book, intended to bring closure.

- John 1:1-14 is called a **Prologue**.
 - It introduces the main character, Jesus, who is “**full of grace and truth.**”
 - Everywhere you look in John’s gospel, Jesus demonstrates grace and truth.
- **The epilogue also shows this.** Grace and truth are on display.
- **Prior to his passion, he washes their feet. After his passion, he makes them breakfast. Jesus still serves and blesses his people with grace and truth, as he renews and restores.**

What sets the epilogue apart is that it ties up some important **loose ends.**

Loose End #1: Peter is reconciled to Jesus.

- This is very important because the reader is left wondering about Peter’s relationship with Jesus. The early church would need to know that Peter was restored to Jesus since he would become the main leader.

Loose End #2: Jesus shows the path forward for the disciples and all Christians.

- That path forward is discipleship, following Jesus in life and mission.
- This mission involves “**fishing**” for people and “**feeding**” the flock.

Loose End #3: Jesus tells Peter that he will die.

- This told everyone that Peter would not be around forever.

Peter’s restoration is a very relevant story for us.

What are we to make of the serious failure of the Christian?

- A person who has run well, grown in him, but then suddenly *crashes*?
- *Can a person who denies Jesus be restored?*

Those who have fallen into grievous sin, tend gravitate toward **two extremes:**

- (1) **Too soft**, minimizing sin and his/her need for repentance.
- (2) **Too hard**, minimizing grace, believing that he/she can’t be forgiven and restored.

The Church historically has tended to also go in **two extremes**, as well:

- (1) **Laxity** – Not calling people to repentance and restoration within the body.
- (2) **Severity** – Never accepting repentant people back into fellowship.

John 21 is a case study of forgiveness, restoration, re-instatement.

We learn how Jesus will do it for us and how we should do it for others.

3 Truths about Restoration

#1: Restoration Is Possible Because of the Grace of the Savior (21:1-14)

Observe how gracious Jesus is with these disciples, especially Peter.

It's important to know **Peter's backstory**...

Remember, he had a history of **great starts and failed finishes**.

A: Sea of Galilee (Matt. 14:28-29) Walking on Water – and **down he goes**.

B: Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:15-23) “Right!” then “Wrong!” (“Blessed are you ... get behind me Satan!”)

C: His Greatest Failure

John 13:36-38 – Peter's boast, “I will lay down my life for you”

Unfaithfulness today: “I will never.... Demean my wife, belittle my wife; lie to parents; cheat on an exam; lust at pornography”

John 18:15-18, 25-27 – His tragic collapse

A detail in **Luke 22:60-62** – “the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (61). Peter must have been able to see the Lord. And Peter “**went out and wept bitterly**” (62).

He was shamed/crushed.

Does he strike you as “the disciple most likely to succeed?”

Gal. 2:14 – Peter would fail again.

Imagine your life played on the **big screen for everyone**.

- **A rooster** is now his logo in Jerusalem.
- If someone had to choose a logo or a mascot for your life, what would it be? A bulldog? A harley? Shoes? For Peter, it's a rooster!

Consider the Savior's Grace to Peter (21:1-14; cf., Luke 22:31-34)

1: – “**revealed**” – twice. A very important word in John.

It's an appearance designed to create an impression and response.

- It's intentional. It's a planned confrontation.
- The Lord had appeared to Peter already (John 20, Luke 24:34; Cor. 15:5)
- Apparently, **Jesus did not use any of these occasions as the opportunity to confront him with his denial.**
- I think the Lord was waiting to the right time to re-commission him.
- This re-instatement would involve:
 - A **similarity in his of his previous call**. This was the same area where he called him. (See **Luke 5**). I think he was reenacting the event.
 - A **public re-instatement in the presence of the other disciples**. “The public nature of his denial of Jesus demands that his reinstatement to service be equally public in view of this fellow disciples.” (Kostenberger).

v. 2 – Peter **heads the list**, as he does elsewhere. He's the leader.

Are they are to be blamed for going fishing? I don't think so.

- Some say this was an act of total **apostasy or total despair**.
- But that's too strong.
- Remember, Jesus told the disciples to return to Galilee after his resurrection (Mark 14:28; 16:7). But he hasn't shown up yet.
- Peter could be growing impatient. And he had to eat! They were human!
- They haven't abandoned Jesus.

- This is made clearer by how Peter throws himself out of the boat, and swims to Jesus. This doesn't sound like a guy running from Jesus (Carson).

However ... not all seems right. We don't see them fishing in Acts.

- Jesus will give a final commission here to them, in sort of acted out parable, that from now on, their job will be fishing for people.
- This story doesn't sound like the disciples living empowered on mission.
- Some things need to be set right.

And one thing is for sure, this happened in the providence of God.

3: Surprise. They caught nothing.

- It was the one thing they knew they could do well. But it's an ordained failure.
- A great illustration that apart from Christ we can do nothing.

4: They didn't recognize him... glorified body.

5: – “Children” or “friends” “men”

6: Jesus shows their inability and his ability. Recall Luke 5:

- The Same Lake
- The Same Situation – no fish
- The Same Command to Cast the Net
- The Same Promise – large catch of fish
- The Same Large Catch of Fish – nets breaking/153
- The Same Savior – Only risen this time

7: In this moment, John recognizes the Lord.

Peter puts some clothes on and threw himself into the sea!

I'm sure the guys in the boat were glad he left!

Perhaps the inward shame caused him to want to be clothed. So he throws something over the loin cloth before meeting with Jesus.

8: dragging the fish.

Fishing is a great picture of mission because the waters in the ancient world were symbol of **chaos and death**. God has taken us out of the waters of death, and brought us safely into another realm. Our mission is to bring people out of the realm of darkness and death and bring them into the kingdom of Christ.

Think about the grace, and love of Jesus Christ. He **initiates** this restoration.

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time”

Jesus is the model for our outreach of wayward disciples –

- “Brothers, if anyone is caught in a transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” (Gal 6:1)

Breakfast

9-14 - Breakfast with Jesus on a beach – what a thought!

- **Jesus has a history of meals with sinners.** Here's another. (**READ**; third time being (1) Mary and Disciples, (2) Thomas).
- **What kind of fish were they eating? Why, tilapia, of course.** The Sea of Galilee is full of them.
- **Next time you cook tilapia, think about Jesus! You should do it and invite some friends over or eat it in your GG.**
- **Imagine the scene**

John, the beloved, the author of this book – the most *widely published piece of literature ever on earth!*

I see **James**, who will not live much longer. **Herod** will kill him (Acts 12).

I see **Thomas**, who would be a *martyr in India*, according to tradition;

And **Peter**.

These men who climbed out of the boat would one day have schools, hospitals, and churches, and places named after them.

- **St. John's College, St. Thomas' hospital. St. James Square.**
- **Do their enemies have anything named after them? Herod Street? Herod Hospital? Nero University? How about Caesar? Okay, a pizza... a haircut ... and a salad.**
- **And people will name their kids after the Apostles, but not Nero – maybe your dog.**

Notice the detail about the **charcoal fire** in 21:9 (cf, 18:18).

- **Why charcoal? Is it because food is better on the charcoal?**
- The only other place this word is used is in 18:18 when Peter denied Jesus.
- It seems like it's intended to bring this issue up.
- This is why Jesus will ask Peter three times if he loves him – it was a threefold denial.
- The sense of smell brings memories doesn't it? Particular perfume; foods; etc.
- Maybe Peter thought of the time he denied the Lord when he smelled this.
- But now, he will never smell it the same again.
- **It will smell like grace from now on.**

Whatever the case, for restoration to happen, one must face his/her failure. See it. Own it. Feel it. And then, go to the Savior, for restoration.

The Savior Still Had Plans for Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³²but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (**Luke 22:31-32**)

But he needed to restore him.

Can I ask you my friend, **“Do you need to have a meeting with the Savior?”**

You can't be restored to full service unless you admit your need and face your failure. He gives grace to the humble.

Your failure hasn't put you beyond the reach of Jesus' restoring grace.

#2: Restoration Involves Reaffirming Our Love to the Savior (21:15-17)

Jesus asks Peter three times "Do you love me?" corresponding to Peter's three denials of Jesus.

Restoration involves going back to where you first started. To the basics.

The important thing is that Jesus asks him, "**Do you love me?**"

Let me address a common reading of this passage before we examine this.

There are three words in Greek for love: *eros*, *phileo*, and *agape*.

The text reads like this:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| • Do you love [agape] me? | I love [phileo] you |
| • Do you love [agape] me? | I love [phileo] you |
| • Do you love [phileo] me? | I love [phileo] you |

Some have suggested that this change in question three is significant, but I don't think that's the case.

- I don't think Peter is saying, "**I love you but not as much not to that degree.**"
- These words are used **interchangeably** in John.
- Further the conversations took place (most likely) in **Aramaic** and such variation would not have been present.
- Moreover, Peter answers, "**Yes**" each time. If there is a difference in the type of love then he should have said "no."

The same is true for "lambs" and "sheep" here. There's nothing theologically significant about that change.

The important thing here is Peter's three-fold reaffirmation of love and the command to feed Christ's sheep. We must not miss the main things.

Notice Jesus doesn't ask him about **his past**; he asked him about his heart *in the present*.

The really fundamental thing about a Christian is their love for Jesus.

- It is right to refer to Christians as those "**who love the Lord.**"
- Peter said, "though we don't see him, we love him."

Jesus said that he had a great problem with Christians who do not love him.

- Repentance is the act of returning to **our first love** (Rev. 2:2-5)
- Repentance is not just feeling bad. It is not just saying I "I did something wrong" or "I made a mistake" Pagans feel bad. Pagans admit, "I made a mistake."
- Christian Repentance is *about forsaking our idols and confessing our love for Christ*. Love for Christ is primary. Not just "no to sin" but "yes to Christ."

- Jesus had given a lesson to Peter about love and its relationship to divine forgivingness in **Luke 7:36-48**. “Those who have been forgiven much; love much.” (7:47).
 - Now it is Peter, who is going to be forgiven much. Much.
 - And the question is, “Do you love me?”

Peter’s repentance involved....

Being Real with the Savior (15), “more than these”

- “More than these” refers to the other disciples, not the fish or the fishing business.
- Peter had boasted that he loved Jesus more than the others in **Mark 14**, “Even though they all fall away, I will never” (29). Now he's going to get honest.
- Jesus is asking him to **examine the strength of his earlier commitment**.

2. Being Re-instated in front of the Disciples.

- If the Lord did not reinstate Peter in front of the disciples, we wonder at what the others who have thought about him in the future.
- The word on the street would be – “too rash, too impetuous, too inconsistent.”
- It was a public sin, and he needed public repentance.
- “Whatever potential for future service he had therefore depended not only on forgiveness from Jesus, but also on reinstatement amongst the disciples” (Carson)

Being Utterly Dependent on the Savior (16-17).

- Peter was “**grieved**” (17). There is a heavy hand on Simon Peter.
- **Repentance hurts**. It is the sorrow though that can lead us to repentance.
- When Peter is particularly grieved (v. 17), it is not because Jesus has changed verbs, **but because the same question is being asked for the third time**.
- As he had disowned Jesus three times, so Jesus requires this elementary yet profound confession three times.

There is no trace of self-righteousness in Peter’s response. He can only appeal to the fact that the Lord knows everything.

- Peter renounced **self-reliance and pride and embraced a humble awareness**. – He says, “**you know everything.**” (17b)
 - **Peter drops the comparative language. He’s been humbled. No more bragging about his loyalty.**
 - **He is laid bare - totally helpless for mercy.**
 - There is no self-reliance. He recognizes his limitations.
 - Peter is seeing his desperate for his grace – for Jesus knows all things.
 - Jesus knows the condition of our hearts. We can’t fake it; we can only appeal to his mercy. (Cf Ps 51:1)
 - All he can say, is “forgive me. You know me. I throw myself on your mercy.”

“Jesus accepts his declaration, doubtless to Peter’s relief, and commissions him: *Feed my lambs.*” (Carson)

- The really important question to you today, posed by the Savior is: Do you love me?
- Here is the pre-requisite for restoration.
- He could go shepherd because Jesus accepted his affirmation.

#3: Restoration Is Demonstrated by Following the Will of the Savior (21:15-23)

Peter’s love for his Lord, and the evidence of his reinstatement, are both to be displayed in Peter’s pastoral care for the Lord’s flock.

Love is manifested in allegiance to Jesus.

Is the person restored? We will see.

“If you love me, you will keep me commandments.”

2 Demonstrations of repentance:

A. Care for the Savior’s Sheep (15-17)

That is, the church.

- This whole account has a **church emphasis.**

It’s in the presence of the disciples;

it’s about Jesus’ sheep;

it’s pointing forward to Peter’s responsibility to the church in the future.

He is called to feed **not** “his sheep” but “**Jesus’ sheep.**”

Jesus cares about his church.

Jesus’ followers care about his church.

Not all Christians are under shepherds, but all are called to care for one another as fellow believers under the Chief Shepherd.

However, we must Remember: We are **caring for sheep.**

Sheep are dirty animals –

Sheep also wander away sometimes –

Sheep must be protected from wolves.

It’s important to notice that Jesus told Peter “Feed my sheep” not “pet my sheep.”

- One of the primary ways we shepherd the flock is by *feeding*.
- Often people put preaching in a different category than pastoring, but that’s wrong. Feeding is a primary way we care for the flock.
- Every Christian has this ministry to speak the word of Christ to one another for their edification.

B. Submission to the Savior’s Will (18-23)

- Two Simple Words – that Jesus started with in **Matthew 4:19**

The Cost We Must Consider (18-19)

- “stretch out your hands” was a reference to the crucifixion.
- Evidence from church history shows that Peter did in fact die on a cross. Some say upside down; tradition says after he saw the crucifixion of his wife.
- Jesus told him this the night before the crucifixion – “Where I am going you cannot, but soon you will.” (13:36)
- Peter served him for some 30 years.

Will you die for Jesus? That’s really not my question today.

- The question is: Will you live for Jesus?

Path We Have (20-23)

- Peter is a lot like other Christians. He wants to compare himself to other Christians. He got distracted.
- This book ends with a touch of **humor**. At least, I think it does.
- I hope you see it; it has a powerful point.

20 – John, he is the disciple whom Jesus loved; he is very much like a kid brother relationship; at the Last Supper, he’s beside Jesus. He and Peter are nothing alike.

21 – Peter says, “I’m going to be crucified, what about him?” Peter says, “If I’m going to get crucified, someone else needs to.”

If you have kids, you know how this goes, “I’m going to spank you.” They ask, “What about him?!”

John would not escape persecution [Patmos], but this journey would be different.

22 – Jesus says, “What is it to you?” “Who knows, Peter, I may let him live forever.” “That’s none of your business, Peter.”

V. 23 – The saying spread

- **The point: We are not carbon copies of other Christians!**
- **How can we make our short stay on this life significant? By following Jesus.**
- **Not by trying to follow someone else’s path.**
- There will be similarities.
- Your following of Jesus will involve following him in the context of a church, but your vocation, place and the dynamics will be different.

Conclusion (24-25)

24: Perhaps John’s disciples pick up the pen to add the final words; words which validate John’s testimony. (“we”)

25: Delightful ending.

Gary Burge

The story is larger than anything he can imagine. His effort, while glorious for us to read, pales in comparison to the glory of the Person whom his story describes.

Reflections

Restoration is real. **You are not beyond the reach of his restoring grace.**

Do you need to be restored?

Jesus has two questions:

Do you love me? Not, if you loved me once.... This is present tense.
Right now! Do you love me?

Will you follow me? All the professions of love mean nothing, unless you resume a life of discipleship to him.

He says, "I want your heart, your mind, your affections, your ambitions. That's what it means to follow me."

Restoration begins when you answer **"yes"**

To use Peter's own words, "The God of all grace, will restore and strengthen you" today, as you reaffirm your love to the Savior and commit to following His will.