

“The Restoration of Peter”
John 21:15-19

Good morning everyone!

It’s good to see you!

Let’s go ahead and turn in our bibles to the book of John, John chapter 21...

As you’re turning there in your bibles, (I didn’t say anything last Sunday but...) let me just take a moment and say thank you for the letters, cards and kind words while I was out on my sabbatical the past two months.

It was such an encouragement to me...

I also want you to know that I took full advantage of those two months to unplug and recharge and I feel very blessed to be able to do something like that.

So church, thank you for blessing me and my family in that way...

But I’m excited to be back—especially behind the pulpit...

Now, just for the record, I told Andrew and Austin that while I was out if they wanted to finish out the book of Revelation for me that they were more than welcome to do so...

However, they both declined.

And so let me kind of fill you in on where we will be in God’s Word over the next several weeks.

Next week, as Andrew said in the announcements, it will actually be Senior Recognition Sunday and so as we recognize our graduating students, Austin will be preaching and leading in that service.

And as many of you know, the following week is Mother’s Day—and so to be honest with you I didn’t really want to start back the book of Revelation on Mother’s Day...

And so I’m going to preach a standalone sermon for that occasion...

But on the NEXT Sunday (Lord willing) we will be starting back our study of Revelation and finish that book on out.

I think we have about 5-6 more studies in that book and we'll be done.

But that's just a heads up about what we'll be studying for the next several weeks.

(Long Pause)

Well, for today, I didn't want to start back with Revelation only to have to stop again, so I thought we would do a standalone sermon for today...

And so I thought it might be good to focus a little on "What happened AFTER the resurrection?"

Of course, last Sunday was Easter Sunday or Resurrection Sunday and for many I think Easter is kind of the pinnacle of Holy Week—as it should be...

But after Easter Sunday, people kind of move on and don't really consider the fact that Jesus spent time on earth AFTER his resurrection.

In fact, the bible says that he spent 40 days here on this earth.

And so what did he do?

Well, one of the things that he did was he met with his disciples and gave visible proof that he was alive.

And one of the people that he met with that I want to take a look at here this morning...was the Apostle Peter.

Now, to understand why this meeting with Peter was so important, I think we need to remember the details of what happened on the night Jesus met with his disciples in the Upper Room where they shared the Last Supper.

There in the Upper Room we read in Mark's gospel account that as they all sat around the supper table, Jesus predicted that all of them would scatter and fall away at some point.

And it was Peter who spoke up and said, *“Lord, even if all fall away, I will not.”*

Pretty confident in himself...

Jesus responded back and said, *“Yeah Peter...before the rooster crows twice (that is, before morning) you will have disown me three times.”*

And Peter emphatically declared, *“Lord, even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”*

Well, you all know what happened...

Later on, that very night, after Jesus was arrested and hauled away, Peter is warming himself by the campfire in the courtyard of Caiaphas the High Priest...

And there he is approached by three different people who ask:

Aren't you one of Jesus' followers?

And all three times he denies even knowing Christ...

Luke's gospel account adds this important detail...

It tells us that after Peter had denied Jesus, the guards were moving Jesus toward a holding cell and Jesus looked His eyes on Peter's.

And the Bible says that in that moment Peter realizes that he had just done the very thing Jesus predicted...

And the bible says that Peter “broke down and wept.”

He had disowned his Lord.

A pretty bad moment for Peter.

Well, at this point here in John's gospel chapter 21 we see what happens when Jesus dies, rises from the grave, and then initiates a seemingly awkward conversation with Peter.

So let's read this—John chapter 21, starting in verse 15...

¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ 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.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ 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.” ¹⁹ (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.”

****Prayer**

I’ve entitled this morning’s message quite simply—“The Restoration of Peter.”

Here in this passage Jesus not only forgives Peter, but also reinstates him into service...into ministry.

And as we look at this, there are three parts here that I want to bring to your attention...

If you like to take notes we’re going to put these up on the screen for you.

Number one, I want you to see the **Confrontation**.

Jesus confronts Simon Peter here by asking three questions.

And they’re all similar—he asks Peter, “*Pete, do you love me?*”

Three times—*Pete, do you love me?*

Now, why ask Peter three times if he loved him?

Well, some have suggested it’s one time for every time he denied him...

And that could be true...

But still, why would Jesus do this?

I mean, is he trying to rub Peter's nose in his sin?

No, not at all...

Jesus is asking Peter this question because he's simply wanting to address Peter's sin...

He's doing this because he loves him...because he wants to heal him.

You see, Jesus refuses to sweep Peter's sin under the rug and act like it never happened...

He needs to address the "elephant in the room."

And so he confronts Peter about it.

And you know what? The same is true for us—those of us who belong to Christ...

Whenever we sin or whenever we disobey the Lord, the Lord faithful to confront us about it.

How so?

Well, he does this by way of conviction.

The Holy Spirit will convict us and cause us to feel awful about what we did.

This is the Lord disciplining us...

This is him spanking us.

In fact, in Hebrews 12 the author there writes about the discipline of the Lord.

He says this, he says, *"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children.*"

You see, because the Lord loves us as his children, he never lets us live comfortably in sin.

Rather he will convict us by way of the Holy Spirit and confront us in our sin.

And listen, have you noticed this...

Sometimes, he will confront us by using other people—other brothers and sisters in Christ.

People who will come to us in love and say, *“Hey, I love you and because I love you I have to tell you that what you’re doing, how you’re living is wrong...it’s sinful...”*

“Let me help you...I’m here for you.”

What is that?

That’s the Lord using faithful Christians to confront us in our sin.

And again, the Lord is doing this because he loves us and because he wants to heal us.

You see, the Lord in many ways is a skilled surgeon...

For example, if you have a cancerous tumor in your body that needs to be removed, you go to a skilled surgeon and they do what?

They cut that thing out!

And yes, it’s painful, it’s going to hurt, you’re going to have to go under the knife, and they’re going to stitch you up and you have to take it easy for a while...

But it’s all done for your good!

So that you might be healed.

And that’s what the Lord is like with us—he’s like a skilled surgeon who confronts us in order to heal us from the effects of sin.

And so it is with Peter here...

(Long Pause)

And you know maybe here this morning the Lord is convicting you about some sin in your life...

There's something you're doing that you know is wrong and the Lord refuses to let you live comfortable in your sin.

In short, the Lord is disciplining you...

And it hurts...it stings...

But in Hebrews 12, the author of Hebrews tells us that “...***God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.***”

You see, the discipline of the Lord has a purpose—and that's a harvest of righteousness and peace in our lives.

That's what he wants for you.

And so he unsettles you so that you will repent...so that you will change directions and do what is right.

And so don't ever despise the discipline of the Lord...

And don't ever ignore the discipline of the Lord...

But rather listen...and receive the Lord's instruction and correction.

(Long Pause)

Alright, one more thing here about this confrontation...

Jesus asks Peter three times, “*Peter do you love me?*”

But the first time Jesus asked Peter this, he adds something to it—did you notice it?

It's slightly different...

In verse 15 Jesus asks him, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me **more than these?***"

Now, the question is: who are "these"?

Well, there are a number of ideas...

It could be that Jesus is talking about their fishing gear...

The nets, the boats, the fish—in totality, he's talking about their occupation.

"Hey, do you love me more than your career, what you've done your whole life, what you've been trained to do?"

You know it's interesting that when Jesus first called Peter to follow him he was fishing...

And Jesus told him, "*Hey, follow me and I'll make you fishers of men!*"

And the bible says that Peter and his brother Andrew "immediately" dropped their nets and followed him.

And yet, here in our story what has Peter done?

He's picked back up his net to go fishing again.

He's gone back to fishing...

And so it could be that Jesus is asking him, "*Peter, do you love me more than a successful career? Do you love me enough to give up your former life?*"

(Pause)

You know this is a question we have to ask ourselves as well...

Do I love the Lord more than ___ fill in the blank ___?

- More than my career?
- More than making money?
- More than being successful?
- More than my own happiness?
- More than any person or anything?
- More than life itself?

(Long Pause)

Well, there's a second possibility here as to what "these" could mean...

It could be that Jesus is asking Peter if he loved him more than "the other disciples loved Jesus."

Remember, Peter had already announced at the Last Supper that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples...

"Jesus, even if these guys all bail on you, I won't...I'm with you till the end!"

But of course, he wasn't.

And so it could be that Jesus is saying to Peter, *"Hey, Peter...do you REALLY love me more than these...like you said?"*

(Pause)

Now, the truth of the matter is we will probably never know exactly what "these" are here...

And I think that's a good thing...

Because we all have a "these" in our lives...

We all have something or someone in our lives that seeks to compete with Jesus as it relates to him being number one in our lives.

And mine may be different from yours...

And yours may be different from mine...

But we all have to answer this question daily: “Is there anything or anyone in my life that I’ve sought to love more than Jesus?”

(Long Pause)

Well, we’ve seen now the confrontation, the three questions...

Let’s next look at the **Confession**.

(Pause)

After each time the Lord asks “*Peter, do you love me?*” Peter responds back with the same response—he says “*Yes Lord, you know that I love you!*”

Now, this here is one of those occasions where it’s extremely important to know the original language.

For you first time bible students, the NT wasn’t originally written in English—it was translated into English from Greek.

Greek is the original language of the NT.

And in Greek, there are four words that are used that can be translated “love.”

(Pause)

Now, some of you hear that and you go, “*That’s weird...why would they do that?*”

Well, it’s actually a pretty cool thing...

You see, in our English language, we use just ONE word (“love”) to communicate different feelings...

In other words, we say things like “*I love my wife and I love football.*”

Hopefully those two types of loves are different.

Or we say “*I love Jesus and I love potato chips.*”

Obviously, those two loves are different.

But in the English language we'll use this one word to describe our feelings towards both.

In Greek they have different words to describe different feelings even though it's translated "love" in our English language.

- *Eros*—which is where we get our English word "erotic" from—it describes a romantic love between a husband and wife
- *Storge*—which is a "family love"

And then there are two other words that are used in this conversation between Jesus and Peter:

- *Phileo*
- *Agape*

Now, the "phileo" is a word that describes "brotherly love"—a deep friendship.

It's why the city of Philadelphia is called the city of brotherly love.

(Pause)

But then you have the word "agape" and it is a word that speaks of unconditional love.

And this love is said to be the highest form of love.

It is "supreme love."

(Pause)

Now, I want to put this on the screen for you so you can see when and where he Jesus uses these two words.

Granted Jesus and Peter are speaking in Aramaic, but they use different words nonetheless.

Verse 15...

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you *agape* me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I *phileo* you.”

So the first time Jesus asks this question he says “Pete, do you agape me?”

That is, “Do you love me supremely?”

Peter responds, “Lord, you know that I phileo you.”

That is, “You know that I love you like a friend.”

(Long Pause)

Same thing the second time...

Verse 16, “¹⁶ He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you *agape* me?”

Do you love me supremely?

He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I *phileo* you.”

You know I love you like a friend...

(Pause)

So twice Jesus asks “Do you agape me?”—Do you love me supremely?

And twice Peter says “You know that I phileo you.”—I love you like a friend.

But check out the third time...

Verse 17, “¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you *phileo* me?”

So what did Jesus do?

He came down and used the word that Peter was using...

It says, “*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 **phileo** you.”*”

(Pause)

Now, there’s a couple of questions that we have to ask...

First of all, why does Peter not respond to Jesus by saying “*Lord, you know I agape you*”—*I love you supremely!*

Why does he use the lesser word “phileo”?

Well, I think it’s because at this point Peter is humbled...

Remember what happened in the Upper Room?

Remember how Peter responded when the Lord told his disciples that they were all scatter when things got tough?

And how did Peter respond?

“Not me Lord...not me!”

Peter was overly confident...

He was prideful...

Some might say, a little arrogant...

But now, he’s been humbled...

He’s saying, “*Lord, I can’t say that I agape you—that I love you supremely...I can’t say that because of my sin.*”

Peter has been humbled...

I would even add that he’s broken over his sin.

It even says in verse 17 that Peter was “grieved” over this.

It's painful for him to talk about his love for Christ after what he did...

We're reading here of a man who was drastically different than who he was back in that Upper Room.

He's been brought down to earth a bit.

See the humility in this man here...

(Long Pause)

Now, the second question we need to ask is this...

We understand now why Peter refused to come up and use the agape...

But the next question is why did Jesus come down to the word "phileo" the third time?

Here's why: it's because to the humble and broken, Jesus will always come down and meet you where you're at.

This here, in my opinion, is Jesus meeting Peter in his brokenness.

And if you're here this morning and you're broken over your sin...

If you're ashamed of what you've done or who you've become...

Let this bring you comfort.

That in your brokenness, the Lord does not run from you...

Rather, he pursues you and desires to meet with you and heal you...and restore you...

(Pause)

But now please don't misunderstand things...

Restoration only comes to the humble and broken hearted.

Restoration only comes to those who possess "...godly sorrow that leads to repentance..."

(Long Pause)

You know I've noticed that there are those who are sorry over what they have done, and there are those who are sorry that they got caught.

Both are sorry...

But one is sorry that they've sinned against the Lord and the other is sorry that they're now going to have to face some difficult consequences because of their sin.

(Pause)

Restoration with the Lord only comes to those who confess and say "*Lord, I've messed up...*"

"And I'm sorry that I've sinned against..."

Restoration comes to the humble and broken hearted...not the proud.

(Long Pause)

Well, one last point here...

We've seen the confrontation, the confession, now let's talk about the **Commission**.

After each question and each response, we see Jesus respond with a commission statement.

That is, he gives Peter an assignment...

At the end of verse 15 he tells Peter "*Feed my lambs.*"

Then at the end of verse 16 he says "*Tend my sheep*"

And then at the end of verse 17, "*Feed my sheep.*"

And so three times Jesus commissions Peter...

(Pause)

Now, I think most would probably understand if Jesus told Peter, *“Look man...I love you...you’re forgiven...but I’m just not going to be able to use you anymore.”*

“You’ve revealed some SERIOUS flaws in your faithfulness and commitment to me...so go back to fishing.”

If Jesus had said this, I’m sure that Peter and the other disciples would have probably understood.

Or Jesus could have treated him with silence...

Given him the cold shoulder...

But that’s not what Jesus does...

He doesn’t discard Peter...

He doesn’t even just reinstate him into service...into ministry...

But rather he gives him the assignment of being a shepherd—a pastor...

He says, *“I’m going to entrust over to you one of the most important things in the world to me...and that’s my sheep.”*

“And so not only are you going to fish for men, but you’re also going to feed those you catch.”

“The fish that become my sheep, you’re going to feed them and take care of them.”

What a God of grace!

(Pause)

Now, I do believe that there are times when one will sin in such a way that they might be disqualified, either permanently or for a season, from holding an office or position in the church...

But to the repentant and truly humble, not only can God forgive us, but he also wants to continue using us for his glory.

(Long Pause)

And so let this be an encouragement to you if you have failed the Lord or stumbled in your walk with Christ...

Like with Peter, not only is there forgiveness for you, but there is also ministry for you.

Praise the Lord, Christian, your failure doesn't have to be final.

If you will humble yourself...

Confess...

And repent.

Jesus is in the business of restoring people.

(Long Pause)

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played University of California in the Rose Bowl.

And in that game a man by the name of Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for California.

However, somehow, he got confused and instead of running towards the right endzone, he began running 65 yards in the wrong direction.

One of his teammates, Benny Lom, ran him down and tackled him just before he scored for the opposing team.

Right there near the goal line....

Well, when his team went three and out and attempted to punt, Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety which was the ultimate margin of victory.

(Pause)

Now, that strange play came in the first half, and everyone who was watching the game had the same thought: *“I bet the head coach is going to lay into Roy Riegels...he probably won’t even play the second half!”*

Well, the team headed to the locker room at half time and all the guys went to their locker...except for Riegels.

He instead went to the corner, sat down with a towel over his head and wept like a baby.

The head coach, Coach Price, talked with the team about the second half adjustments and when one of the assistant coaches came in and told him that they had only 3 minutes before the second half started, Coach Price told the team, he said, *“Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second.”*

That meant that Riegels was going to not only play, but he was going to start the second half.

Well, the players all got up and ran out of the locker room...but Riegels just sat there.

Coach Price went over to him and said, *“Riegels I need you to go back out on that field.”*

But Riegels looked up at him with his face all red from weeping...

And he told Coach Price, he said, *“Coach, there’s no way I can go back out there. I’ve embarrassed myself, my family...I’ve let down you and this team, the university...”*

“There’s no way I can show my face to that crowd...”

Coach Price put his hand on Riegel’s shoulder and said, *“Roy, I need you to get up and go back out there...the game is only half over.”*

And with that Riegels got up and ran back out onto the field...

And those Tech men will tell you that they have never seen a man play football as hard as Roy Riegels played that second half. ¹

(Long Pause)

Truth is, we all fall...

We all fail.

All God's sheep have a tendency to wander.

But praise God, for those who have trusted in Christ, where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.

Some of you need to receive that forgiveness today...

You need to be restored...

I can't give it to you, only the Lord can.

So let's approach his throne of grace now.

Let's pray...

¹ Markes, Travis. "Returning to God" Book of Jonah: A God of Second Chances, 2009

OUTLINE

- The Confrontation (v. 15a, 16a, 17a)

Because the Lord is a loving heavenly father
he refuses to let us live comfortably in sin.

QUESTION: Is there anything or anyone in my life
that I've sought to love more than Jesus?

- The Confession (v. 15b, 16b, 17b)

Four Greek words translated "love":

1. Eros—"romantic love"
2. Storge—"family love"
3. Phileo—"brotherly love"
4. Agape—"unconditional, supreme love"

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you agape me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I phileo you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you agape me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I phileo you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you phileo 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 phileo you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

The Lord desires to meet us in our brokenness.

- The Commission (v. 15c, 16c, 17c)

Your failure doesn't have to be final.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Markes, Travis. "Returning to God" Book of Jonah: A God of Second Chances, 2009