

Life in His Name – Part 51
Restoration of a Fallen Friend - John 21:1-17
Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – March 17th, 2024

Intro:

- As I mentioned last week, the last chapter of the Gospel of John is like an epilogue in a book or a post-credit scene in a movie. For all intents and purposes, John has accomplished his goal in telling us about Jesus so that by the evidence, we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing in Him (by the way, believing is an ongoing action) we may have Life in His name (John 20:31).
- However, John wants to deal with one more topic: what if you have believed and then failed, stumbled, and fallen in following and living for Christ? How does Jesus respond to people like that, people like us perhaps at times or for a season? With his pastoral heart and being prompted by the Holy Spirit, John tells us the story of how Jesus restores Peter, who guides us in our restoration and helps us restore others. In this passage, we see the wisdom and knowledge of Christ as He beautifully and profoundly ministers to a fallen friend. Jesus fulfilled what was prophesied in Isaiah 42:3: “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (also recorded in Matt. 12:20 as applied to Jesus).
- I am framing this passage around what Jesus knows and how this knowledge informs His ministry to those who have been wounded because of their fallen nature.

Jesus knows where you are

John 21:1-3 NIV

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

- We don’t know exactly when this event happened. It was sometime after His second appearance to the disciples, a week after His resurrection (John 20:26-29) and before His ascension to the Father. It had to be days, if not weeks, after the last visitation because the disciples had traveled from Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee and returned to their somewhat normal lives, needing to provide for themselves and their families.
- How did Jesus find them? It's not like there were cell phones or GPS trackers. The Sea of Galilee is a big lake; they could have been anywhere in a town, along the seashore, or even in a boat, somewhere out in the lake among dozens and hundreds of boats. Even finding them was a miracle, and Jesus did it in the dark of night.
- This tells us that Jesus knows exactly where you are because He is God. Not only does He know where you are physically, but emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and relationally as well. The God who can call all the stars in the sky by name and knows the number of the very hairs on your head knows everything about you. There is nothing that you can tell Him that He does not know already. What He knows, He knows perfectly and truly. When He asks you a question, it is not for His knowledge but for yours. And when He speaks to us, He knows exactly what to say given what He knows.

- Jesus understands you. He knows where you are. He knows how you think, your emotional state, and where you are with Him. And He loves you and draws close to you, calling you by name, even those who have stumbled, failed and faltered. He says, “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28-29).
- Not only does He know where you are, but He also knows how to get your attention.

Jesus knows how to get your attention

John 21:4-6 NIV

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. 6 He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

- Jesus knows the perfect timing to reach you and speak into your life and into your situation. His timing is always right, and the waiting, the wondering, and sometimes the wandering are all used to develop our understanding and shape our soul into His image. He sets up the circumstances perfectly to accomplish and communicate His goodness and good plan.
- In this case with these seven fishing disciples, He caused the fish in the sea to avoid them and then, at His word, a large number of fish gathered beside them at the right side of the boat so they would be caught. As Jesus set up the circumstances in the lives of the disciples, He does the same in ours, for His purposes according to our needs. Will you continue to trust Him as you wait and as you go about your everyday lives? Know that He has not forgotten you and is working out His plans, even in the mundane, and even through our sorrows and separations.
- Now, this whole setup contains several layers of meaning; however, the most important and main point is that Jesus recreated the exact scenario when He first called Peter, James, and John (the sons of Zebedee) and some of the other disciples to follow Him. Luke 5:1-11 records their first interaction with Jesus. They had fished all night and had caught nothing, and then after Jesus stepped into Simon Peter's boat and taught, Jesus told them to “let down your nets for a catch,” which they did and caught “a large number of fish.” John was the first to put the pieces together, which leads to our last point: Jesus knows how to restore the fallen.

Jesus knows how to restore the fallen

John 21:7-8 NIV

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.

- *Jesus knows how to restore the fallen by renewing their calling.* In recreating their first calling, Jesus was not only re-identifying Himself, but He was also communicating that He had a calling on their lives, including Peter. People often think the Lord is done with them if they slip up or fail and they have lost it all. The truth is, “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). Now, the outworking of these gifts and calling may change because of a failing, and dependent upon the circumstances, there will be some consequences, but the gifts and the calling will not be revoked. Peter needed to hear this. People who have fallen need to hear this. You need to hear this.

- What also is strikingly beautiful about these two accounts of the miraculous catch of fish, is what is different about the two. In Peter's first contact with Jesus, after hearing one teaching and then experiencing this miracle, Peter responded by saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). But this time was different because Peter knew Jesus. He had walked with Him for years. Peter knew His thoughts and he knew His heart. When he understood that it was Jesus, Peter could not wait even a second to draw near to Him. And I am telling you, if you truly know the heart of Jesus, in your failings you will run or swim to Him as fast as you can, instead of hiding in shame or drifting away.
- Jesus was not done in this restoration process. After recreating one scene to renew Peter's calling, Jesus recreated another scene to repair Peter's wounds.

John 21:9 NIV

When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

- *Jesus knows how to restore the fallen by repairing their wounds.* This "charcoal fire" should remind you of another "charcoal fire." That is why John highlights the detail of the same fire using the exact same words to describe both. This restoration scene was a recreation of the scene of Peter's greatest failure, where Peter denied even knowing Jesus (after declaring he would never do so) around another fire at the first light of dawn after he had been up all night and he was cold, right before the rooster crowed.
- Instead of a reprimand or a condemnation, at the place where Peter distanced himself from Jesus, Jesus invited Peter in, in close to fellowship with Him over a meal.

John 21:10-14 NIV

Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." 11 So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

- What Peter especially needed to hear from Jesus, along with the other disciples who had deserted Him, was not only do I forgive you, but I want to be close with you and fully restore our relationship. I want us to be in close fellowship again. This is deep healing of the shame and guilt of our failings. Not only does Jesus forgive us, but He also wants to be close to us because He both likes and loves us. I imagine this washed over them all, like a cleansing stream and a soothing balm.
- This scene and this gesture were so profound and meaningful that the early church adopted the symbol of Christianity as the fish, not the cross, as signifying that they were in fellowship with the risen Christ. Many of the earliest Christian tombs have a fish inscribed, and some have both the fish and the bread.
- After this meal, Jesus had one final thing to do to restore Peter, and that was to reestablish his purpose.

John 21:15-17 NIV

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” 16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” 17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

- *Jesus knows how to restore the fallen by reestablishing their purpose.* Jesus then gave Peter the opportunity for redemption. As they were gathered around this second fire, like the fire of his fall, Jesus asked Peter three questions, one for each of his denials. All three were asking Peter if he loved Jesus, because love for Jesus is the only thing that will reestablish our purpose and bring us to full health.
- The first question about Peter’s love for Jesus was a quantitative question, “do you love me more than these?” There has been speculation as to what “these” referred to.
 - Some consider Jesus was referring to the fish, the boat, and his love for fishing. I think this is highly unlikely because they were gathered together around a fire with the disciples, not walking among the fishing gear and the fish.
 - Another thought is that Jesus was saying, do you love me more than these disciples love me? How was Peter able to know how much the other disciples loved Jesus in comparison to how much he loved Jesus? I also think this is highly unlikely.
 - The third option is, “do you love me more than you love these other disciples?” I think this is most likely because Peter would be the best judge of his own heart when comparing who he loved the most. Second, because Jesus taught that if we do not love Him more than any other person, including parents and children, we are not worthy of Him (Matt. 10:37). Third, if our love for Jesus is not greater than our fear of people, we will fall into a trap (Pr. 29:25). Peter’s love for Jesus must be greater than his love for anyone else. By stating this, Peter would have the strength to stand for and alongside Jesus. And because Peter loved Jesus more than any other, Peter then, out of the overflow of this love, could do what Jesus asked him to do: take care of those whom Jesus loved, to “feed my sheep.” Peter was to feed them spiritually with the word of God.
 - So Peter replied to Jesus, “Lord, you know that I love you.”
- Jesus asked Peter the same question another time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter answered similarly, and then Jesus responded a little differently, saying, “Take care of my sheep.” Meaning Peter, not only do I want you to feed my sheep out of your love for me, but I also want you to take care of them. Shepherd my sheep. Know that they are mine, Peter, not yours (this is a good reminder for every pastoral shepherd), and make sure that you watch over them, ensuring they are okay and that they are not getting in trouble or getting lost. Help them keep moving forward. Help them be healthy and overcome obstacles. Take care of them and love them because you love Me. Peter, I am recommissioning you to the work I have gifted you for and called you to do.
- Then Jesus, one last time, asked Peter the same question. “Simon, son of John, do you love me.” This time, Peter was hurt by the question, probably because with this third question, Peter was thinking, “Does He not trust that I was telling the truth?” So Peter then concluded, not only do you know me, but you know everything. With this admission, Peter then would not question the knowledge and wisdom of the Lord. He would be sure to follow His plan because not only did Jesus know him, but He knew everything, and with this all-encompassing knowledge, He would know the best thing for Peter to do. So Jesus then said again, “Feed My

sheep.” Jesus was telling Peter this is what I am asking and telling you to do. This is the most important thing; focus on this because of your love for Me.

- This, again, is powerful and profound. Jesus was telling Peter that his love for Jesus would keep him from falling, and that his love for Jesus would keep him from failing to do what Jesus asked Him to do. It also tells us that the main activity for spiritual shepherds is to give to the people what they really need—the Word of God—and how important it is for all of us, His sheep, to feed on His Word.

Conclusion

- Jesus knows where you are and how to get your attention. He knows how to restore anyone who has failed and anyone who has fallen. Your gifts and your calling are irrevocable. Jesus is inviting you back into fellowship with Him. He is asking you if you love Him, and then out of that love, to return to what He has created you to do.
- After communion, where we will all have the opportunity to renew our faith, I am going to ask you, after the benediction, to come forward in response to this message.
- Prayer **and transition to communion.**

Communion

Benediction

May God grant you the strength to get up again after falling (Pr. 24:16), and may you know His power is made perfect in your weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

Questions for Growth Groups

- What did you learn about the heart of Jesus from this passage?
- What did you learn about Jesus' methods from this passage?
- Have you seen Jesus work in your life in these ways?
- Are you currently in need of restoration to your purpose and calling? If so, let the group know and have them pray for you.