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JOHN 21:1-25

Today, we finish our study in the *Gospel of John*. I hope you've been blessed by this great old book. The *Gospel of John* is a treasure of proofs that the Lord Jesus Christ is exactly who He claimed to be.

Several weeks ago at the monthly prayer luncheon at the seminary, several professors were sharing stories about the seminary...just things that had happened to them over the years.

One missionary shared the story of the time when, years ago, he had been teaching some classes for Dr. Charlie Culpepper. Dr. Culpepper had been a missionary in China and had come back to the States and was serving at Mid-America.

Dr. Culpepper had been ill and the missionary was a young professor at the time and he had taken his classes over. Well, the last day of classes for the semester, Dr. Culpepper came to class. He said, "Oh, Dr. Culpepper, you didn't need to come to class today."

And Dr. Culpepper said, "Well, son, this **is** the last day of classes, isn't it? And he said, "Yes...it is."
Dr. Culpepper said, "Well, I was wondering what the boys have learned." He said he started picking up papers and said, "Well, Dr. Culpepper, I've taught them straight from your notes."

Dr. Culpepper said, "Son, I'm not worried about that. I'm just wondering if they've learned to walk closer to Jesus today than when they first came in this class."

And that's what I'm wondering and hoping for. Are we walking closer with Jesus now than when we began our study in this Gospel six months ago? I truly hope so!!! I hope I am and I hope you are!!!

With that in mind...let's look at

John 21:1-3...

Notice that there are only seven disciples present. We don't know where the other four are. **Matthew** tells us that Jesus had told the disciples to meet Him in Galilee. Maybe the others just hadn't arrived yet.

I think it's interesting that the first two mentioned in **verse 1** are Peter and Thomas...the one who **denied** and the one who **doubted**. This tells me that the church is made up of those who have failed and failed miserably...just normal people!

Not only is the church **made up** of folks who have failed...the Lord is able to restore them and use them mightily...and we'll see more of that shortly.

The first thing that catches our eye in this passage is that Peter said, "**I am going fishing.**" This verb "am going" is in the present tense which means "I am going fishing and I will keep on fishing."

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It carries with it the idea of **“changing direction...of stopping one activity and beginning another.”**

Peter apparently decided the need to be the disciple of Jesus had ended at Calvary.

We've said this before, but I believe it needs to be repeated...

Salvation does not nullify or override our personalities.

Peter had always been impulsive and impetuous and he probably always would be to some extent.

We need to remember also that this is coming on the heels of Peter's great failure. He must have been so disappointed and so discouraged by all the events that had just taken place. He probably thought he could be of no use to Jesus anymore.

Can you imagine the disappointment Peter felt in himself?

Granted, Peter knew by this time that Jesus had risen from the grave...but apparently Peter didn't know that Jesus **still** had plans for **him!**

Peter must have felt like an outcast and a flop. I don't believe any of us would have felt any differently

As we study this chapter, I want us to see several pictures and principles of the Christian life. **Notice, too, that not only is Peter going fishing, but he's leading six others to do the same thing!**

Jesus had told them to meet Him in Galilee...not to go fishing!

Jesus had been training these men **to preach the gospel...
to win souls for the kingdom of God...
to plant churches...**

If these men and the other four were to return to their original careers and desert their calling by Jesus to become fishers of men...God's work on earth would be stopped!

Satan had been unable to stop Jesus from going to the Cross...
Satan had been unable to keep Jesus in the tomb...

Salvation had been accomplished by the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ!

But, if there were to be no preaching of the good news of salvation, the plan of redemption for lost sinners would fail!

At least, that's what the devil *thought!*

Salvation and the spread of the gospel had been in the heart and mind of God before the foundation of the world! **No one or no thing** could stop it!

So, let's see step by step what Jesus did to meet this crisis and to bring Peter and the other disciples back to where they needed to be!

Verse 3... “they caught nothing...”

These men had fished all night and had caught nothing!

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Now, I'm not a fisherman...but I live with one and I've seen the frustration when he has gone fishing and not caught any fish.

Remember, these men were **professional fisherman!** They used very large nets!
But, they had been called **from** their fishing businesses!
They had been called **to** a higher calling!
Jesus said they would be fishers of men!

Did all this escape our Lord's attention? Of course not! **He knew where they were and He knew what they were doing!**

Verses 4-6...

I think it's interesting to remember that the children of Israel had to go back a second time into the wilderness to learn what God had wanted them to learn the first time they were there.

And we see Peter and the other disciples going back to where they started...back a second time to the sea to fish. Then Jesus came and taught them what He wanted them to learn the first time He called them from the their fishing boats.

What was God teaching His children in the wilderness? **TO TRUST HIM!**
What was Jesus teaching His disciples on the Sea of Galilee? **TO TRUST HIM!**

Wouldn't you like to have been there to see this scene played out?

Jesus called them "children"(KJV and NAS) "friends" (NIV) because of His love and care for them. And isn't this just like Jesus?

How often have you realized at your point of failure that Jesus was there all along...calling you His "friend" and His "child."

These men weren't looking for Jesus! That's why they didn't recognize Him!

Jesus asked them if they had any fish.

Jesus wants us to be aware of our emptiness before He gives us His abundance.

Jesus wants us to beware of our weakness before He gives us His strength.

So...Jesus told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. **What happened? What always happens when we do things His way?**

He fills our need...and He does it exceeding abundantly beyond what we can ask or think!

By the way...what if Jesus were to ask you and me if we have caught any fish? What could we say?

"No, Lord, because we've been walking according to **our own** plan?"
or "Yes, Lord, because we've been walking according to **Your** plan!"

Have you and I caught any fish for the Lord?

Let me just read you what Warren Wiersbe said in his little commentary on the **Gospel of John...**

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“A fisherman catches living fish, but when he gets them, they die.

A soul-winner seeks to catch “dead fish”...men who are dead in sin...and when he “catches” them they are made alive in Jesus Christ!”

Verses 7-8...

John recognized Jesus! **“It is the Lord...”**

We see Peter’s impulsiveness again, don’t we? But, oh what Jesus has waiting for Peter and the others!

Verses 9-14...

Did you notice that Jesus already had fish cooking when the disciples came in from fishing? I believe Jesus is trying to teach us a lesson...

The lesson here is that yes, Jesus wants His followers to “catch fish”...to win souls for Him...that’s exactly what He had commissioned these fellows to do.

But, Jesus is not restricted to the efforts of His servants.

Jesus can and does save souls apart from human instru-

ments... He saved Paul that way. **He simply met Paul**

going down the road and saved Him!

But, aren’t you glad He allows us to be a part of His kingdom’s work?

Then, we see Jesus telling the disciples to bring Him the fish they had just caught. This is a picture of the souls He enables His servants to gather in.

Won’t it be a precious thing to have souls in heaven that we have “caught” for Jesus? God has called each of us to personal evangelization.

But I believe every time we support a missionary or folks going on a short-term missions trip like the Jacksons have just led to El Salvador, every time we give our money or offer up our prayers, the Lord is allowing us to be a part of their effort!

Do you see the fact that Peter **single-handedly** hauled in this net...the same net that **all** the disciples couldn’t handle in **verse 6**?

We’re all weak when we follow Jesus from a distance, but when we are in His presence, His power enables us to do things we never dreamed we could do!

One more thing that I want us to see before we get these fish out of the net... **“the net was not torn”...verse 11**. Not one of the fish were lost! And not one of God’s saved ones will be either!

Jesus showed them that He would supply their needs and that He would have sweet fellowship with them. Notice the Savior of the world...cooking and serving!

How like our precious Lord to meet Peter’s physical needs before He dealt with His spiritual needs.

Verses 15-17...

The first thing I want us to see is that the Lord Jesus addressed Peter as “Simon.” Simon was his old name. Jesus had changed his name to Peter, which meant **“rock.”**

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Jesus was saying that He would turn Simon the weak into Peter the strong.

But, here Jesus goes back to the name “Simon” and I believe He did that to remind Peter from whence he came...to remind him that without Jesus he was weak.

As we've said many times before...the **New Testament** was written in Greek and Greek doesn't always translate into English with exactly the same intensity of meaning. Here, we have a perfect example of that.

There are actually four different Greek words translated into our English word love. One is **storge'**...and it means *a love between and among family members.*

Another is **eros**...and it means *a sexual, erotic love between man and woman.*

Another is **phileo**...and it means *a friendship kind of love...a fondness for another person...*(Philadelphia...the city of brotherly love.)

Another is **agapao or agape**...and it means *the highest form of love...not based on any condition.* It is the kind of love that God loves us with.

Of these four kinds of love, we see two in this passage. We see **agape** or **agapao** and we see **phileo**.

To get the effect of this exchange between the Lord and Peter, I'm going to give you an example that I saw this past week in James Montgomery Boice's commentary on the **Gospel of John**.

We're going to refer to **agape** love as “100% love” and **phileo** love as “60% love.”

Jesus initiated the conversation by asking Peter if he loved Him with the highest love possible. **“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me with a 100% love...more than these?”**

Now, the “more than these” could be interpreted several different ways...

- 1) Do you love Me more than you love these disciples?
- 2) Do you love Me more than you love these boats and fish and nets?
- 3) Do you love Me more than these disciples love Me?

I believe Jesus meant the latter. Remember, Peter had boasted that though all the **others** might forsake Him, **he** would never forsake Jesus.

I believe Jesus is asking Peter, “Peter, what do you have to say now?

You once boasted that your love for Me was 100% and that it was greater than the love these other disciples have for Me. **Is this true?** Do you **really** love Me that way?”

What does Peter say? He said, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love you with a 60% love.” What's happened to Peter? Well, he isn't **nearly** as sure of himself as before, is he?

He isn't saying that he doesn't love the Lord Jesus. But, he's not **boasting** of his love as he did before. He's not saying here that his love is greater than someone else's love.

He's simply saying that his heart is open to Christ. Peter is telling the Lord that he loves Him with the best love that he, a sinful human being, is capable of having.

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The second time the Lord asks His question of Peter He uses the same word for love again... **“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me with a 100% love?”** Peter replies as he did the first time, *“Yes Lord, You know that I love you with a 60% love.”*

The third time the question is asked the Lord comes down to Peter’s level and uses Peter’s word, **“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me with a 60% love?”**

This is as much as to say, **“All right, Peter, I know you are not capable of the kind of love I have for you and that you are right in saying that your love isn’t the 100% kind, but let me ask you...do you really love Me even on the level you say you do? Do you really love Me with a 60% love?”**

Peter answers the Lord, *“Lord, You know all things...You know that I love You.”* And what he said was, *“You know that I love You with a 60% love.”*

Do you know what is so wonderful about this story? Jesus didn’t say, **“Well, Peter, if that’s all you can muster up for Me, just forget it!”**

No, with each answer, Jesus said to Peter **“Feed My lambs”** or **“Shepherd My sheep”** or **“Tend My sheep.”**

It’s as though Jesus is saying, “Okay, Peter, I’ll work with your 60% love, because I am able to bring even that limited love up to the height I desire, the height with which you **must** love Me in order to endure the things I have called you to endure.”

Peter was grieved when the Lord Jesus switched from **agape** to **phileo** in **verse 17**. Peter knew he had said more in the past than he should have. He had boasted of things that he hadn’t been able to follow through with.

Do you see what Jesus was doing here?

Jesus knows our thoughts, even the very intentions of our hearts. And He knew exactly what was in Peter’s heart. But, Jesus knew that **Peter** must know what was in his own heart!

There was a time when Peter had declared that he would go to prison with Jesus...that he would be willing to die with Jesus...but Peter hadn’t done that. **Peter had failed miserably when put to the test.**

But, all that was in the past! Jesus had a plan for Peter’s life and **Peter** needed to know exactly how deep his commitment to Jesus really was!

Jesus had to minister, not only **forgiveness** to Peter, but also **restoration** to service!

I’m so glad Jesus didn’t say, **“Peter, why did you fail Me?”**

I’m so glad Jesus did say, **“Peter, do you love Me?”**

That’s all Jesus wants from any of His children. **He knows we’re going to fail Him.** But He also knows that if we love Him we will want to be restored and we will want to please Him and we will learn from the times we fail Him...and we will go on to serve Him better!

The last thing we need to note about the Lord’s questions to Peter is that He asked these questions three times! WHY? Well, how many times had Peter denied Jesus?

For Peter, almost every major lesson had to be repeated three times before he finally got the message.

Three times he denied the Lord.

Three times he was asked by Christ if he loved Him.

Three times he was commanded by Christ to feed His flock.

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Three times the sheet fell before Peter saw the significance in **Acts 10:9-16**.

The Lord Jesus wasn't being cruel to Peter. He wasn't intentionally humiliating Peter publicly. We need to remember that Peter's denials of the Lord Jesus had been public denials...and Jesus needed to publicly restore Peter!

Isn't God good to us? Peter had failed!
Peter was broken and repentant!
Peter was forgiven!
Peter was restored to service!

We pointed out a couple of weeks ago that Luke tells us that Jesus told Peter that Satan had desired to sift him as wheat, and that Jesus had granted Satan that permission...but, Jesus also told Peter that He had prayed for him...that when he had turned...when he been restored that he would strengthen the brethren!

And **Galatians** tells us that Peter was called by God to be the apostle to the Jews, just as Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

For Peter to have the authority he needed to be the leader God called him to be, then all the apostles must know he had been restored! So, Jesus restored him publicly!

**How precious to know that no matter how we have failed Jesus, He forgives and restores!
But we must have a repentant heart!**

Verses 18-23...

Jesus had restored Peter and had revealed to Peter that He expected him to be a **feeder** and **nourisher** and **tender** of His lambs and sheep.

Since Jesus had done all of that, now we see Him making Peter aware of the price of this kind of commitment.

Jesus doesn't want a half-hearted commitment from any of us. He wants us to be willing to present our bodies a living sacrifice. But, some of the children of God are called to do more than. Some are called to be martyrs for the faith. And the Lord was preparing Peter for this.

Tradition tells us that Peter was indeed crucified, but that he requested to be crucified upside down because he didn't believe he was worthy to be crucified right side up as His Savior.

If we had time, we would turn to **Acts** and read Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost when 3,000 souls were saved...

- we would read where Peter and John were arrested for preaching the gospel...
- we would read about Peter preaching to Annas and Caiaphas, the same men who condemned Jesus to death...
- we would see Peter healing the sick and even raising the dead!

Praise God! Peter rose to the occasion...no longer fearful of what others would do to him for his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ! Peter would no longer live under the guilt of his failure! And we don't have to either!

Verses 20-23...

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Was Peter's question about John a question showing his concern for John? **"Lord, I'm concerned about my friend, John...tell me what's going to happen to him?"**

Or was it a question wanting to know that if he would be called on to give his life...why wouldn't John as well? I don't know!

Whatever the reason for the question, Jesus answered Peter by saying in essence... **"That's not for you to know, Peter..."**

We're not to look at other believers and ask why they are having it one way and we're having it another!

John lived to a ripe old age. Peter did not...but that's God's business, not ours!

If I'm suffering and you're not or if you're suffering and I'm not...**God has permitted both and He does all things well, doesn't He?**

Verse 24...

John closes with the reaffirmation that he had been an eyewitness to all that he had written.

Verse 25...

Remember when the Queen of Sheba heard of the wealth of Solomon and came to see for herself? She said, **"...the half was not told me..."**

That's what John is saying here.

Don't you look forward to the day when we will get to heaven...

- and we will receive our perfect bodies...
- and we will know as we are known...
- and we will sit at the feet of our Lord and listen to Him
- and surely we'll say, *"Oh Lord, not even a fraction had been told to me..."*

Because the world could not contain the books!

How I pray that our walk with the Lord Jesus is closer and sweeter and more committed now than when we began our study of the **Gospel of John** six months ago.

Remember the key verse of this book that we saw last week. John said he had written these things that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in His name. My prayer is that we will share these things with someone else as we walk with the Lord.