

Restoration

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[0 : 0 0] So it would be really helpful if you had your Bibles open at John's Gospel in chapter 21.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these? This evening we're continuing in our studies in a short series called Disciples in the Dock and for the benefit of anyone who hasn't been here over the last few weeks, we've been looking at key questions that Jesus asked in the Gospels to his disciples.

For example, a few weeks ago we looked at Jesus' question concerning his identity from Mark's Gospel. But what about you? Who do you say that I am? And then a couple of weeks ago we looked at Jesus' question to his disciple concerning what they place their worth in from Luke's Gospel, for watch that prophet a man if he gained the whole world, yet forfeit his very self. And this evening we're turning our attention to another question, a question that gets right to the heart of the matter, namely the matter of the heart. And this question is, do you love me?

It's a question Jesus asked Peter after his dramatic failure. And our purpose at looking at these questions is to provoke some deep heart examination and some serious soul searching.

It's my hope that these studies will make sure that our lives are built and based upon the solid foundation of the Gospel. And that these studies will draw us and spur us on to love and know Jesus Christ better. As I begin, I want us to just pause for a moment. Think about Jesus' question as if he was here tonight and he was asking you it for the very first time. Do you love me?

[2 : 1 3] The question is not asking us whether or not we have a warm, gooey, floating feeling in our heart occasionally for Jesus. This question is not asking us, do we have a religious regard or a religious respect for Jesus? Now this question is asking us, do we have a deep heart level affection for Jesus Christ as he's revealed in the pages of scripture? Do we love the one who is the Son of God? Do we love the one who came into this world to seek and save broken men and women like you and me? Do we love this Jesus? And what makes this question all the more significant is that it's asked to a broken man who feels a failure and is a failure. In fact, this thought-provoking question finds itself tucked away in the middle of one of the most loved and the most moving passages in the entire Bible. And the reason this passage is so treasured by Christians is because in it we have a wonderful picture of the gospel in action when the risen Savior Jesus Christ restores the fallen failure Peter. This is the message of Christianity personified and embodied in Jesus himself. And so the title of our sermon this evening is Restoration. Restoration simply means to bring something back to its original condition as opposed we're more familiar with the word restoration in terms of old buildings being restored or towns been revitalized. Just last month a few of my friends and I went on a trip to Rosalind Chapel just outside of Edinburgh, many of you may have heard it. It's actually one of the most popular tourist attractions in

Scotland made popular because of Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code, his novel and then the film was set there. And for the last decade or so Rosalind Chapel has been covered in scaffolding. They've been carrying out some extensive restoration to the building, work on the roof, work on the stone, work on the carven's, work on the stained glass windows, work in the organ. But one of the joys I had last month of going to see it was that they'd removed the scaffolding and that they had managed to put the church back as well as they could to its original condition. What a joy it was to view this 15th century medieval chapel in the way it once looked. God willing it's my hope and prayer that tonight we will see what restoration looks like in a sinner. In a sinner who's been restored back beautifully to fellowship with Jesus Christ. Tonight I hope we'll see how Jesus restores Peter to the condition he was in before his denial. Now whether you're a follower of Jesus or not, it is my hope and prayer that this story will communicate to you the extravagant grace and goodness that is an offer in Jesus Christ for people who fail him and for people who are broken.

And tonight I'd like us to take our time together to just journey with Peter, to walk by Peter's side, to sit with Peter as he sat that morning at the breakfast, to see and to listen as Jesus restores him lovingly and graciously. I want to do this by looking at this question in three simple parts. First we're going to look at the circumstances in which this question arises.

And then secondly we'll look at the question itself and then finally we'll look at Peter's answer and Jesus' response. So let's begin with looking at the circumstances in which this question arises to appreciate the weightiness of Jesus' question. Let's stand back and let's appreciate the wider context. Let's go back to that night before Jesus' death. That night in the upper room when Jesus ate with the disciples what we now call the Lord's Supper. And I wonder do you remember that when they were having that conversation that night over that meal, Jesus informed his disciples that this very night all of you will abandon me, betray me and deny me.

And as they're sitting there Peter in his usual fashion just impetuous, just bold, he declares Jesus, even if all of these guys deny you, I will never disown you. And Jesus looks up straight back and says Peter I tell you the truth, this very night you will deny me three times and the cock will crawl. And still Peter can't keep his mouth shut and he says but Jesus even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. I think there's a temptation as we read this that we could perhaps want to take the higher, the spiritual higher ground and to look down on Peter and to judge him. But I think if we're honest with ourselves how often have we too made bold, empty claims to Jesus? How many of us would recognize a bit of Peter in ourselves? And then earlier on Katie read this from that sad account of Peter's denial in John 18. And perhaps you were able to picture as she was reading in your mind's eye that dramatic denial as Peter stood in that mingling with those people in the high priest's courtyard and how the servant girl had a conversation with them and he said I am not a disciple. And next the palace guards had a conversation with them, I am not a disciple. And thirdly and finally he denied him again.

[8 : 48] Isn't Peter in so many different ways a reflection of who we are? Because so often we too are a shame to speak of our Saviour. We're often and not as often to people who won't hurt us, people who hold no threat against us like a servant girl. Yet we like Peter still can find it in ourselves, not to identify with Jesus Christ that risen Saviour. So that's the wider context of the question. That's the backdrop that comes behind it. But let's now pick up the story as it's found in John chapter 21. Let's sketch just very briefly the immediate circumstances to this question. John 21 verse 1 begins with these disciples standing on the shores of Galilee.

Peter and six other of the disciples and the reason they're here is because we know from Matthew's Gospel Jesus told the women in the morning of the resurrection go tell the disciples to go to Galilee and wait for me and I'll see them there. And so they're standing mingling around on the shores of Galilee and Peter again in his impatient nature says I'm going fishing.

And all the disciples join with them and say okay we'll go with you. And it's hard to know that Peter here is he going back to his old life? Is he going back to his old ways? What he knows best? I was Peter here just making most of the time that he has. And then this scene continues there out in the boat and they're out all night long and they catch nothing.

Can you imagine what it feel like to be an experienced fitgerman going back to what you think you know best and not catching a thing? And then John informs us that early that morning an unknown figure appeared on the shore and the unknown figure cries out hey guys have you got any fish? And back comes the answer no. And he says so put your nets on the other side. And it must have at that moment been like deja vu because back in Luke five when these disciples were first called is that not what happened? That they were out fishing and there was an unexpected unknown figure on the shore and he told them to put their nets on the other side and they did. And as they put their nets on the other side they take in this huge haul. And it's so funny because John turns to Peter at that moment and he said it is the Lord. And Peter in his impulse of fashion again grabs his clothes flings him on jumps in the water and swims to shore. And I find myself asking the question why does Peter do that? Why is that his reaction? And it's most likely because he was struggling and wrestling with the guilt and he was desperate to have his relationship with Jesus restored.

And so Peter arrives on the shore and John tells us a very significant point and I think we can often read over it. It's in verse nine. That when the disciples and when Peter arrived on the shore they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it. Can you imagine what was going through Peter's head at that moment when he looked up and saw fire of burning coals? Did you pick up when Carrie was reading that Peter stood next to a fire of burning coals warming himself and that night he

denied Jesus. I must have brought all those memories flooding back. The guilt, the shame of denying Jesus Christ. And at that moment Peter turns round and Jesus says bring some of the fish that you've caught. We're told in verse 11 that Simon Peter single-handedly climbed a board and dragged the net ashore. And I just love that because it gives me an insight into what I can imagine Peter to be like. I can imagine Peter is this strong muscular man with big fisherman's hands. A man who's able to take ashore 153 fish. It reminds us that he was a real man. He's human just like you and me and I think so often when reading the gospels we miss out on that. And so he drags his net ashore and then he hears those loving warm words. Come and have breakfast with me.

[13 : 43] And would it reassurance that must have been to Peter? Come and sit with me. And we're told that they sat down together and they had fish and bread. It's funny because it says also in verse 12 that none of the disciples dared to ask who it was because they knew it was Jesus. And some of the commentators suggest that as they sat having breakfast that early that morning, the breakfast they had was in silence. And so if I could just imagine what it was like for Peter he probably sat there silent. Sat with his head bowed, thinking about the guilt and the shame of his sin. And so that's the immediate context in which this question arises. Let's now look at this question. Let's now join this scene as it is in verse, the story as it is in verse 15 when it says when they had finished eating.

I want to note something that's quite helpful to picture it as you picture this story. Verse 19 tells us that Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved was falling down.

It's this idea that after they had their breakfast they actually got up and went a walk. And so the image is that when Jesus has this conversation with Peter he's actually walking along with him. And it's quite customary in that society that when you were with your rabbi and your teacher that you would go and walk with him. And he would perhaps be teaching one personal lesson and all the others would stand behind falling, listening in, listening and learning. And so we have this picture of Jesus and John walking along the shores of Galilee. And in this special conversation out of the mouth of Jesus come solemn words, heart wrenching words. Simon Peter, do you love me more than these? Can you imagine the pain, the hurt, the guilt, the shame that must have welled up in Peter's heart at that moment? I want us to know a few things about this question that Jesus asks. First notice that Jesus asks the question himself. So it was struck to you that Jesus asked the question and not Peter. So often when we fall out with a friend or fall out with somebody we often find ourselves saying to the person that we've let down asking them for reassurance that do you still love me? Do you still like me? Are we still friends? But in this case, Peter is not asking Jesus a question. Jesus is asking Peter the question, Peter, do you still love me? I think the reason is because Peter knew that Jesus loved him. The man who had just laid down his life, Peter knew that he never had to question his love. So that's the first thing I want us to notice about this question, that Jesus asks it, do you love me? Also notice that the restoration is not hurried. It takes place as they walk together. And Jesus very slowly, very carefully and very deliberately asks the question. He begins with Simon, son of John. That was the old name for Peter. Peter's new name was Peter which means rock, but he had failed to live up to his name and so Jesus addresses him with his old name.

The name he had before he had been called to be a disciple, Simon, son of John. It probably started to bring into Peter's imagination those feelings of what it was like before he was a Christian. It was like Jesus was saying, you went back to your old ways. And it also strikes me that in calling him Simon, son of John, Jesus is reminding Peter that he knows him so well. It's like he's saying, Peter, I know who you are. I know everything about you. In fact, I know you better than you know yourself. That's the same with Jesus and us. He knows us tonight. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? Very carefully, very deliberate, more than these. Now the question is, what is the more than these? Is it the fishing tackle? Is it the fishing boats that are lying around? Simon, Peter, do you love me more than your old life? Or is it Simon Peter, do you love me more than these disciples? Do you have a greater love for me more than these disciples? I'm inclined to agree with that one because that's after all what Peter had claimed. He claimed in that night at the Lord's Supper, even if all of them deny you, Jesus, I will never disown you. And so it's more like Jesus saying, do you love me? Is your love really greater than these other disciples? And just as a side, we should never estimate ourselves better than we actually are. What a humbling and painful moment it must have been for Peter to hear those words, do you really love me more than these guys love me? He was reminding Peter

that he had no stability. What he claimed was foolish and stupid. That's question must have torn his heart. I think that's why Peter doesn't respond to the part of the question and Peter's answer, he just says back, yes

Lord, you know that I love you. He doesn't say, yes Lord, you know that I love you more than these guys. He just answers, yes Lord, you know that I love you. And then a second time this question comes in verse 16, Simon, son of John, do you truly love me? Try and feel the intensity of the moment. Imagine what it would have been like to be asked this question a second time. Remember Peter's a man who's broken. I imagine him walking at the side of Jesus with a tear stained face, wracked with guilt. And here comes this question again, do you love me? There may be some of us here tonight who feel like we've blown it. There may be some of us here tonight who are wracked with shame and guilt because of sin in our life. This passage before us tonight is for you because it's a passage that displays the restoration that is available in Jesus Christ. If you're willing to admit your failing, if you're willing to confess your sin, then you can be forgiven. You can be restored.

[21 : 46] You see one of the things that really comes to light in this special conversation between Jesus and Peter is that Jesus is willing to accept Peter where he's at. Jesus knew that Peter was a broken man. He knew what was going on inside of him. And he also knows where you're at and where I am at. And yet in asking us do you love me, he's giving us the opportunity to be restored back to fellowship with him. And then a third time, verse 17, Simon's son of John, do you love me? And John notes that Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him this question a third time and Peter responds, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. I think the reason why the third time was so painful for Peter and John records it is because it definitely would have brought back the memory of his threefold denial. And so when Jesus asked him a third time, it would force him to remember the incredible way of his sin. But isn't it beautiful? Isn't it amazing that when Jesus requires repentance and confession from us, in this passage he requires it in the form of an answer? You see repentance and restoration is always a painful process of getting back to where you started with Jesus. But when the Lord restores us, he wouldn't do it in any other way. We wouldn't want it in any other way, would we? We don't want cheap grace. We don't want a quick fix. We want to know that we love Jesus and that he still loves us. So with the minutes that we have left, let's just look briefly at the answer that Peter gives and the response that Jesus gives to Peter's answer. Each time Jesus asks this question,

Peter responds with the same answer. Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Here is restoration and operation because in each answer Peter displays that even though he failed Jesus, even though he denied Jesus, he still loved Jesus. And so often when we fail Jesus, we can be tempted to deny our love for him. There's a great story told by Charles Haddon Spurgeon in a bygone era of a poor bedridden woman who was under a grievous cloud. And one day when a minister was visiting this woman, she said to the minister, Sir, I do not think I have any love for Jesus. And the minister knew better for he knew what her life had been.

So walking up to the window, he took a pencil and a piece of paper. And he wrote in this piece of paper, I do not love the Lord Jesus Christ. And he brought it back to the woman and said, now sign that. When she read it, she said, Oh, sir, I would be torn to pieces before I would sign that. The minister responds, Oh, but you just said it just now. Ask sir, but I can't put my hand to that. And then the minister responded. Then I suspect that you do love him. That story illustrates perhaps what we feel like when we have sinned and felt guilty. Our faith, our love, perhaps is just this gooey feeling and it just goes.

That's not what Jesus wants. He wants true, deep, heart level affection. Something that says if we were asked to sign a name on that piece of paper, I do not love the Lord Jesus Christ. Would we? Could we? And notice what Jesus's response is to each of Peter's answers.

Yes, Lord, I know that. Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Each time Jesus responds with a statement, feed my lambs, tend my sheep. In other words, he's saying, Peter, not only am I restoring you back to fellowship with me, back to what you were once like before the denial. I'm also going to restore you to service with me. In other words, I want you to be an under shepherd of the flock. I want you to tend my sheep. That is, I want you to care for them, nourish them and nurture them. I want you to feed my flock. I want you to feed my people with the word. Isn't it interesting who Jesus uses in service for him? One of the great lessons we can learn from this is that Jesus wants to use broken people who have been restored. Jesus can't use proud people, people who are oblivious to their sin, people who won't recognize their sin, but Jesus delights to use broken

people to minister to other broken people. If Simon Peter is going to be effective in restoring others, then he'll need to appreciate the lesson that he is learning in this experience of being restored. How freely and how greatly you can speak of the grace of Christ when you have known its power at work in your life. What I love about this story is that Jesus never comes with a heavy hand to Peter, but he comes with that tender hand as they walk along the shore. Do you love me? Yes, Lord, you know that I love you and feed my sheep.

[28 : 17] Peter was broken. Peter was filled with guilt. Yet the Lord came to him and walked with him. As Neal said this morning from Isaiah 42, the servant of the Lord doesn't break the bruise bead. The servant of the Lord doesn't snuff out the smoldering smoke. No, he deals with us graciously and lovingly. Like a shepherd, he picks us up. He carries us close to his heart. Peter's denial was great, but Jesus' forgiveness is greater for those who are willing to confess their sin. And as I close, let me ask this question one last time, but put your name into it. Andrew, do you love me? Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we come before your throne as broken people who delight to know the grace that is in offer to us in Jesus Christ. Father, we thank you for this great story. There is just a perfect picture of the gospel in action. We thank you that you remind us that you love us. We thank you that in this passage we are reminded that when you deal with us, you do so, so tenderly and so graciously. We thank you that you love and delight to restore us, to fellowship with you, and also to service with you. We pray, Father, that as broken people who know and experience your grace, that we would go forth even from this place tonight to share afresh the wonder of your love to a broken and sensual world. Father, we praise you for your son Jesus Christ, who walked with his people, who loved them, and who didn't ever break them or snuff them out. Father, we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.