

Renewal in 2015

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Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 0 0] Well, many of you have probably begun already a couple of weeks ago the time of reflection on your past year. That's what we do at this time of year.

We reflect on the previous year and think about how it went and think about what the new year will look like and we make petitions and requests and all these things to try to make life better in the upcoming year.

Some of you had a great year, you had babies, you got married, you got a job, you graduated, you prayed every day, you read your Bible consistently for the first time in your life, all sorts of things.

And some of you look back to 2014 and you see a year of mundanity. So another year where I didn't get very much done, I didn't do what I wanted, I failed a lot or it's a year of complete and utter failure or tragedy for some death, disease.

If you've kept up with the news at all or any of the blogs, you know that most people are calling 2014 a year of crisis and suffering.

[1 : 1 1] Just listen to this laundry list of what went on if you've forgotten in 2014. Russia annexes Crimea and threatens the Ukraine, ISIS declared an Islamic state and gained its ground by a modern crusade of brutality, Ebola struck down thousands in West Africa, Michael Brown was shot dead and two police officers were just executed for it.

The relationship in the US between the police and those it's meant to protect is wavering, Malaysian airline flight 360 is still missing.

Mass shootings were at their peak this year in all of history, 278 mass shootings, the last of which was 132 children murdered by the Taliban in Pakistan.

It was a year of crisis. And what we have to do is we have to look back at 2014, we think of the joys, we think of the suffering, we think of the crisis and we have to make sense of it.

And if you're not a Christian today, if you're a person that's still thinking through Christianity, wavering through whether or not this stuff is true, one thing I'll challenge you to do today is make sense of the fact that your conscience tells you by some natural law that you can't explain that that laundry list is bad.

[2 : 4 0] It's bad, right? And you've got to make sense of that. You've got to provide a ground for that reality. And if you are a Christian today, we look at that and say, when are things going to get better?

When is Jesus going to come and make this place new? And that's what we read about in Revelation 21. It's a passage that looks into the future and sees a new heaven and a new earth, a place without tears, without suffering, a place where there are no more 2014's and there are no more September 11's.

And John 21, I'm going to argue this morning, is a small microcosm in Peter's life of what happens in Revelation 21, a new heaven and a new earth.

And so my point today is this. In 2015 offers us as Christians an opportunity to be vehicles of renewal, a renewal that God has started from the very time Adam and Eve sinned and that God will finish in Revelation 21, but that now we are called in 2015 to be the actors and actresses in God's divine drama of redemption.

That's what this reality is. It's God's divine drama of redemption. And this is what we're being called to. So whatever 2014 was like for you, a big failure, mundanity, absolute joy.

[4 : 09] In 2015, we have an opportunity to fulfill God's commission for our lives and that's to be vehicles of rebirth, renewal and restoration.

To participate in what God's doing and making all things like the springtime again. And so this morning what we're going to ask is what's the nature of this renewal that God is doing for us and how do we think about it in this new year.

And then in some ways this is today is a kind of one series. So this evening we're going to look at that on a corporate level in regard to the church.

This morning we're going to look at it in regard to on a personal level. You as an individual, me as an individual. So let's begin. What is the nature of this renewal that God is offering us today?

The need for renewal, we talk about renewal, restoration, rebirth, all these re-type words. It implies that something is not the way it ought to be, right?

[5 : 14] That's the presupposition to ideas like John 21 or Revelation 21 that something is not the way it should be. Something's broken. It's not what it once was.

Emma Larkin, if any of you are familiar with her, she's an American journalist. Actually that's a pseudonym. I don't know who she actually is. She's an American journalist that has really followed the country of Burma very closely for the past couple decades.

And she wrote a book called, in 2008, called Everything is Broken, A Tale of Catastrophe in Burma. And it chronicles the story of a May 2008 cyclone called Nargis.

And I'm betting that almost no one in here has heard of it, and I hadn't either. She writes in it about a Burmese girl, a little seven-year-old Burmese girl named A.U.

Pong. And she titles the chapter The Plight of the Daffodil, because the Daffodil is our word for Nargis. It's a flower in Burma.

[6 : 22] Nargis was a cyclone that had 145 mile per hour winds. It came ashore as a category four. And here's the statistics. Katrina, Hurricane Katrina, killed 148,000 people in the South, Southern United States.

The atomic bomb in Japan killed about 70,000. Nargis killed 360,000-plus. About 1.5 million were made homeless in 24 hours.

And it's estimated that the government just stopped counting death toll when they got to 130,000. But probably the greatest evil about this cyclone was that we never heard of it.

We never heard a word about it. Listen to what Emma Larkin writes about what went on during this time. She describes rows of bodies spread across the paddy fields, disease running through the countryside, ships laden with food turned back.

Airplanes with medicine disallowed to land. The official newspaper published zero pictures of the disaster. The national statistics reported none of the deaths from the storm.

[7 : 32] But on the front page the next day, the newspaper reported the total number of chickens lost to disease the previous year.

The propaganda was a fiction of a land in control, leadership steady in guiding its country through a mere thunderstorm. One survivor said that the dead were the lucky ones because we are now living in hell itself.

And she describes in more detail this little girl, a seven-year-old girl named A.P. Ong, who was found at the top of a coconut tree. She had watched her family swept away by the waters.

And a rescue boat finally came for her after three days. And she was in the top of this coconut tree and the rescue boat was beckoning her. Come down. We're here to save you.

And she refused. Why? She refused because she was ashamed. She was like Eve in the Garden of Eden hiding herself.

[8 : 30] Why? Because she was naked. Her clothes had been ripped off. And she refused to come down from the tree and expose herself to strangers.

Her only source of survival was this boat. And there's this unbelievable complex strand of horror in this scene, isn't there?

Not only do you get this picture of this awful natural disaster that kills 400,000 people in a day on one level, but you also get a totalitarian regime that doesn't even report it and won't allow help from the outside.

But then maybe probably the worst of all is that this picture, this very personal picture of this little girl who's naked and ashamed. You see, it's the fact that she knows it's not simply that I'm a victim of natural disaster.

It's that there's something wrong with me. I'm a sinner. She knows that she's naked and ashamed because something is not right with who she is.

[9 : 35] And so this illustration, this story gives us these three strands, these three pictures of what's wrong, why God is on this project of renewal and redemption.

One is the natural. There's something not right about this world we live in, right? Romans 8 talks about how it groans in pains of childbirth.

We see it. People die from disease and disaster too much. And then the second level we see there is the ethical. There's an ethical problem, a moral problem.

The totalitarian regime is not acting the way it ought. There's an ethical issue here. And then the third one is the spiritual.

That we have a spiritual problem. Those two problems may be outside of us, but there's something wrong within us. We are sinners.

[10 : 30] We are separated from God and people. And so you see these three strands. What John 21 is about is that Jesus came to take care of all three of those things.

Jesus didn't come simply to pluck us out of this world and to say, oh, heaven's way over there and it's so much better and I'm taking you out of this world and getting rid of all this mess.

Now, he came not only to restore us as people who are spiritually broken, but he also came to restore this earth that we live in now, which is broken.

We were never meant to be apart from it. We were never meant for any of that. This is our home and God is on a project of renewal and restoration and reversal that begins with the heart of the individual and it ends with no more natural disasters, no more tears and no more pain on this new earth that he's coming to restore.

All right, so let's take a close look at John 21 for a few minutes and we're just going to walk through it and I'm going to point out some things. The first thing is this. Christ knows at a personal level our need for rebirth and renewal.

[11 : 50] He knows your need for rebirth and renewal in 2015 at a personal level. The situation here is that Jesus is resurrected from the dead.

He has appeared to the disciples a couple times already and now this is the third time. And the very first verse of the passage says this, Jesus revealed himself again and that word carries a lot of weight in this passage.

And it's not simply saying Jesus showed up. Jesus, he let them see him one more time. There's more going on there. What he actually is intending here, John is, who's very careful with his words in this Gospel by the word revealed, is that when God shows up, people get changed.

God's appearance, Christ's appearance comes with divine power and divine mercy. And so we get this indication from the very first verse, something big is about to happen here.

Now let's think for a second about Peter. What do you remember from Peter's background as he steps into the story? The activity going on here is that Peter says, I'm going to go fishing.

[13:07] Seems fairly simple and innocent. I'm going fishing and do you guys want to go with me? And they say yes. Think about Peter's background. Just a few chapters back, Peter was in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus and the soldiers came and what did Peter do?

He sliced the ear off of Malchus, the Roman soldier. He cut his ear off. And then he follows Jesus down to the courts.

Why? Because he had told Jesus at the Last Supper, I will go where you go. If you have to die, Jesus, I will go die with you.

That's what Peter had told Christ. And Christ told him at that moment, no. Truly, truly, I'm in, I'm in. You will betray me.

So Peter the Bold, this is Peter the Bold. He cuts Malchus' ear off. He says, I will fight to the death for you. I will follow you to the courts. I will stand trial with you.

[14:07] Peter the Bold. But recall what happens when we get to the courts, a young maid comes to him, a girl, and says, aren't you one of his people?

And he says, no. And two more times he commits treason against God. He completely betrays him. And so we get this juxtaposition from John between Peter the Bold, Peter the weak.

Peter is not what he says he is. He's always talking big, but he never follows through with it. Listen to what Calvin says about Peter the Bold and Peter the weak, John Calvin.

Jesus would have found it far better for Peter to groan and pray in some dark hidden corner of that garden than to follow him into the presence of men.

Peter now undertakes with great earnestness the performance of a duty from which Christ had told him he could not do. And when he comes to the confession of faith and what she ought to have persevered even to his own death, his courage utterly fails him.

[15:17] And so during the final meal, this is what Jesus had told, this is the conversation they had had. Peter proclaimed, I will lay down my life for you, Jesus. And then Jesus hits him with the stark reality saying, truly, truly, I say to you, you will actually deny me three times.

Amen. Amen. That's what he says. Calvin puts it this way again.

When Peter stumbles so shamefully at the very first step of faith, the foolishness of his boasting is exposed. He had boasted that he would prove to be a valiant champion, able to meet death with firmness and courage, and now at the voice of a single girl, a young maid.

And that voice accompanied by threatening, he is confounded and throws down his arms, such as a demonstration of the power of man. Certainly all the strength that appears to be in men is smoke, which a breath will immediately drive away.

When we are out of the battle, we are too courageous, but experience shows that our lofty talk is foolishness and groundless. Look, it's amazing how John constructs this narrative, which is a bit different, not historically, but the point he's trying to make from the other Gospels.

[16 : 41] Peter's denial and John chapter 21 are sandwiches bred for the meat that's in between, John chapter 20. And what is that?

It's the resurrection of Christ. And so what John's doing in setting all this up in the way he's constructed it is he's pointing us to see that Christ died for people that betray him.

Christ's resurrection is the restoration of people that commit treason. The worst of sins is to deny.

And that's exactly what Christ came to do, to accomplish, to save. Now if you come with me back into John chapter 21, we come to this passage and Peter says, I'm going fishing.

And the other disciples follow him. Peter was the leader, you remember? He was chosen by Christ to be the leader of the disciples. He was called Petros, meaning rock.

[17 : 40] This is the rock on which Christ will build his church. All these statements like that. And we're starting to get these questions in our head. Is this the rock?

So the question I want to ponder for a second is why were Peter and the other disciples fishing that day? Why did they go fishing? They had seen the Lord in chapter 20, but most commentators and most theologians that wrestle with this passage think this, that Peter's return to fishing is actually a denial of himself as an apostle or as a witness to Christ's resurrection.

That simple act, so heavy it's burden and don't fall. You remember that back in Matthew 4 that Peter was called out of fishing to follow Christ.

Christ came and we get a very similar scene back in the beginning of the gospels to what we see here in chapter 21 that he came and said, you're no longer a fisherman, you are now a fisher of men.

I'm calling you on mission here. And then it's really interesting in John chapter 21 that John's great commission in John chapter 20 verse 21 is this, as the Father has sent me, even so I am now sending you.

[19 : 02] He just said that to Peter. He just said it in the previous appearance. And now in the very next passage, what John is showing us is that Jesus didn't obey it.

He's basically saying, I am not fit to be a witness of this resurrection. That's what's going on here. And some people will talk about when they read this passage, this being like a total apostasy of him denying the faith, not believing in God.

And that's not what I think is, that's not what's happening. What's happening is that Peter is ashamed. He just denied Christ three times.

He betrayed his oath. And when Jesus tells him, now I am sending you out into the world on mission to be a renewer, to do the work that I am doing, to participate in my plan of redemption.

He says, I'm going to take my old job back. I'm going to go fishing again. And it's interesting that it's at night. I think there are a lot of things going on there with John's use of the metaphor of darkness in the book.

[20 : 18] But we don't have time to do that. Listen to what Augustine says about Peter. This is the old Peter, the Peter that was called away from fishing into the discipleship of Christ.

Peter put such reality into their following of him then that he left everything in order to cleave to him as his master. So much so that when the rich man went away from Jesus and sorrow because it is saying to him, go, sell all that you have and give it to the poor, Peter said to the Jesus, Jesus, we have forsaken all and followed you.

Why is it then that now by the abandonment, as it were, of his apostleship, he became what he once was and he seeks again what he had once forsaken?

As if forgetful of the words he had once heard, no man putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven. Look, when Jesus shows up on this beach in this passage in John 21 and calls out to the disciples and says, cast your net on the other side.

This is a revelation of absolute divine mercy that can only be accomplished by a God who became man, died for people's sins and resurrected from the dead.

[21 : 42] Jesus showing up is a personal act of mercy. It's exactly what Peter needed. He had abandoned the mission and he just needed to see Christ's face.

Peter needed to know that Jesus died for him. And it's interesting that one of the first things Jesus does, and this is, we'll get back to this in just a moment, is he doesn't talk to him about what's happened in the past.

He doesn't talk to him about the death and resurrection. He doesn't talk to him about his betrayal. He says, do you want breakfast? Do you want to have breakfast with me? He invites him to feast with him.

And not only that, but he provides the fish. You see, Jesus doesn't just leave us to our spiritual renewal.

He treats the whole person. You want to live in a world where you get to dine with Christ? That's what Revelation 21 is about.

[22 : 47] You want to live in a world where nobody's hungry anymore. Jesus is coming to create a world for us, to renew this earth in such a way that everybody gets as much fish as they want.

No more of any of the pain and suffering. He came to treat the whole person, the whole earth.

He not only comes to treat Peter spirit in his heart, but he comes to have breakfast with him.

We can see glimpses of this type of kingdom. The kingdom that is coming all throughout the gospels. If you think back through the stories in the gospels that you love to read and think the types of miracles that Jesus was doing, we see a Savior that came to treat all things.

He treats people for disease. He treats people for their hunger. He's always giving attention to the poor.

[23 : 54] This is the kingdom we want. This is the kingdom we want. It's not just that we want our hearts renewed. We want to walk hand in hand with God.

We want to sit down at the dinner table with Him, like Adam did in Genesis chapter 2. This is the kingdom we want, and it's the one that we've never really had.

We look back on 2014 with dreams and wishes. I look back at my life, as I'm sure you probably do to yours, and we have all these thoughts. I wish I would have.

I wish I wouldn't have. We all want something more.

We all want a perfection that we've never attained. I got the pleasure of going back to my old house once.

[24 : 56] The house, I don't know, some of you may still live in the same house you grew up in. I lived in a house in Natchez, Mississippi for about 18 years, and I haven't been back to Natchez hardly at all since.

Heather and I got engaged there, but I got the chance once in college after my parents had moved off to Atlanta, Georgia, to go back. If any of you have ever had this opportunity, it's really cool because you go in and there's this immediate weight of nostalgia that hits you, right?

Because you were a kid there. I remember going in to my old bedroom and thinking, remembering that it was blue. My bedroom was blue. I was a boy, it was blue, but I go in and it was definitely purple.

I was pretty upset about that. I thought it was blue as a kid and it was purple. You go in the backyard and the backyard is so much smaller than you thought. I thought it was a huge backyard, but it's not very big at all.

Everything's changed. New people are there. None of the decorations are there anymore. There's something even deeper going on with that type of an experience if you've ever had it before.

[26 : 06] There's a blissful longing in that experience for a family that you never had, for the success that you never had, for the beach you have never seen, right?

For an entire world you've never had. The point that John is making here with Peter is that Jesus came with a program of redemption that is slowly but surely making all things new.

Slowly but surely and definitely restoring us to the Garden of Eden and even better. It's making us people that we never were in a world that we never lived in.

Christ knows our need for redemption and renewal. He knows it. He knows your need for it. He knows your sin and he knows your longings.

The second thing is this, that Christ comes and the location of that renewal is in the resurrection. The location of his renewal of the program is in his resurrection.

[27 : 26] There's three aspects of our need for renewal and rebirth that we talked about earlier. The spiritual, the ethical and the natural. Just to do a bit of terminology for a second.

When we're talking about these three aspects, especially when we're studying God's Word and constructing it in some form of theology, we say that we need rebirth first.

In other words, we're sinners. We're spiritually broken. We're separated from God judicially. What the Bible talks about as rebirth or we call it oftentimes regeneration is Christ coming and dying and rise again to fit that spiritual problem.

Then we call the second thing, the ethical problem we have often renewal. That Jesus came to renew us. He came to make us holy.

We call that sanctification. The third is restoration. This is Christ's treatment of the natural realm. The place we live, our bodies, resurrection.

[28 : 30] We see all three of these aspects in Jesus very person. When he dies and when he rises again and when Paul reflects on these things, he comes and says Christ has justified you before God.

That's your spiritual problem. He is sanctifying you before God. That's your ethical problem. He's resurrecting your body before God. That's your natural problem. He's doing all three of these things.

He is the location of renewal. It is only by faith in him that these promises are ever achieved for us. The last brief thing we'll talk about, we'll just look at for just a couple minutes, is this scene on the beach.

This scene on the beach starting in verse 15. The scene on the beach is so interesting. Why does Jesus come and ask this same question three times?

He says to Peter, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep.

[29 : 34] What's going on here? What's going on here? Why is that happening? I think what John is teaching us is if we think about the history of Peter, what's happened to him, that Jesus is meeting him exactly where he is.

Peter has denied Christ three times. Jesus comes to him at breakfast and gives him three questions.

Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? When Peter gets angry at the end, what we want to do is shake him and say, wake up. Don't you see what's happening here?

You denied the Savior three times. He's asking you three questions. Each of these questions is an assurance.

You're mine. I forgive you. I'm renewing you. You're reborn. The power of my resurrection is applied to you.

[30 : 40] The point is this. You've betrayed me, yet our relationship is not broken. You've committed treason against me, yet you've been redeemed.

Now go and be a vehicle of the same. Maybe the climax of the passage, the final point we're getting to, the ultimate goal to tell us is when Jesus tells him in verse 17, do you love me?

Jesus says to him, then feed my sheep. That's the same exact message he has for all of us today. We've committed treason against God.

We've broken his laws. We've done all these things. But if you love him and if you have faith in him and if you look at the resurrection as the power of redemption for your soul and for the renewal of this earth, go and feed a sheep.

Go and make disciples. As the Father has sent him, so he is sending you. This is the mission of 2015, is to be on mission, is to do what Jesus did.

[31 : 56] What Christ is calling Peter to here and what he's calling us to here is to look forward to Revelation 21 and see what's coming. In the hope of that looking forward, to look backward and say, the ground of it is the resurrection of God.

And then to stand here in the present and to be an imitator of Christ, a vehicle of renewal, a vehicle of restoration.

So last thing I'm going to say, I'm just going to give you three. I'm just going to read them because we don't have time to get into them. I'm just going to give you three resolutions, whatever you want to call it.

Maybe you don't have one yet. Here's some of how you can become, just practical ways maybe. Maybe you don't need any of these.

Maybe you do. Of being a person that's committed to the project Christ is doing right now. The first one is this, embrace the mission of mourning and evening repentance in 2015.

[33 : 02] Embrace the mission of mourning and evening repentance. I'll just say briefly. When Peter sees Christ, when John says, I see the Lord, that's Jesus, what does he do? He puts on his garment and jumps in the water.

Now it's probably the case that the boat would have gotten there faster. I mean, why does he put on his clothes to jump into the water?

Because he knows he's appearing before royalty. This is an act of repentance. And so one thing that I'm trying to be resolved to do this year, and I think where mission outside of these walls begin, is to be people who repent every day, who ask the forgiveness of their sins.

And that of course assumes a fresh commitment to being a person who really prays. Secondly, embrace the mission of renewing your mind in 2015.

You can't be a vehicle of renewal, a gospel preacher to the world unless you're constantly renewing your mind. Romans chapter 12. Get to know more of God this year.

[34 : 11] In John 17, Jesus said, the knowledge of God is eternal life. And get to know more times, get to spend more time this year getting to know the culture.

Getting to know what it is to think critically and Christianly about the culture outside of you. And then lastly, embrace the mission of telling people in your daily circles at work and your family wherever there may be daily circle mission of what you believe and why.

All three of these things are in constant dialogue and relationship. Constant repentance and prayer, constant theological education of getting to know more of your Bible, getting to know more of God and loving him more, getting to know the culture and what it thinks and then talking to people about it.

That's just three practical things we can do this year to be a vehicle of renewal pushed by the gospel of Christ. Let's pray. Father, thank you for this message of hope we get from Revelation 21 in John 21.

We ask that you would apply it to our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.