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John 21:15-22 – *The Life of Peter: Restored and Called*

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John 21:15-22

<sup>15</sup> 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.”

<sup>16</sup> 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.”

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

We said that discipleship is entering into a process of growing.

You're growing in love for God...

And you're growing in your love for those around you.

If it's a growing process...

Then we start at the beginning and work our way toward maturity.

We start out not knowing Jesus...

Then we enter into a relationship with him—

And over the course of our lives—

Our trust in him increases, our desire to walk in old ways decreases...

Our praise and love of God increases...

And we mature in our relationship with him.

One thing we can definitely say about this process of discipleship...

Is that it is not easy...

In fact, it can be quite painful.

We know that it was a painful process for Peter.

### **Peter is a man who is hurting in our passage.**

This is Peter—

An intense guy, ready to meet the Lord wherever the Lord goes—

The one who asks Jesus to call him out of the boat...

To walk to Jesus on the stormy sea.

This is Peter—

A good friend and follower who wants to protect Jesus—

The one who pulls Jesus aside and tells him he can't die.

This is Peter—

The one who refuses to have his feet washed by Jesus—

If anyone is going to serve...

It's going to be Peter serving Jesus.

This is Peter...

The one who says to Jesus:

“Lord, wherever you’re going, I will follow...”

“Even if it costs me my life.”

Peter makes this bold declaration of his commitment to the Lord...

Only to have this commitment tested a few nights later.

His friend and master, Jesus, is arrested and taken to the high-priest’s house.

Peter is waiting outside in the courtyard when someone recognizes him:

“Hey, you look familiar. Are you one of his followers?”

“Nope. Not me,” Peter replies.

Again, they ask Peter:

“I think I saw you with him. Are you sure you aren’t one of his disciples?”

“Look,” Peter says, “you must have mistaken me for someone else.”

A third time:

“You were with him in the garden. I saw you.”

“I swear, I don’t even know the guy,” Peter fires back.

Peter spares his own life—

He saves his own reputation—

But he denies being Jesus’ follower.

In Matthew’s Gospel it says that Peter weeps bitterly after this.

### **Peter is hurting.**

Can you imagine the immense guilt and shame he’s carrying around?

Peter was in Jesus’ inner circle...

Peter, James, and John...

Seen as leaders among the disciples.

Always the first to speak up...

Always the first to profess his faith and commitment.

Now word has spread that he denied the Lord before Jesus was crucified.

I'm sure when Peter thinks about that night, he has to fight back the tears.

When he thinks about denying the Lord...

He feels the pressure building behind his eyes.

If you've ever done something that goes against your own values...

You know what this is like.

You feel like you sold-out on yourself or someone you love...

You can't believe what you've done.

It's all you can think about...

You want to be rid of it, but it hangs over you.

You feel like everyone else knows too...

Like everyone is looking at you and talking about you.

Well for Peter, they *did* know!

This was a very public thing.

Strong, confident, trusted Peter...

Denied the Lord three times.

**Peter is hurting.**

So he turns back to what he knows—

His old vocation before following Jesus—

He goes fishing.

Peter essentially gives up on his call to follow Jesus...

Assuming that the Lord is done with him.

Here is a man in need of restoration.

How many of us are carrying around the guilt and shame of the past?

How many of us are in need of restoration?

Have we done something or said something that still replays today?

Something that is hanging over your head?

Is there something in your life that has caused you to turn back from following the Lord?

Assuming that he's done with you.

At one time you were convinced that you were a Christ-follower...

But your actions, thoughts, or words have brought that into doubt.

“Christ will never want me back after what I've done!” we think.

“How can I turn back to the Lord after the way I've been living?”

“Surely I can't be a Christian with all of these doubts!”

“I may as well go back to my old life.”

Maybe that scene of infidelity replays...

Where you were unfaithful to a spouse or boyfriend.

Or maybe these stressful COVID times have led you to do some things you're not proud of...

Things *you* can't even believe you've done...

Things you don't want to do.

Maybe there are times when you denied the Lord for the sake of your own reputation...

Those times when you shied away from owning up to being a Christian—

Around your friends, teammates, co-workers, or even members of your family—

The memory of it hangs over your head...

It keeps coming back to you.

You feel the shame...

You carry the guilt with you...

You're hurting.

We're like Peter...

We need restoration.

How does Jesus handle Peter's hurt?

How does Jesus meet Peter in his shame and guilt?

Jesus comes to his disciples on the shore and prepares a meal for them.

The conversation by the fire is probably awkward...

Everyone knows that Peter denied Jesus...

And that they hadn't talked about it since.

Peter is probably hesitant to look Jesus in the eyes...

Peter's eyes are probably fixed on his food or the fire in between them.

But, like a skilled surgeon, Jesus carefully navigates to Peter's wound:

"Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Jesus has already said to his disciples:

"If you love me, you will keep my commands."

"You will obey my teachings." (John 14:23-24)

Peter knows that his denying of the Lord does not communicate love for Jesus...

This is now a memory of shame and guilt.

But Jesus doesn't avoid the tender area...

He walks with Peter right into it:

"Simon son of John, do you love me?" Jesus asks again.

"Yes Lord, you know I do."

Peter, hoping that the question won't be repeated again, hears Jesus ask a third time:

"Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Jesus takes Peter back to the night of his denial.

"Peter is hurt" because Jesus asks him the third time...

But Jesus knows that this is what Peter needs to face...

This is what Peter needs to hear.

Jesus walks Peter into his deepest wound...

Because it's here where Peter is restored.

Jesus doesn't add more shame to the wound:

“Peter, what were you thinking that night!?”

“How could you deny me like that?”

“You said you would lay down your life for me...”

“Instead you deny knowing me...3 times?!”

“You are a poor follower...away from me!”

No, the resurrected Messiah—

With holes in his hands, feet, and side—

Restores Peter...

Jesus restores the man that turned his back on him.

Jesus uses the same name for Peter—

Simon son of John—

This name he used when Jesus first called Peter back in John 1.

Jesus called Peter...

And he never let him go.

Once Jesus calls you...

You're his.

You belong to him.

Nothing can change that.

The only way that Peter is able to be restored—

That Jesus can hold onto Peter even through his apostasy—

Is through Jesus' wounds.

The wounds that Jesus endures on the cross for Peter's denial...

For Peter's apostasy.

Jesus gave his life for Peter...

Now Peter hears these words of healing and forgiveness.

Jesus restores Peter.

But it's not just restoration that Peter receives.

Peter's restoration is inseparably linked to his calling.

At the same time he is restoring Peter...

Jesus is also reinstating him as a shepherd of the people.

“Feed my lambs.”

“Take care of my sheep.”

“Feed my sheep.”

“Peter, you are forgiven, you *do* love me...I know this...”

“Now, I want you to show that love by caring for my people.”

“I want you to follow me.”

Jesus is reinstating Peter as a shepherd of the people.

Jesus heals Peter and recommissions him:

“Peter, your life will be one of following me.”

“You will care for my people.”

“This is your calling.”

“I've restored you and now I am going to use you.”

What a change for Peter:

Going from a place of hurt and pain—

Where he is planning on returning to his former life...

Thinking Jesus has wasted 3 years on training him—

Now to a place of restoration and a renewed sense of calling.

Jesus restores Peter...

**And Jesus restores us.**

No matter where we're at in our faith—

If we're at the beginning of the discipleship process...

Or further along like Peter—

We *will* have our stumbles and falls.

We *will* have our moments or seasons of doubt.

We *will* have times of weakness where we give into sin...

Times where we disobey the teachings of Christ...

Or even flat-out deny him.

But Jesus is in the business of restoration.

This is why he endured the cross.

His love displayed for us on the cross covers over a multitude of sin.

He knows his people—

Jesus knows our deepest hurts and our most intense shame—

And he wants to heal us.

This will look a little different for us than it did for Peter.

Jesus is no longer with us in the flesh...

We can't see him or audibly hear him speak words of healing.

We can turn to him in prayer—

We can confess our hurts to him...

And turn to his written word for assurance of his love—

But he's given us another way to know his forgiveness and healing:

Each other.

Our brothers and sisters in the Lord become Christ in the flesh for us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German theologian says:

“When I go to my brother [or sister] to confess, I am going to God.”

God in the flesh...

These are our brothers and sisters around us...

Those who are united in Christ stand in his stead...

Receive our pain and offer grace and healing.

It's awkward...it's uncomfortable...it's often times embarrassing to share our deepest hurts—

Or we don't want to burden others with our problems—  
But Christ gave us each other to speak words of restoration and healing.  
We are the flesh and blood of Christ here on earth to our brothers and sisters.  
We know that we're no better than anyone else.  
We all stand in need of healing...

We all stand in need of Christ's healing mercy.  
Sometimes we'll be the one coming with our hurts...

And sometimes we'll be the one offering words of assurance and restoration.  
It's hard right now to connect with each other...

But this is something that must be pursued.  
We are hurting and in need of grace...  
Our brothers and sisters are in need of words of God's healing...  
We've been put here to represent God to our brothers and sisters.  
So make a call this week to a trusted friend—

Call a pastor or an elder—  
Speak out loud your pain and hurt...  
And allow the grace of God to enter in through your fellow Christian.

The Lord isn't done with you...

No matter what you've done.  
And he wants to not only heal you...  
He also wants to reinstate you...

To reaffirm the call he has on your life.  
None of us have fallen too far that the Lord says, "You're finished."

The Lord called us once—  
He claimed us as his own—  
And he's letting us know that he still has a plan to use us.  
So whether we're called like Peter—

Called to shepherd and lead God's sheep...

Eventually called to give up our life for the Lord—

Whether we're called like John—

To bear witness to Christ through our spoken and written word—

Christ has a call on our life to follow him.

He is inviting us into healing and restoration...

And he's inviting us into the plan he has for our life.

May we allow him to restore us...

Say yes to where he's leading...

And live lives that glorify God...

All through the power of the Spirit he gives to us.

Amen.