

"The Second Chance"

John 21:11-24

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A college football coach begged a professor not to flunk his star linebacker ahead of the big game. The professor agreed to give the student a second chance with a one-question oral exam: "What is two plus two?" he asked. The player hesitated, thought deeply, and answered, "Five?" The coach jumped up and begged, "Please, professor, just give him one more chance!"

Folks, we may not have a lot of sympathy for that linebacker, but most of us are very grateful for second chances. In fact, I suspect most of you have benefitted from second chances more than you admit or even realize. The Bible records a variety of instances of second chances, including, for example, when God uses a big fish to give the prophet Jonah a second chance to go and preach in Ninevah.

Yet, I cannot think of anyone who benefits from a second chance more than the man we focus on today, Simon Peter, AKA the Apostle Peter. He messed up, failed, sinned, blew it as badly as anyone ever had. And yet, the Lord graciously gave him a second chance. And Peter used it to lead the Christian church when Jesus was no longer on earth.

Today, as we conclude our "Encounters with Jesus" series, we will explore how Jesus gives Peter this second chance. Our text is John 21: 15-24. If you have your Bible, you can turn there. Let's pause and pray that the Lord would use this portion of His Word to encourage and challenge us today.

This passage doesn't make sense, unless we know a bit of background. Simon Peter is basically the leader of Jesus' band of 12 disciples. As they have come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, Jesus tells them He may face some trouble. Peter, as a very loyal follower pledges **John 13:37b I will lay down my life for you.** At that point, Jesus answers **John 13:38 "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.** And that is exactly what happens.

That night Jesus and His disciples go to the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus is arrested by the temple guard. After that Peter seems willing to risk his own life to keep that from happening. **John 18:10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)** This is one of the men who was arresting Jesus. However, **John 18:11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"** Jesus is then taken in the middle of the night to what was called the high priest's courtyard, where He will be interrogated. Peter and John follow, a brave thing to do. But as Peter enters the courtyard, one of the servant girls, who knows John is a follower of Jesus, confronts Peter.

John 18:17 "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." This is denial #1. Jesus is interrogated and mistreated by this mob of Jewish leaders. **John 18:25 Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not."** That is denial #2. Then, **John 18:26 One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" Again Peter denied it.** Denial #3 and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

Despite Peter's bold claim that he would risk his life for Jesus, despite his violent effort to resist those who had come to arrest Jesus, despite bravely following Jesus to the courtyard, Peter denies Him three times, just as Jesus had predicted.

Most of you know the story from this point. It is Friday morning and Jesus is taken to Pilate, the Roman governor, who ends up condemning Him to death. And after that Jesus is crucified, dies on a cross between two criminals. He is taken down and put in a tomb on Friday evening, but by Sunday morning that tomb is empty. Jesus is very much alive. He has conquered death as the risen

Lord. After that He spends 40 days on earth before He ascends to heaven and during that time He meets with His disciples on various occasions.

One of them is recorded in John 21. Peter and six other disciples including John, are fishing back in their home region of Galilee, northern Israel, on the Sea of Galilee, AKA, the Sea of Tiberias. Jesus appears on the shore, and when Peter realizes it is Jesus, he is excited to see Him.

In fact, he jumps out of the boat and runs to shore. Jesus had prepared breakfast for His friends. After they eat, it is time for Jesus and Peter to have a little talk. This is the first time they have really had a conversation since that terrible night before Jesus was killed, when three times Peter denied even knowing Him.

John 21:15a When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

We cannot be certain what Jesus meant by the word “these.” Some think Jesus was referring to the fishing boat and equipment, and thus was asking, “Peter, do you love me more than you love your profession, your livelihood?” Others think Jesus meant “Do you love me more than you love your friends, these men who have been fishing with you?” This may seem like a strange question, but Jesus had already told the disciples that their devotion to Him must be greater than their loyalty to family or friends.

Most Bible scholars, however, think Jesus was asking, “Peter, do you love me more than *these other men* love me? Again, that may seem like a strange question. But considering what happened just days earlier, and considering what would happen in the future, as Peter becomes the leader of the Church, it is probably a fair question.

Though we may not be certain exactly what Jesus was asking, Peter likely was, and gives a clear answer. **John 21:15b He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.”** And then the conversation becomes a little more unusual. **John 21: 16, 17 Jesus said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” Jesus said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do**

you love me? Simon was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Folks, one of the peculiarities of human language is that sometimes we use different words to mean the same things, and other times use the same word to mean different things. That is especially true with the word, love. I love my wife Nancy, I love the Green Bay Packers, and I love Blue Moon ice cream. The same word, love, describes three very different types of affection.

Many sermons have been preached focused on the fact the Greeks have different words for love, including “agape” and “phileo.” Those words are often defined as unconditional love, “agape,” and friendship love, “phileo.” A third Greek word “eros” is romantic or sexual love.

The first two times Jesus asks, “Do you agape me?” and Peter responds, “Yes, I phileo you.” The third time Jesus asks, “Do you phileo me?” and Peter responds, “You know I phileo you.” Thus , a common interpretation is that Peter cannot affirm an agape love for Jesus and is grieved when Jesus lowers the bar, and basically asks, “Peter, do you like me?”

Dr. Don Carson, who I think has written the best commentary on John’s gospel available, says, “Maybe, but not likely.” He notes that John likes to use different words to mean the same thing and seems to use agape and phileo interchangeably. For example, in John 11 both words are used to describe Jesus’ love for Lazarus. Carson says the clear reason for Peter’s grief is the fact Jesus asks him three times, “Do you love me?” That reminds him that three times he denied even knowing Jesus...three times. Could Jesus ever forgive him?

The answer is yes. He is willing to give Peter a second chance. On that night Jesus was arrested Peter had failed miserably. Yet, Jesus has a new assignment for him. In many ways it will be more challenging and difficult. When Peter was asked if he was a follower of Jesus, by a servant girl, he denied it. In a few weeks Peter will be asked to stand in front of a crowd of thousands of people, to not only testify that he is a follower of Jesus,

but to proclaim Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord.

Jesus points to this assignment by telling Peter to feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and feed my sheep. Again, sermons have been preached talking about three different assignments for Peter. But I think Don Carson is again correct when he says these all refer to the role Peter will play in leading both the apostles and all believers in Jesus that will make up the early Christian church.

Folks, I hope you realize how strange this seems. Peter blows it big time, totally fails, the night Jesus is arrested, and then is given the most important role anyone could possibly have. It would be like if JJ McCarthy threw three interceptions in one quarter of the game on Friday against the Broncos, and yet, Kevin O'Connell announces that McCarthy will be the starting quarterback instead of Kyler Murray in the season opener against the Packer in two weeks. It would be like that, except football is just a game. What Jesus calls Peter to do is anything but a game. It is a matter of life and death, eternal life and death, for billions and billions of people.

I suspect if Jesus would have talked with some of the other disciples, and asked for their opinion, He would have heard, "Ya, Peter is a good guy. We like him and everything, but he's not the guy you want to be in charge. After you were arrested that night, he lost all of his courage. He just folded under the pressure. We need someone more reliable to be our leader."

But Peter is the one Jesus wants to feed and tend His sheep. He knows Peter is exactly the person who should lead the band of apostles, and that first Christian church in Jerusalem. He knows, that empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter will have the strength, wisdom and grace necessary for all that the Lord will call him to do.

And He knows, empowered by the Spirit, Peter will have the courage to stand up and preach the gospel, proclaim Jesus as the risen Lord, to the crowd on the day of Pentecost. In fact, in that sermon he will boldly tell the Jewish leaders in the crowd that they are guilty of crucifying the Messiah, Jesus. And, as a result of that bold sermon, about 3000 people become believers in

Jesus Christ. Jesus knows that when Peter gets a second chance, he *will not fail*.

But Jesus also knows the path ahead for Peter will not always be an easy one. Yes, he will be used by the Lord in some remarkable ways as the gospel spreads from Jerusalem into Judea then Samaria and then to, KJV *"the uttermost parts of the earth."* But, in the end, Peter will have a second chance to lay down his life for Jesus. And this time he will do so. He will do so with courage and grace.

Jesus predicts what will occur: **John 21:18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)**

When Peter was old, probably about 65, he was arrested. The emperor Nero ordered that he be executed, crucified. Because by this time he had learned not only courage, but also humility, Peter request that he be crucified upside down, because he was not worthy to be killed in the same manner as the Lord Jesus. In the most difficult of all circumstances, Peter would bring glory to God with his last breath. Jesus made a wise choice when He gave Peter a second chance.

Okay, that is our encounter between Jesus and Peter. What lessons does God have for us through this portion of His Word? I think there are two pretty obvious ones.

#1 The Lord provides us second chances. When we fail, when we mess up big time, God graciously provides a second chance. That is what we call the gospel.

The God who created each of us, gave us all a rather simple assignment: love the Lord God with your entire being, and love your neighbor as yourself. A simple, but apparently not easy assignment. Not easy, since we all fail. **Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Thus, Romans 3:10 There is no one righteous, not even one.**

Yet, in His love God provides a second chance. It is not what we might expect. We failed the test,

perhaps we can just take the test over. Perhaps, but if we did, we would fail, again, and again, and again. So, the second chance God gives is that Jesus takes the test for us, in our place. And He *does not fail*.

All we need to do is, as God enables, stop trusting in ourselves, and put our confidence, our faith, in Jesus Christ and in what He has accomplished for us through His life, death, and resurrection. This is the biggest and most important second chance anyone will ever get. And Friends, if you haven't done so yet, you need to take advantage of this second chance and place your trust in Jesus Christ.

But the Lord offers us other second chances as well. Another pastor I know did some foolish things in the first church he was at and got fired. But God and another church gave him a second chance, and he has had a wonderful ministry there. Here are a couple of other examples. Jenny is starting her fourth year of college and will be leading a Bible study on campus this fall. Everyone at school thinks of her as a wonderful Christian gal. But they didn't know her when she was at the community college a couple of years earlier.

Even though Jenny grew up in a Christian home, and claimed to believe in Jesus, she was pretty rebellious those first two years after high school. There had been lots of parties with plenty of alcohol and sex. One of the great things about being at a new school was that no one knew about this. She rededicated her life to the Lord two summers ago and has avoided partying since then.

But how could she lead a Bible study? How could she talk to other girls about the importance of sexual purity, when she had been so promiscuous? She felt like such a hypocrite.

Jenny decided to talk to her mom, Jane, about how she felt. And fortunately, Jane is a wise, mature believer in Jesus. Jane was a little shocked by some of the things Jenny told her that day. She didn't realize how bad things had been those first two years out of high school. But Jane has experienced and understands grace.

She said, "Jenny, what you did in the past doesn't define you. Who you are today is what matters. Yes, sin can sometimes leave scars, but those scars

testify to the healing God has given you. You can tell those girls in your Bible study that if they have messed up, God offers them a second chance, because He has given you a second chance. Sexual sin is not the unforgivable sin. The story of King David teaches us that. And it is a privilege to tell others that **If we (1 John 1:9) confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** Jane added, "Jenny, God not only takes away your guilt, but He desires to take away your shame." Friends, that is the beauty of that second chance. Frank professed faith in Jesus when he was a teenager. He and Sue got married when they were each 20. Things went well for a while, but after a couple of years it seemed they were always bickering about something.

One evening, Sue started complaining about household projects Frank had not gotten done. The argument intensified. Both of them spoke foul words to each other, and then Frank kind of snapped. He yelled "Just shut up," and slapped Sue hard across the face. Sue looked at him, ran into the bedroom, came out with a suitcase 10 minutes later, walked out the door, hopped in her car and drove away. The police arrived at the house 15 minutes later and Sue filed for divorce the next week.

Frank was devastated. He knew he had messed up big time. How could he have hit his own wife? The next three years were pretty dark for Frank. He had gone to the counseling the court required, but then his pastor referred him to a Christian counselor who really helped him deal with his guilt, shame and anger. A few months later he met Tina. Within a year they were married, and now after five years things are great, and they are in church every Sunday. Frank believes this second marriage, this second chance, is a wonderful gift from God.

Friends, think about second chances you have received in your life. If you cannot think of any, think harder. Thank the Lord for them and then...

#2 Make sure you are willing to give others a second chance. One of the clear implications of the gospel is that those who have received grace, should give grace. Those who have been forgiven should forgive. **Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and**

compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Now, forgiving others can be complicated, especially when someone who has wronged you doesn't acknowledge he/she has done anything wrong. But... when someone apologizes, when someone asks for a second chance, you need to be willing to give it.

A parent needs to give a child a second chance. A child sometimes needs to give a parent a second chance. A wife may need to give her husband a second chance. And husband may need to give his wife a second chance. Your friend may need a second chance. Your employee may need a second chance. Your boss may need a second chance. And if for some reason you don't think you can give that, I encourage you to talk to one of our pastors.

Second chances. Jesus gave Peter one. We all need them at some point. The Lord graciously offers them to us. We need to be willing to give others a second chance as well.