

John 21 Love God, For Others

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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We pick things up this morning after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus – remember that after He rose from the dead He spent another 40 days on earth before ascending into Heaven where He is today – seated at the right hand of the Father, constantly making intercession for you and me.

So, let's see what John says about Jesus' last days with the disciples:

1 After these things (the events surrounding the resurrection in Jerusalem which we read in Chapter 20) **Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself:** **2 Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples** (7 out of 11 – Judas is gone) **were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."** **They said to him, "We are going with you also."** **They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.**

Turns out, even if you're one of the Twelve Apostles, things don't always go your way.

Now, that may seem like something small on the surface, but lately I've been realizing even more that being a Christian doesn't really change the world around me. Bad things still happen. There is difficulty or friction in my life; people do things I don't like, situations happen that I can't control; accidents occur, storms hit and wreck my plans.

And I want to think that, gee, if only I were holy enough, somehow I could promote to super-saint and just walk above all this mess because things would magically come together for me. I would walk from open door to open door with signs and wonders following.

When I was younger I remember playing a lot of video games – specifically action games – games where you were a character, or a space ship, or something, and you had to make your way through a world or a scenario. And if you've played those kinds of games, isn't there usually something hidden inside that world which gives you the ability to gain some special power so that suddenly you were invincible?

Take, for example, Super Mario Brothers – if Mario picked up a mushroom he grew to twice his normal size and could take an extra hit without dying. But if you picked up a star, you changed color and started blinking-you were temporarily invincible and you could knock over enemies by just walking right through them.

That's what I want. I want to jump up someday, hit my head on an invisible brick, and find a star so that I can walk wherever I want through life and nothing slows me down.

I know everyone else is battling the flu, but I'm feeling fine. I know everyone else is paying over \$3 a gallon for gas, but I'm still paying \$1.19. Other people are getting 73 emails a day, but I only get 4 and they're all full of good news, funny jokes, and links to things I really want to see, AND of course, I have the time to read them with their attachments and links. I want to be like Florida this past week – the rest of the country is freezing, but I'm still wearing board shorts and flip-flops.

I don't know why, but sometimes I have this idea in the back of my mind that that's the goal – that's what I'm trying to work toward – a perfect life where nothing goes wrong. And I think that somehow if I get closer to God, maybe He'll use some of His power, as my Spiritual Father, to get me closer to my goal. That He's my power-up star.

But the truth is, things don't work that way. I'm sorry, but they don't. You can't walk around in this unpopable bubble of bliss, untouched by the world's difficulties. But what you can do is allow God to change your *attitude* toward things. No matter how much you love Him, you are still going to have difficult days, you are still going to get bad news, you are still going to have frustrating neighbors, co-workers, family members and children.

As someone once put it, Jesus doesn't promise to make your *life* crisis-free, He promises to make *you* crisis-proof--so that you'll be able to survive what comes your way, even if it's not easy, or comfortable by resting in Him – we'll see even more of that later but I wanted to point this much out while we're here.

So, back to our story, they went out fishing all night, and caught nothing – being a disciple of Jesus didn't change their outcome and now, it's morning.

4 But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

They're about 100 yards off shore – at that distance you can see someone, but not make out who they are.

5 Then Jesus said to them, "Children, (lads) have you any food?"
They answered Him, "No."

6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find *some*." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea.

8 But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits [about 100 yards]), dragging the net with fish. 9 Then, as soon as they

had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught."

11 Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come *and* eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"— knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish.

14 *This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.*

So here's the next thing I want to point out: that although God does the miraculous, He also takes care of the monotonous - He serves the men breakfast. He's practical and pastoral.

He isn't just a God for some occasional spiritual experience. He's not located far away at some shrine or temple; He's not shut-up inside the Church as if we only let Him out on Sundays. No, He's everywhere, and He's interested in every facet of our lives – remember, we said He wants to grow us into the kind of people who can walk through everyday life and not escape it's challenges, but walk through it's challenges hand in hand with Him.

So, the last time we saw Jesus He appeared to them when they were all gathered together praying in a room in Jerusalem, but here we see Him visit them at the jobsite. And that's good, because if I'm honest, I probably need Him more at the jobsite than I do in the church. Oh, I come here to worship, I come here to be in fellowship, I come here to learn more – but what I really need is to experience more of Christ in my daily life and to be a better reflection of Him out there in the daily world.

Think about it – how often did Jesus meet with people in Temple, or in the synagogue? Oh He did, He absolutely felt that was the place people needed to be – if Jesus was here today in the flesh He'd tell people – you need to be in church, you need to be gathered together with other believers – but most of the time when we see Jesus we find Him in the scenes of ordinary life. He was out and about-He was guest at dinner, he stayed the night with people, he showed up at the worksite, and this time He shows up when things weren't going particularly well – they had had a bad night.

And it just so happens that this time He exercises His divine prerogative to grant them a miracle--because Jesus shows up at the job site, they were blessed with an enormous catch. But let me ask you what's more important – the catch, or the time spent with Jesus? If it had to be one or the other, which would you rather have?

And you see, right now, sitting here in church, many of us say-well, of course, I'd take the time with Jesus. But when we're out there on the jobsite, when you're working in the home, when we're going through our everyday life, we spend most of our time wishing we had a good catch.

Fellowship with Jesus is possible, in those in all those places, but we don't give it much thought because we're so distracted by what's going on – **we lose sight of eternal truths because we're blinded by daily realities.**

But let me tell you – Jesus wants you, and me, to put Him in the center of our lives each day – He wants us to know that He is still God – day by day, trial by trial, disappointment by disappointment. And as He works that out in us, then He wants to use us to share that good news with others. Watch what happens next:

15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, *son of Jonah*, do you love Me more than these?”

What are these?

- A. The others – including his own brother Andrew and his good friends James and John – do you love me more than you love them? OR
- B. do you love me more than they do? “Though all forsake You still I will not?” Or
- C. do you love me more than the fish and your old occupation as a fisherman?

We don't know – maybe it was all of them.

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

He said to him, “Feed My lambs.”

16 He said to him again a second time, “Simon, *son of Jonah*, do you love Me?”

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

He said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, *son of Jonah*, do you love Me?”

Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?”

And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”

Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.”

Three times Jesus asks the question. Why is that?

Because Peter had denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed on the night when Jesus was arrested and tried – you remember that, right? In the Upper Room Jesus had said that that very night they would all desert Him, and Peter said, “Not me Lord, though everyone else may abandon You, I'm ready to die for you!” Peter thought he was dedicated, but Jesus knew what would happen.

And now, Jesus gives Him the opportunity to be restored. Not just forgiven, but restored. That's different than the way most of us act, right? How many times have you heard someone say, or even said yourself, I've forgiven them, but I'll never trust them again.

That's not at all the reaction Jesus has toward Peter. Why? I think it's because Peter has repented. You can see it in the way Peter responds – Jesus asks, “Peter, do you love me?” And Peter responds, “Yes Lord, You *know* that I love you.”

Peter was obviously broken, crushed by his sin. No doubt he shed many tears remembering what he had done. How much time had he spent in prayer asking for forgiveness? And now he's at absolute rock bottom – that place of utter sorrow – confronted by Jesus on his sin. This is the way that God works, this is the way that He heals – He comes and He puts His finger on the wound – He touches the sin in your life, reminds you of what you did or what you said, or your attitude toward so and so – and He gently applies pressure to it and says, let's talk about this.

And so Peter says, “Yes Lord, You know I love You.” You knew I would betray You, You know how sorry I am, how much I want to be forgiven. You know I love You.

David said something very similar, in Psalm 139:

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
24 And see if there is any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.

Is that something we can say? Is something we want to say?

If we can – if we can lay our hearts open before God – as ugly as they may be – as wicked and selfish as we may have been – we will find grace. Not just forgiveness, but a restoration of trust. For those who are willing to be examined by God, and confess their sin to God, there is a chance to be led by God, and to serve Him by loving others.

As Jesus tells Peter each time – if you love Me, feed My sheep, tend My lambs.

Now, that's remarkable to me – Jesus says, if you love Me, do something for others.

Remember, Jesus comes to us in the ordinary – in the everyday, not just at church. He wants to translate our love for Him into ordinary, everyday actions. He wants us to *experience* His love everywhere we go, but He also wants us to *reflect* that love everywhere we go.

For Peter, this is a direct call to ministry – to serve God by serving as a pastor-but the principle is the same for all of us – if you love God, we are to express that love by also loving others. Isn't that the great commandment – to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself?

The two are linked, and for good reason-it is the necessary flow-first you love God (because you know His love for you) and then you reflect His love to others.

So, put yourself back in your ordinary lives – the lives that you'll be heading back to in just a few minutes – trips to Costco and Whole Foods or Giant; dental appointments; staff

meetings; Christmas shopping and laundry – and check yourself – how is your love for others in those situations?

If you lack the desire to do things for others-maybe the first thing you ought to check is your own love for Christ.

Parents-hard to love your children?

Husbands-hard to love your wives?

Christian-hard to love your family, especially this Christmas?

Servant-hard to serve?

If loving others feels miserable-whether you are a mom, a manager, a Marine, or a minister-check your own love for Christ. And know this – isn't always going to be easy – you don't get a magical star. Look at what was looming for Peter:

18 Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish." 19 This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

Even though you love well, and even though you serve well, things may not go well. It's important that you know that, and that you know that it's not some kind of divine retribution. It's a reflection of the fallen world we live in. Jesus loved the Father, and He spent His life perfectly loving others, but things didn't always go well for Him – His message wasn't always received – His life certainly wasn't always easy. And yet He says, "Follow Me."

That's a command.

But, before you get too depressed and we all turn into a bunch of Eeyore's - that doesn't mean that God is calling everyone to be martyrs or to go through such difficult times. Look:

20 Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"

21 Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what *about* this man?"

22 Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me."

23 Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you?"

Don't worry about what God is doing in and through other people – just worry about you. Are you loving Jesus and doing what He has called you to do?

John still had plenty of hardships. He was sent into exile in his old age, sent off to the remote island of Patmos, like the original Survivor TV show – he was Man vs. Wild. But he did live into his 90's and was the only one of the apostles not to die a martyr's death.

24 This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

But this is enough. It is enough for us to know these things – we all have more questions, certain things we would like to understand or have more information on, but this is enough.

So, what you doing with this? Is it making a difference in your everyday life? It's good to have lofty ambitions, and to have good intentions to change. It's good to be able to come into the church and refresh and recharge, but are you encountering Jesus out there – out in the real world – out in your daily lives? Are you confessing your sins and surrendering to Him? Are you letting Him work through you?

He wants to – so, why don't we all just take a minute to pray about that right now. And if you've never prayed to accept Christ before – if you've never told Jesus you love Him and asked Him to forgive you like He forgave Peter, why don't you do that right now, let Him wash away all your guilt and your shame? If that's you, just bow your head with us all and pray:

Heavenly Father, I want to come to you like this man Simon Peter. I'm sorry that I have sinned, I am embarrassed and ashamed of what I have done, and I ask you to forgive me. I want to be able to say, like he did, "Lord, you know I love you." So please, forgive me, and tell me how you want me to spend the rest of my life serving you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

And for all of us – Lord, we pray, help us to know You in the everyday. Help us to know you on the jobsite and in our homes. Help us to know you in our cars, in our cubicles, and on our couches. We thank you for Your willingness to forgive Peter, and Your willingness to forgive us. Speak to us in a way we can understand, and show us, where and how do you want us to serve you by serving others. We surrender our lives to you – in this room, and wherever we may go from here.

In Jesus' name, Amen.