

## Do You Love Me?

We all love a great recovery story and are familiar with these accounts in sports, politics, and business. But restoration in the moral and spiritual area is much more rare. When we look at the religions of the world, frankly, they are not much help for recovery from moral failure — except for the Christian gospel. The ability to recover from moral failures, large and small, is one of the great distinctives of the Christian gospel. We see this in both the Old and New Testament: Jacob (Genesis 28; 32); David (Psalm 51); Jonah; the apostle Paul (Acts 9); and classically, the apostle Peter. Peter failed on several occasions (Matthew 14:30; 16:23; Galatians 2) but his greatest failure of all was his triple denial of the Lord Jesus Christ at Christ's trial before Caiaphas. What hope for recovery could there possibly be? Our text today demonstrates for us the gracious and powerful cleansing and renewal available in the love of Jesus Christ.

### John 21:1-19

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. **2** Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. **3** Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

**4** Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. **5** Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." **6** He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. **7** That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. **8** The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

**9** When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread.

**10** Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." **11** So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. **12** Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. **13** Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. **14** This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

### Jesus and Peter

**15** When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." **16** He 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." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." **17** He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, 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 everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. **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." **19** (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

There are four key principles for spiritual renewal that are taught in this text.

#### I. **When Jesus reveals Himself, we must run to Him (vv. 1-14)**

The disciples were in Galilee because the angel (Matthew 28) had told them to do so. Fishing was Peter's and others' business, so they were about their business waiting upon the Lord Jesus when He appeared to them. Notice that He appeared to them when they were all together (including Thomas!) and when they had been completely unsuccessful. We often

underestimate the value of our moments of failure. These are the moments when Jesus often makes Himself known to us. After Jesus had instructed them to cast their nets on the starboard side and they took in a massive catch of fish, John knew that it was the Lord. When Peter discovered Jesus' identity, he "cast himself" into the lake to go to Jesus. This is what we all must do when Jesus makes Himself known to us. Upon arriving on the shore, Peter noticed that there was a charcoal fire (vs. 9). This "charcoal fire" is only found in one other place, John 18:18, where the servant girl and soldiers and Peter warmed themselves after Peter's first denial. This was an intentional reenactment by the Lord Jesus Christ, taking Peter to his painful place in order that he might be recovered.

## II. **When Jesus probes, we must open our hearts to Him (vv. 15-17)**

Jesus poses this important question to Peter three times, just as Peter had denied Him three times: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Nothing could be more painful to Peter than to have Jesus ask him these questions, yet Jesus' goal is a full recovery of His disciple. We must let Jesus into our histories and into our brokenness in order that we might be healed. Notice that in Peter's case, his restoration was publicly accomplished, because Peter's denial had been a public affair. Jesus was restoring Peter not only to Himself but to his fellow disciples. Three times Peter professes his love for Jesus Christ. There can be no greater question for any of us to answer than this: Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?

## III. **When Jesus calls, we must enter His service (vv. 15-17)**

Jesus not only restores us, but renews His call upon our lives and we must answer (see Isaiah 6:1-8). When we have failed morally, there are at times limitations to the roles in which we may serve. For example, if a bank president embezzles funds, he may be restored to his friends and the community, but probably not as bank president! Likewise, we would never have someone serve in our Nursery who had a record of child abuse, even if they had been fully restored. It is also true that some in full-time, paid Christian ministry are not to be restored to their previous office after sexual failures, but what is true is that all of us, upon restoration, are restored to His service. In Peter's case, he was restored to shepherding ministry and was told to "feed my sheep." Peter was to spend the rest of his life feeding Jesus' sheep through the Word of God and prayer. Thus are we to do the same. JC Ryle said, "It is not loud talk and high profession; it is not even impetuous, spasmodic zeal, and readiness to draw the sword and fight — it is steady, patient, laborious effort to do good to Christ's sheep scattered throughout this sinful world, which is the best evidence of being a true-hearted disciple."

## IV. **When Jesus reassures us, we must trust Him (vv. 18-19)**

Peter was no doubt terrified that, having denied Jesus once, he would do so again in the future. Jesus reassures him that he will be faithful until his death. Jesus also shows Peter that his death will be by crucifixion, just as his Savior's was. Tradition teaches us that Peter was indeed crucified upside down. Jesus reassured Peter that he would persevere to the end. He has done the same for us as well. This gives us confidence to serve Him no matter what the opposition, knowing that He will sustain us. John Wesley, when hearing that the Methodists were being criticized for their evangelical doctrines and practices, once said: "Well, at any rate, our people die well."

It was these poor, simple fishermen who eventually changed the world because Jesus restored His brothers to final relationship with Him and usefulness in His Kingdom.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What do you think Peter's life would have been like if the events of John 21 had never taken place?
2. What is distinctive about Christian spiritual restoration?

3. In what ways does Christ reveal Himself to us today? How can we run to Him?
4. Why is it essential that we open our hearts to Christ's probing?
5. What are some ways that Christians can feed Christ's lambs and tend His sheep?
6. What assurances has God given us that encourage our trust and obedience to Him?

### **Going Deeper**

1. Is there any area of your moral and spiritual life that needs to be restored by Jesus?
2. Go through the four steps outlined in this study — run to Him, open your heart to Him, recommit to His service, trust His promises. Share this experience with at least one other trusted confidant.