

"A WORD OF RENEWAL"

John 21:15-23

I am grateful for the opportunity to preach this morning. Pastor Chuck and Ms. Darlene, as well as a few of our other staff and members are away at the Southern Baptist Convention—I know you'll want to pray for this. Thank you so much for the love and support you've shown my family since we joined you several months ago. Serving you is a blessing.

This morning we will wrap-up a series of messages on The First Words of the Resurrected Christ. So far, we've seen. . .

1. On the morning of his resurrection, Jesus gave to Mary a Hope that Changed Everything.
2. Two unnamed disciples on Emmaus Road saw in real-time that God's Truth Clears up Confusion and Gives Direction to Our Lives.
3. Disciples in the Upper Room discovered Jesus to be the Ultimate Peacemaker.

4. Thomas learned that Jesus is Strong Enough to Handle Our Doubts.
5. Several disciples who experienced the miraculous catch of fish in John 21 remembered that clarity about the Lord and his calling upon them guarantees success in the mission he gives to us.
6. Jesus's followers were given a Word of Action to Make Disciples Everywhere.

Our passage this morning reinforces the truth that **the Lord is never finished with us. Look to your neighbor and say, "The Lord is not finished with you." I hope you meant it—because it's true!** This should be good news for all of us, because—whether we like it or not, in one area or another—every one of us experiences very real limitations. At some point or another, all of us have or will fall short of the expectations placed upon us, or the expectations we place upon ourselves. If we're not careful, those moments of embarrassment or disappointment can take on a life of their own and shape our outlooks and identities—indeed, our entire lives—in ways that the Lord never intended. My encouragement to you this morning—based on this passage in John's gospel—is that **The Lord is not finished with you!**

As you find your place in John chapter 21, verse 15, let's imagine the scene together:

- We find the disciples at the Sea of Galilee, a place very familiar to them. They've worked here, and they've experienced some incredible moments with the Lord here.¹
- The disciples had been waiting for Jesus's next appearance; Peter took the group fishing.
- During the night, when they were alone, they caught nothing; the day breaks, Jesus shows up, and they haul in 153 large fish. It's miraculous, just like the first time a similar situation occurred in Luke 5.
- They realize "it's the Lord" on the shore, so they get over there as quick as they can, where Jesus feeds them over a charcoal fire.

While several disciples were present, Peter is now going to rise to the foreground of this episode. So it's worth reviewing a little of his backstory to set the stage for this moment.

¹ F. B. Meyer writes of the location that "every headland and inlet [would have been] fragrant with hallowed association." See *Peter: Fisherman, Disciple, Apostle* (London: Lakeland, 1968), 108.

- We meet Peter in the opening chapter of John's gospel. Andrew, a new initiate into Jesus's group of disciples, introduced his brother to the Savior. **"He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)'" (John 1:41–42).** Jesus saw something in Simon that no one else could see—He looked through the rugged exterior and tempestuous emotions and saw the man he could make of him—a man so different in quality that it required a new name he would be called to live up to—Cephas (Kepha in Aramaic), which means "stone" or "rock."
- Simon Peter followed the Lord. And during their three years together, he became the team captain of the disciples. You see him at the center of many episodes recorded in the gospels, and when you see his name listed, you can rest assured of one thing—you never know what you're gonna get. He's the kind of guy that, when he speaks, he's not always right, but he's never in doubt. He's the consummate man of action—quick to respond in heated moments, in word and in deed.

- At the transfiguration (Matthew 17) he wanted to build tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. He missed the point of the footwashing in the Upper Room (John 13). When Jesus warned them of his crucifixion and of their own temptation to fall away, Peter replied **"Even though they all fall away, I will not. . . If I must die with you, I will not fall away" (Mk. 14:29, 31)**. And at the moment of initial testing, when a band of soldiers and chief priests arrived in Gethsemane's garden to arrest Jesus, Peter took a sword and shaved an ear from the servant of the high priest, who was named Malchus.

The night before Jesus's crucifixion grew longer, and the testing intensified. Jesus was put on trial, and the disciples could merely observe. From a distance, Peter watched Jesus, and other onlookers watched Peter. When push came to shove, when confronted and interrogated about his association with Jesus, Peter denied knowing him over a charcoal fire (John 18:18). Not once. Not even twice. But three times. He said he did not know the man on trial, and that he was not one of his followers. And as soon as the words fell from his lips, he looked eyes with Jesus (Lk. 22:61). Imagine the embarrassment and disappointment he must

have felt; three of the gospels record his response—he left the scene of his crime and broke down in tears. Some "Rock", you might say.

But we have to remember. . . Jesus called this man knowing at the beginning just how he would respond near the end of their earthly time together. He shared a meal with him in the upper room, washed his feet, and prayed over him with full knowledge of his denial—he even told him that it was going to happen. This is how Jesus approaches *us* in *our* weakest moments, those times when we feel blanketed in embarrassment and disappointment. He offers here a word of renewal—for Peter and for us—that reminds us of his big-picture plan for each of our lives—that when we're tempted to throw in the towel, or question our usefulness, **the Lord is not finished**. Look with me at our passage. . .

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.

I want to draw attention to **The Savior’s Approach** with Peter in this story. First of all, it is a **Wise Approach**. Jesus knew what was at stake with Peter, based on his very-public denial. Everyone knew what had happened with him; it was probably most deeply felt among the disciples. If Jesus ignores the incident and acts like it never happened, he reinforces with the disciples, Peter, and every person after them that events like this are no big deal—we just sweep it under the rug and let bygones be bygones, forgetting the past. That’s not what He does. He talks to Peter about it, because it does matter. And he addresses him publicly, because it happened publicly.

The Savior’s Approach is also **Kind**. Jesus didn’t rub Peter’s nose in his denials. He’s not an accuser holding court; he’s a physician aiming to heal, not

harm.² And again, he looks *into* the man, past the externals, to his heart. That’s where he questions him, “Simon, do you love me?”

It wasn’t long ago that Peter claimed to have the greatest love for Jesus, moreso than any other disciples. Jesus is asking him, “Simon, is your love for me greater than their love for me—as you’ve declared in the past? Are you still the standard by which everyone else should aspire to love me?”

Jesus does not ask if Peter believes, or if he is sorry for what he did (He already knows). He does not demand better efforts next time. Peter is neither expected to make up for his previous denial nor wallow in despair. Jesus leans into love. Not

² Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol. 7: St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 2:373. See also James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John, Volume 5: Triumph Through Tragedy, John 18–21* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). Boice writes, “The truly cruel thing would have been to let the matter go on festering in Peter so that throughout his entire life both he and the others would think that he was somehow inferior and unworthy of office though he had undoubtedly repented of the sin with weeping, as the Bible tells us. The kind thing was the public restoration so that Peter and the others would henceforth know that Peter’s past was past and that the Lord had himself commissioned him to further service” [1638].

sharpened skill or greater energy, but love, trust, and rest.³

Why love? Because to love is to give oneself to; to devote; to obey; to become defined by. To love is to cast away any consideration of a life apart from those loved. If Peter loves Jesus, everything else that is necessary will follow.

Jesus takes a **Patient Approach** with Peter, repeating himself three times, once for each denial. He didn’t rush it to save Peter’s squirming, nor lay it on thick to increase his sense of guilt and shame. His questions touched the wound. Rather than squirming, Peter took it in. Rather than pointing to the depth of his commitment, Peter appeals to Jesus’ judgment about him. He knew this was the moment of his healing. “Lord, you know all things”—you know exactly what happened, You know both the worst and best about me.⁴

³ Gary Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 595–99 and J. H. Bernard, *The Gospel According to St. John*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 2:701–702..

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John, Volume 5: Triumph Through Tragedy, John 18–21* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 1639.

Jesus knew that Peter’s denial had to be viewed in context of the greater relationship. This one event betrayed what Jesus knew about the true man, that (as nineteenth-century English preacher Joseph Parker wrote), “Under all the blasphemy there lay an affectionate heart, under all the lapse and shame, and treason there throbbed an immortal love.”⁵ Peter’s denial was a chapter in a larger story—not the whole story, and definitely not the conclusion. Despite the pain, Peter has loved the Lord and learned a humility necessary for what was to come.

The Savior’s Approach is Redemptive in nature, just as it always has been. His goal is not to build an army of unchanged adherents, but to cultivate followers whose lives take this shape of his own. Jesus had something for Peter to do—but not before he was broken. A self-sufficient, headstrong Peter wouldn’t have faithfully represented Jesus in the task given.

His calling is not just to catch men, but to nurture them, young and old alike. To work with the Chief Shepherd to cultivate godliness in them, feeding

⁵ Joseph Parker, *Preaching through the Bible, Volume 22: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 450.

them by the Word committed to him. But then he goes further. . .

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."

As you grow in faith and maturity, your life will look more like mine in the sacrifice you'll be required to make, Peter. While it would be another thirty years down the road, Peter would not only live like Jesus, but he would have opportunity to die like him as well. "Follow me." The man has changed, but the call remains the same.

Last, notice **The Savior's Personal Approach**. Jesus didn't avoid Peter, or talk to the masses generically with Peter in mind—he dealt with Peter about Peter.

²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been

reclining at table close to him and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"

²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

²² Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"

²³ So the saying spread among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

We don't know if Peter is intentionally shifting attention away from himself, or asking about John out of concern. What is clear is that what the Lord does with John is ultimately not Peter's concern. "I'm not talking to you about him; I'm talking to you about you! And *you* need to follow *me*!"

Jesus deals with us the same way. He knows where we've been, what we did or what was done to us, and why it happened. And his word to Peter is a word to us. He approaches us personally with wisdom, and kindness, and patience, and with a view to redemption. And just as he wasn't finished with Peter, **the Lord is not finished with you!**

It's impossible to know everyone's situation in the room. But certainly in a room this size, some of you might feel yourself to be right where Peter was. Do you ever question where you stand with the Lord? Are you saddled with disappointments? Your darkest moment does not have the last word. A bad chapter isn't the whole story. Your experiences, imagination, and emotions will conspire together to get you to think that you're done. But we are not those who simply live by what we feel—we live by what God says—and His Word to us is clear and true, life-giving and life-sustaining. **Takeaway Truth—The Lord is not finished with you!**

APPLICATION

The Lord is not finished with you. When you're tempted to question that, FIRST OF ALL, **remember the Lord's purpose for you.** He has called you to be disciple with full awareness of what he received when he got you. Just like with Peter, he knew both who you were and who he is making you to be. He has promised to save, keep, and transform all who turn to him in faith.

- **Rom 8:28–29, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to**

his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

- **1 Cor 15:49, "Just as have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."**
- He is not finished with you—He is working with great skill to make you like Jesus, and just like everything else that He does—whatever He starts, he finishes!
- Are you discouraged? Do feel as if you have sinned away any usefulness for the Lord? Look not upon your track record—look upon His, ask him to apply it to your case and begin where you are to walk in obedience to Him, trusting Him to make you like Himself for eternity!

The Lord is not finished with you. When your own love towards him feels weaker, SECOND, **remember the Lord's love for you.** He has proven his heart toward you by taking upon himself the *full punishment* for all our sin, betrayals, failures on the cross. **Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** All sin—past, present, and future. To hold you hostage to sin already forgiven would not only be unjust, but it would call into question the fulness of

Christ's sacrifice on your behalf. The book of Hebrews attests several times that Jesus died "once for all"—all sins and all people. Take him at his Word, and run to **1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**

The Lord is not finished with you. When you are overwhelmed by a particular difficult situation or dark season, **THIRD, remember the Lord's glory through you.** Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that the Lord's glory is best beheld in fragile vessels. Listen to this passage: **We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies."** Sustaining fragile people like us is no mere chore to the Lord—it is why He came, why He saves us, and the means by which He glorifies Himself through us. You are no burden to the Lord—you are a living billboard of His resurrection power and eternal purposes! His reputation is on the line with how he deals with you—and He has committed to eternally

glorify His name through those who come to Him in faith!

The Lord is not finished with you. When you feel alone, **LAST, remember the Lord's presence with you.** I'll remind you of last week's message, found at the end of Matthew 28. Jesus promises **"I am with you always"** to those ready to follow Him, making disciples everywhere they go. Who is it that remains with us, Church? The very one who just two verses beforehand declares correctly that **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given" to Him.** You are not alone. . . as you follow the Lord and walk in obedience to His commands, the One who alone possesses unrivaled authority in heaven and on earth is with you, empowering you every step of the way. The Lord is not finished with you. . . He is just beginning!

This morning I want to invite you to respond to the Lord's own invitation to love him, to trust him, to rest in him, to enjoy him, and to obey him.

- Perhaps you've never repented of sin and trusted in Jesus to save you and to change you. You can do that today. [Invite pastors and staff, worship team to front].

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CFBC, "The First Words of the Resurrected Christ"

- Perhaps you feel sidelined, and the Lord is renewing his call upon your life, like Peter. Would you come to these steps and pray.
- Perhaps you have a friend or loved one that is lost in sin, or maybe they started well but have gotten off track. . . you may want to come and lift them up to the Lord
- However the Lord leads you to respond, you do so, in faith and with confidence that He is more ready to act than you are even to ask.

Pray/Invitation