

2025-05-11 - The One Who Restores - John 21

Pastor Matt Johnson

Good morning. Happy Mother's Day. We're doing a couple of Mother's Day things. There are flowers out there in the café, and there's a photo booth behind the gym. You don't have to be a mother to get your picture taken, so if you want to get your picture taken, Claudia is out there. Just for anyone—please feel free to head out.

Before I get into the sermon, I also want to mention next Sunday. We're doing a Celebration Sunday with one service at 10:00 AM. If you're here at 9:00 AM, you're early by an hour—unless you haven't set your clocks from daylight savings changes! For everyone, the 10 AM service will include baptisms and child dedications. Then, after the service, around 11:30, we'll have a meal and celebrate our graduates. So please, please come join us for all of that. We're excited! We've got a whole bunch of baptisms; we've got child dedications—it's going to be a very fun Sunday.

Now that we're through all that, if you've got your Bibles, I want to open to John, chapter 21. We are in our final week of this series. I'm excited about all those things, but I'm especially excited for this passage today.

We are in John 21, the final week of our series, "That You May Believe." And for the first time in the Gospel of John, we are in a moment where John, in the unit of thought and storytelling, does not use the word "believe." It's the only passage in John where, when you read it the way he wrote it, you don't find the word "belief." And yet, it's a passage about restoring someone who failed in their belief.

Our question for today is:

What happens when your **belief fails?**

I don't know—maybe this morning, when we were singing "*I Will Sing of the Goodness of God*"—all the days of my life, all the moments—you felt a little guilt because you could picture a moment when you fell short.

I don't know if you ever have moments—I have moments—where I can't sleep because I remember a struggle from the past that I still feel like I haven't overcome. Or I failed. I yelled at my kids after saying, "*I'll never yell at them again.*" I love them so much. "*God, give me the strength to never yell again.*" And then my daughter shows me how great her strength is.

I have those moments where I know who I want to be. I know who I desire to be. I know what I think I should be as a follower of Jesus. And I fall short.

And in those moments of failure, I don't know what you think. But in those moments when my belief falters, when I feel far from the Lord, it's passages like **John 21** that give me hope.

What happens when your **belief** fails?

You won't forget the night, but remember the dawn

The key point we're going to make today is: **You won't forget the night. You won't forget the moments of your failure. But remember the dawn.**

Because today, we are going to see Jesus redeem, restore, and transform. And praise the Lord—He still does that today!

To that end, let's pray, and then we will jump in.

***Father in heaven,** God, we thank You that You so loved the world that You sent Your one and only Son, that whosoever believes would not perish but would have eternal life.*

We thank You that Jesus died, completing His mission, completing the work, so that we could have life—even now.

We thank You that Your Holy Spirit is at work today. And we thank You, Lord, that Your Spirit is working even now. We pray that You would be moving in our midst, that You would be giving us eyes to see and ears to hear what Your Word has to say.

Father, I pray You would speak to me and speak through me—that these would be Your words and not mine.

*And Father, we praise You for the work of Your Son—that He is the Messiah, and that in the name of Jesus, we can have life for all eternity. It is in His holy and precious name we pray. **Amen.***

Well, we're going to start today by looking at this question: **What happens when your belief fails?**

Now, I do want to say—you may be out there thinking, "Well, you say 'when' your belief fails—you don't have a lot of faith in us, Matt!" I'm glad you're laughing. But it's a reality that we all fall short. And when you become a Christian, you may think that the moment you become a Christian, it's all sorted out—you've got it all together. But no.

Because today, as we look at the life of **Peter**, we see that he has the highest of highs in the Gospel of John for followers of Jesus. But he also has the lowest of lows.

And as we dig into our passage today, we're going to see both on display in **John 21**.

After this, Jesus **revealed** himself again to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. He **revealed** himself in this way:

John 21:1 CSB

John 21:1 begins: *"After this,"* referring to the first two times Jesus appeared first to Mary and then to his disciples, and then to Thomas and his disciples. *"Jesus revealed Himself again to His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed Himself in this way."*

Now, before we go any further, we need to talk about a few things.

If you've got your bulletin, there's a giant chart.

John 21	First 20 chapters of John
An important moment takes place by the sea of Tiberius (21:1)	An important moment takes place by the sea of Tiberius (6)
The disciples are on a boat at night (21:3)	The disciples are on a boat at night (6:17)
The disciples lack fish (to eat) (21:4-5)	The disciples lack food to eat (6:4-9)
Jesus brings miraculous abundance by the sea of Tiberius (21:6)	Jesus brings miraculous abundance by the sea of Tiberius (6:10-13)
Peter ties his clothes around his waist before plunging in water (21:7)	Jesus ties a towel around his waist before washing feet (13:4)
There is a charcoal fire at the dawn where Jesus restores Peter (21:9)	There is a charcoal fire on the night when Peter denies Jesus (18:18)
Peter draws the nets out of the water (21:11)	Peter draws a sword (18:10)
Jesus serves bread, then fish the same way (21:13)	Jesus serves bread, then fish the same way (6:11)
Jesus calls Peter "Simon" (21:15-17)	Jesus calls Simon, naming him Peter (1)
When questioned, Peter affirms his love 3 times (21:15-17)	Peter denies Jesus 3 times when questioned (18:15-18, 25-27)
Peter affirms his love 3 times near a charcoal fire (21:15-17)	Peter denies Jesus near a charcoal fire (18:18)

Jesus declares Peter will lay down his life for Jesus (21:18-19)	Peter declares he will lay down his life for Jesus (13:37)
Jesus tells Peter "Follow me" (21:19, 22)	Jesus tells his disciples "Follow me" (1)

I'm not going to show this again, but it's in your bulletin. In **John 21**, a whole bunch of things happen that reference moments earlier in the book of John and in the life of Peter.

Everything we see in **John 21** gives us these little links to moments in Peter's life.

After this, Jesus **revealed** himself again to his disciples by **the Sea of Tiberias**. He **revealed** himself in this way:

John 21:1 CSB

The first one is **the Sea of Tiberias**. The **Sea of Tiberias** is where Jesus fed the **5,000**. It's the place where, as they were sitting there, Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "*How are we going to feed all these people?*" He knew how—but He was testing them. And they said, "*We've got to send them away. There's no way.*"

And then Jesus provides. From **five loaves and two fish**, everyone eats—and there are leftovers.

Now, the **Sea of Tiberias** is an important name for us to consider.

After this, Jesus **revealed** himself again to his disciples by **the Sea of Tiberias**. He **revealed** himself in this way:

John 21:1 CSB

This was the Sea of Galilee, but was renamed by Romans in 80ish AD

This was the **Sea of Galilee**, but it was renamed by the Romans in roughly **80ish AD**. This is like when I was in a parade—I went to the **Sears Tower**, but if you Google **Sears Tower** today, it's the **Willis Tower**. It just puts that right in—it changes it for you.

But the **Sea of Galilee** became the **Sea of Galilee** again because the Romans didn't want it out there. So the Jews renamed it **the Sea of Galilee**.

But this tells us that **John wrote the Gospel after 80ish AD**. And you may ask, "*Why do we need to know that?*"

Well, John wrote this after every other follower of Jesus—the original twelve—were all dead.

John probably wrote this around **90 AD**, in exile. He had seen the other ten—who were faithful—killed for their faith, imprisoned, and beaten. He himself had been beaten and imprisoned many times.

And knowing that this Gospel was written after 80ish AD should be a big deal for us, because we're going to learn some things as we keep going.

After this, Jesus **revealed** himself again to his disciples by **the Sea of Tiberias**. He **revealed** himself in this way:

John 21:1 CSB

*This was the Sea of Galilee, but was renamed by Romans in 80ish AD
This tells us that John wrote this Gospel after 80ish AD*

Most importantly, the **Sea of Tiberias** is not just where Jesus fed the **5,000**, but it's at a synagogue near the **Sea of Tiberias**, where they would have seen the sea in the background, where **Peter first declared his belief**.

You see, after Jesus fed the **5,000**, they were ready to make Him king. Because if you could feed **5,000** people, you could defeat **Rome**—because you'd never run out of food. And after Jesus fed them, they wanted to make Him king. Then He taught the people about what He was there to do. He said, "**I am the bread of life. It's not about this food. You must eat My flesh and drink My blood.**"

He was referring to what He would do as the **Passover Lamb**, referencing **communion**, and all of these things. Pastor **Matt Yamada** preached on this in **John** in late February.

But the point is, as people heard Jesus's teaching, they saw the miracle and wanted to follow Him, then He taught—and they started to fall away.

After this, Jesus **revealed** himself again to his disciples by **the Sea of Tiberias**. He **revealed** himself in this way:

John 21:1 CSB

*This was the Sea of Galilee, but was renamed by Romans in 80ish AD
This tells us that John wrote this Gospel after 80ish AD
The Sea of Tiberias/Galilee is where Peter first declared his **belief***

From that moment many of his disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, "You don't want to go away too, do you?" Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to **believe** and know that you are the Holy One of God."

John 6:66-69 CSB

And it's here in John, chapter 6: *"From that moment, many of His disciples turned back and no longer accompanied Him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, 'You don't want to go away too, do you?' And Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that You are the Holy One of God.'"*

These are wonderful words in the Gospel of John. This is **Peter declaring his belief**. This is a **high moment**. This is a moment that we should rejoice in and celebrate. Peter knows exactly who Jesus is.

You come to the end of the Gospel of John, in **John 20**, and it says: *"You need to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him, you may have life in His name."*

Peter is kind of saying all of that here. He **gets it**—sort of. This is the **highest moment of Peter in the Gospel of John**.

After this, Jesus **revealed** himself again to his disciples by **the Sea of Tiberias**. He **revealed** himself in this way:

John 21:1 CSB

So we're at the **Sea of Tiberias**, where Peter had his **highest high**. And this is how Jesus revealed Himself:

Simon Peter, Thomas (called "Twin"), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples were together. "I'm going fishing," Simon Peter said to them. "We're coming with you," they told him. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

John 21:2-3 CSB

Simon Peter, Thomas (called Twin), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, Zebedee's sons—one of whom is John, who wrote this Gospel—and two other disciples were together. 'I'm going fishing,' Simon Peter said to them. 'We're coming with you,' they told him."

Now, some people debate: Are they doing this because they've **given up**? Jesus hasn't given them the **Great Commission**, so they don't know what to do. We're not really told.

We do know that after the ministry of Jesus ended—after His **death and resurrection**—for a while, they didn't have income coming in. This could be like their version of **DoorDash**—they're just trying to survive for a little while. We don't know.

But what we **do** know is—they **know how to fish**. And so, they **go fishing**.

"They went out and got into a boat, but that night they caught nothing."

So—they **know how to fish**, but they're **not having any luck**.

Now, by the **Sea of Tiberias**, the disciples had once been in a situation where they lacked anything to feed other people. And they're there **again**.

When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus. "Friends," Jesus called to them, "you don't have any fish, do you?" "No," they answered.

John 21:4-6 CSB

"When daybreak came—so at dawn—Jesus stood on the shore. But the disciples did not know it was Jesus."

Now, this moment should take us **right back to John, chapter 6**. Because Jesus didn't just **feed 5,000**,—but in the night, He **walked on water**. And after they recognized Him and He got on the boat with them, they were at the shore.

That was a fruitless night for them. As they were going across the sea—they got stopped by waves. They were stuck and unable to do anything—until they saw Jesus. And then—they were there on the shore with Him. And here, in this moment, it's the same type of imagery.

And Jesus calls out to them: ***"Friends, you don't have any fish, do you?"*** And it's not like, *"Do you guys have fish?"* It's more like, *"I can tell you guys don't have any fish."* I don't know about you, but when I'm working strenuously and not very successful, these are not words I like to hear. But He shouts that out to them.

And they respond: ***"No."***

When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus. "Friends," Jesus called to them, "you don't have any fish, do you?" "No," they answered. "Cast the net on the right side of the boat," he told them, "and you'll find some." So they did, and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish.

John 21:4-6 CSB

Then He says: ***"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you'll find some."***

I always wonder how they were feeling, and we're not told. But—if my wife points out something I need to do—Happy Mother's Day—I get pretty grumpy. Even if it's the exact right thing. And so—I just wonder.

But—they listen.

And when they listen, they go from lacking anything to feed themselves—to an abundance that they're unable to haul into the boat because it's such a large number of fish.

Again—Jesus displays His ability to bring abundance from nothing.

The disciple, the one Jesus loved, said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, **he tied his outer clothing around him** (for he had taken it off) **and plunged** into the sea. Since they were not far from land (about a hundred yards away), the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish.

John 21:7-8 CSB

"The disciple—the one Jesus loved (John, the author of this book)—said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'" And when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, "He tied his outer clothing around him, for he had taken it off, and he plunged into the sea."

The language John chooses here—*"He tied his outer clothing around him."* We've seen this before.

So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and **tied it around himself**. Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him.

John 13:4-5 CSB

On the night when Jesus was betrayed, as these disciples were sitting around the table, Jesus got up from supper, laid aside His outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around Himself. Then—He washed the disciples' feet.

John chooses these words carefully to remind us. And I say John, but of course—it's the Holy Spirit guiding each letter.

And not only that— He plunges into the water. Peter has wanted to be plunged one other time.

He came to Simon Peter, who asked him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I’m doing you don’t realize now, but afterward you will understand.” “You will never wash my feet,” Peter said. Jesus replied, “If I don’t wash you, you have no part with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.”

John 13:6-9 CSB

He came to Simon Peter, who asked Him—this is as Jesus is washing their feet—and Simon Peter says, ***'Lord, are You going to wash my feet?'*** Jesus answered him, ***'What I'm***

doing, you don't realize now, but afterward you will understand.' And Peter says, *'You will never wash my feet!'"*

Not a **good thing** to say to Jesus there. But—that's what Peter says.

Jesus replied, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with Me." And Simon Peter said to Him: "Lord, not only my feet—but also my hands and my head!"

Plunged, the **language** is there making us **think** of these moments.

And **Peter is wrong**. And by the way—he says **three wrong things** in **three sentences** to Jesus. **Three** is an **important number** in Peter's life:

"No, You're not going to wash my feet."

"You'll never wash my feet."

"Wash all of me."

All Three times—Peter misses.

The disciple, the one Jesus loved, said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, **he tied his outer clothing around him** (for he had taken it off) **and plunged** into the sea. Since they were not far from land (about a hundred yards away), the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish.

John 21:7-8 CSB

But now—when he sees **Jesus on the shore**—He **ties his outer clothing around him**—
And **plunges into the sea**.

Since they were not far from land (about a hundred yards away), the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish.

And I wonder how they felt about Peter abandoning them in that moment.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with **fish** lying on it, and **bread**.

John 21:9 CSB

When they got him out on land, they saw a charcoal fire was there with fish lying on it and bread. "Fish" and "Bread" like John Chapter 6.

When they got out on land, they saw **a charcoal fire** there, with **fish** lying on it, and **bread**.

John 21:9 CSB

Not only fish and bread, but the charcoal fire is very important here. I hope you know the smell of charcoal; it's the best smell in the world. And I hope you know the smell of charcoal, because when you think about it, you can smell it immediately, right? There's

something about that scent that takes you to summer, takes you to those moments. But for Peter, it took him to a different moment, I think.

Then the servant girl who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, “You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?” “I am not,” he said. Now the servants and the officials had made **a charcoal fire**, because it was cold. They were standing there warming themselves, and Peter was standing with them, **warming** himself.

John 18:17-18 CSB

When Jesus is arrested, Peter enters the high priest’s courtyard. John helps him get in, and the servant girl who was the doorkeeper says to Peter, “*You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?*” And Peter responds, “*I am not.*”

This is his **first denial** of Jesus—of which Jesus had said, “*You will deny Me three times before the rooster crows.*”

After that, we find out that ***the servants and the officials had made a charcoal fire because it was cold. They were standing there beside it, warming themselves. And Peter was standing with them, warming himself.***

Scent is a powerful thing.

I’ve been taking my kids to the **Brookfield Zoo** on Mondays. One of the rooms—the **swamp room**—has a **gross smell**. But when I go there, it takes me **back to my childhood**—to moments with my **grandpa**, when we’d go out **fishing**. It takes me back to being a kid at the **Henry Doorly Zoo** in Omaha. And suddenly—I have these **floods of memories** I haven’t thought about since I was **eight years old**.

And **Peter**, in this moment, is **smelling charcoal**. Probably—the **last time** he smelled it was on the **night** when he said, “*I am not His follower.*”

Now Simon Peter was standing and **warming** himself. They said to him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” Peter denied it again. Immediately a rooster crowed.

John 18:25-27 CSB

And it wasn’t just the **first time** that smell would have been present—because the **other two denials** happened as ***Peter was standing and warming himself in front of that same fire. They were all standing around that fire.***

And they said to him, “**You weren’t one of His disciples too, were you?**” **And he denied it and said, “I am not.”** Then—one of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear

Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you with Him in the garden?" And Peter denied it again. Immediately a rooster crowed.

In the Gospel of John, it **ends there**. But we know from the **other Gospels**—he **fled, weeping**. And you might picture him **weeping at night**—but it would have been the **crowing of dawn. At daybreak**. This morning, I got to church at **5:30 AM**, right as the **sun was coming up**. And it was **so still**.

Peter would have been **weeping**—leaving in the **stillness of the day**.

When they got out on land, they saw **a charcoal fire** there, with **fish** lying on it, and **bread**.

John 21:9 CSB

And now—he is face to face with Jesus on the edge of the Sea of Tiberias, in front of a charcoal fire, warming himself. He's wet. He's soaked. And there is fish lying on it—and bread.

Before we go any further—how amazing is it that Jesus orchestrates all of this? How amazing that Jesus takes the time "Your highest moment, Peter, was at this sea. Your lowest moment was in front of a charcoal fire. I'm going to bring it all together. I'm going to bring it all together—so in this moment, we can restore everything."

It is such a wonderful, incredible picture.

I hope—husbands out there—when you plan anniversary dates for your wives, you think about the story of your relationship. You try to find key moments to plan around—so you can show your love and the story of your relationship.

When our second child, Levi, was born—Or when Lucy was born—we had complications. Jess had high blood pressure, and it was very stressful.

With Levi, he was a giant baby, and we had stress. We had a day before we had to go to the hospital, but it was stressful. And so—I did everything I could to think of how to set Jess up so that when we went to the hospital, she felt peaceful.

We had a playlist with Justin Bieber's song "Baby"—A song we never listened to—But that playlist is still on our phones from the day Levi was born.

I did everything I could think of. And I remember—we went into the same room in the hospital—The same room where Lucy was delivered after 40 hours. We went into that same room for Levi—with a completely different attitude. And I bring this up because the detail we take time to plan for the people we care about; Christ has done far more.

He waits until Peter is at the Sea of Tiberias. He waits until that moment. He has the charcoal fire. This wasn't a charcoal fire someone else had made. He's got it there ready to go. Because His restoration of Peter is not just going to be: *"Hey Peter, we're good."*

Jesus is going to bring back the scent, the shame, the moment, and He's going to bring restoration to all of it.

The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me. Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the father will honor him.

John 12:25-26 CSB

It's important to note here, when Peter denied Jesus three times, it was within 24 hours of when Peter would have heard Jesus say these words: ***"The one who loves his life will lose it, And the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me. Where I am, there My servant will also be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."***

When Peter **denies Jesus three times**, it is the **exact opposite** of belief. It is the *"He loves his life—so he should lose it."*

When they got out on land, they saw **a charcoal fire** there, with **fish** lying on it, and **bread**.

John 21:9 CSB

And there's this reality. I wonder—when Peter stood there, I wonder what went through his head. But I'm sure memories were flooding.

"Bring some of the fish you've just caught," Jesus told them. So Simon Peter climbed up and **hauled** the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn.

John 21:10-11 CSB

Then Jesus says to him, *"Bring some of the fish you've caught."* So, Simon Peter climbed up and hauled the net ashore. Now—it's interesting.

It doesn't say the disciples all hauled the net. It says, *"So Simon Peter climbed up and hauled the net ashore."* Presumably—the other disciples are still holding the net. Because if they let go, all the fish would have left.

But it's Peter's strength that brings it to bear. And there's this funny word here. And it's not funny here, the word "hauled". It's the appropriate word. But when you read this word—you should go back to John, chapter 18.

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, **drew** it, struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) At that, Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword away! Am I not to drink the cup the father has given me?"

John 18:10-11 CSB

You know, it's also important to note. John, the author, is the only one who mentions it's Peter who cut the ear. And you may wonder why there are little Christian Internet memes that joke that John and Peter were always competing with each other. Like John mentions, we raced to the tomb, and I got there first. Some people joke about this and think that John and Peter maybe didn't have a good relationship, but that's not at all what's happening. If Matthew, Mark, or Luke would have written that Peter cut the ear off, those gospels were all written before Peter died. If they had mentioned that it was Peter, well then, Peter, who was being persecuted heavily by the Jews, would have easily been killed for that because they would have said, hey, based on your own writings, you cut this guy's ear off. Yes, Jesus healed it, but even striking a temple servant was punishable by death. And so here we see Simon Peter, the one who drew his sword, used his strength to disobey Jesus. Now he hauls the net in.

"Come and have breakfast," Jesus told them. None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the **bread**, and gave it to them. **He did the same with the fish.**

John 21:12-13 CSB

On the other side of that, there's 153 fish. If you have a Bible that has little footnotes, that says why that's significant, no one really knows. There's just 153 fish. There are a ton of wonderful ideas. There's just a lot of fish.

"Come and have breakfast," Jesus told them. None of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, and he took the bread, and he gave it to them. And he did the same with the fish.

And I've already mentioned John Chapter 6, but the word for bread. And he did the same with the fish.

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place; so they sat down. The men numbered about five thousand. Then Jesus took **the loaves**, and after giving thanks he distributed them to those who were seated—**so also with the fish**, as much as they wanted.

John 6:10-11 CSB

It's exactly the same words in the Greek used in John Chapter 6 when Jesus is feeding the 5000.

This was now the **third** time Jesus **appeared** to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

This is now the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after He was raised from the dead.

And if you, if you haven't noticed the number three is important. "Third", the word appeared John 21:1, the same word is used.

He revealed himself. He revealed himself or he appeared. He appeared, depending on the translation. Three is repeated over and over in this passage. This is now the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you **love** me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said to him, "you know that I **love** you."

"Feed my lambs," he told him.

When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" It's interesting—because they're still sitting around that charcoal fire. There are **six other disciples** there.

And just like when he was asked, "*Do you follow that man?*"—he's in a **public setting** now.

And Jesus says, "Do you love Me more than these?"

Peter responds, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You."

Now—it's interesting if you see the word "**love**" in different colors. Jesus uses the word "**agapao**"—which is the **highest ideal of love**. Peter, in his response, uses "**phileo**"—which is **brotherly love** (like **Philadelphia—phileo**).

There's a lot made of this—because John uses the word somewhat interchangeably. Some people argue that Peter is saying, "*I don't love You as much as You love me,*" or something similar. But I don't think that's what's happening.

Peter, in the Gospel of John, has always been bold. But at this moment—I think we see timidity. He doesn't say, "*Yes, of course!*" He doesn't say, "*Yes, I will prove it!*" He doesn't say, "*Yes, I will lay down my life for You!*"—as he said in John 13. He knows he has failed. He knows he has fallen.

And so—his response isn't about proving anything. I don't think he's saying, "*I don't love You as much as You love me.*" He is saying that, of course—but I don't think the Greek is trying to make it a giant thing. But—he uses a different word. He lacks the boldness we associate with Peter. Whether it's saying, "*Never wash my feet,*" or cutting an ear off—whatever he's doing here—there's a timidity. And the focus isn't on, "*Yes, Lord, I do this.*" The focus is on what Jesus knows. "*You know this. You know that I love You.*"

And Jesus responds, "Feed My lambs."

These are **beautiful, restoring words**. Because Jesus has told the disciples, *"As God sent Me into the world, I am sending you."* And for **Peter**, in this moment, Jesus is saying, "You're still on that same mission. As God has sent Me—I am sending you." Peter, in this moment, is being told—*"The calling is still on you."*

Jesus is **restoring him**. He's **making sure** he understands. For us today—these words are **also important**. Not just for **Peter**—but for **all of the disciples**. They were **sent into the world**—so that we would come to know through their **testimony** and the **work of the Holy Spirit**, others would come to know. So—**2,000 years later**—we are **still responding** to the Gospel message.

But to **Peter**, He says, *"Feed My lambs."* And the **Good Shepherd** is saying, *"The way I have shepherded you—I am the Good Shepherd—you shepherd those I have called you to shepherd."*

A second time he asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you **love** me?"

"Yes, Lord," he said to him, "you know that I **love** you."

"Shepherd my sheep," he told him.

John 21:16 CSB

A second time, Jesus asks him: "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" "Yes, Lord," he said to Him. "You know that I love You." Again—the same pattern. "Shepherd My sheep," Jesus told him. Again—the commands Follow in the mission. Do what I have called you to do." He's restoring him.

He asked him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you **love** me?"

Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, "Do you **love** me?" He said, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I **love** you."

"Feed my sheep," Jesus said.

John 21:17 CSB

Jesus asks him a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" And this time—He uses the same "phileo" word that Peter has been using. This time—Peter was grieved that He had asked him a third time. Why was he grieved? We're not told exactly. But—do you wonder if, when he was asked the question the third time, in front of that charcoal fire, he was thinking about the last time he was asked three times about following Jesus? And it was—"No." And—"No." And—"No."

This time—***he says, "Lord, You know everything, you know that I love You."***

And his **hope** isn't in **his own understanding**—but in the understanding that Christ would have. Because—if we love God, it is a work of God. It is a work of the Holy Spirit,

opening our eyes to see the truth. And here—he is resting his hope that Jesus would know. That Jesus knows Peter. When Peter was sure he would lay down his life for Jesus—He was wrong. But now—As they sit there, Peter knows—"It's not about what I know. It's about what You know. **Lord, You know everything, you know that I love You.** Whether it's true or not—You are the One who knows it.

And Peter believes it. **And Jesus says, "Feed My sheep."**

The restoration is threefold. He denied three times. He is restored three times.

"Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don't want to go." He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, "**Follow me.**"

John 21:18-19 CSB

Jesus then says: ***"Truly, I tell you—when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don't want to go." He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God.***

Do you remember the Sea of Tiberias? It tells us this was written after 80 AD. Peter—around 67–68 AD—was crucified. He was crucified, declaring that Jesus rose from the dead. He was crucified—where all he had to say to get out of it was "*Hey—it was a hoax.*" All he had to do was deny Him one more time. And—according to all of our records in church history—he didn't just die crucified.

He said, "*I can't die the same way as my Lord.*" And he asked them to crucify him upside down. And they did. And John, when he writes this, he's not just saying, "*Here's a prediction about what will happen.*" Jesus predicted what would happen. Jesus is saying a prophecy here about the future for Peter.

But for John and his audience—they know what kind of death Peter wound up dying. To glorify God. And notice—It says, "*To glorify God.*" Jesus—on the cross—looks at His glorification. Peter gets to join in the work. Even laying down his life— The way he said he would in John 13. After saying this, Jesus told him, "**Follow Me.**"

The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must **follow me**. Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

John 12:25-26 CSB

And again in a few verses, he'll say. Again, follow me. And this should remind us of John 12, ***the one who loves his life, will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will***

keep it for eternal life. At one point, Peter was the kind of guy who would deny in order to save his life. But by the end, he was willing to let his life go. He was willing to let the world kill him in it's proof of his eternal life. **If anyone serves me, Jesus says he must follow me. Where I am, there my servant also will be. If anyone serves me, the father will honor him.**

“Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.” He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, “**Follow me.**”

John 21:18-19 CSB

In these final words to Jesus, Jesus isn't just saying you're back. You get to follow me again. He's telling Peter and the places where you failed. In the future, you'll succeed. “Follow me,” he says.

What happens when your belief fails?

You won’t forget the night, but remember the dawn

What happens when your belief fails?

You won’t forget the night, but remember the dawn

He Redeems

He Restores

He Transforms

What happens when your belief fails? You won't forget the night. I'm sure Peter never forgot the night. I'm sure for the rest of Peters life, he remembered drawing the word. And he remembered the smell of charcoal. I'm sure he remembered saying “No” three times, and that shame. But then I'm sure every time he remembered that he remembered a morning just a few weeks later, when the savior sat with him and restored him.

It's such a beautiful picture. It's such a wonderful picture of the depths that Jesus goes to for those who are his. He Redeems. He Restores. and He Transforms.

For Peter Jesus takes those moments of failure, and he gives them the opportunity to faithfully follow again. And praise the Lord that Peter does. He restores Peter. He doesn't just say. Well, you failed me once. So now you're not going to be able to be a part of the ministry anymore? No. Peter gets to continue in the ministry. Jesus restores him threefold. You denied 3 times, you now follow three times, and you get a chance three times to declare your love for me. And he transforms. Peter goes from a man worried about losing his life to a man worried about declaring the gospel and to a man boldly proclaiming the gospel even to his death.

The beauty of this passage for us today is that our Savior loves us the way he loves Peter. Our savior cares so deeply about us.

The only passage in John that doesn't mention the word "believe." The goal of the Gospel of John is that you would believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, and that by believing in Him, you would have life in His name.

The only place where the word "believe" does not show up is in the picture—when Jesus shows someone how greatly He cares for them in the midst of their struggle to believe. And that should fill us with such joy—that in our lowest moments, He can redeem.

That He restores us. That His goal isn't just to say, *"All right, you get to skate by, I guess."* But—He desires that we would be transformed.

We talked last week about bearing fruit.

The work of Jesus is a work that continues in our lives. And we get to see Him work again and again.

And if you're out there today and you're thinking, *"Well, I don't know, Pastor Matt. You don't know what I've done."* Peter did the thing that Jesus said, "If you do this, you don't understand the Gospel. Your belief is false. If you are more worried about your life in this world." And yet—Jesus restored him and redeemed him. The work that Jesus does is so incredible.

If our faith is in Him—In His transforming work and his redeeming power—We will see Him restore us and work in us.

Praise the Lord for that!

If you are here today—And you are a believer—And you struggle to believe that God really loves you—If you have late nights where you say, "I know I struggle with this thing. And because of this—how could God ever love me?"

He doesn't just love you. He loves you deeply. The depths He goes to for those who are His—It's like Peter with the charcoal fire. And the three times. And the strength. And the haul. All the different things Jesus does— His desire is that we would know His great love for us. And that we would walk as those who are transformed by His work.

Praise the Lord—That God so loved the world that He sent His Son. That all who believe would not perish—But would have eternal life. I pray you have that life. And I pray that in the moments when you're struggling to believe it—You turn to Him.

You don't forget the nights. We can't forget the nights—We know our sin. But I pray you remember the dawn. I pray you know the work that He has done to restore you. And to transform you. And I pray you are trusting in that work—And trusting in what He brings.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank You for the depths of Your love for us. We thank You that Your Son, in His restoration, goes above and beyond. He covers every detail. He cares for our souls in every way. And Father, we thank You that for all who believe, we are invited to have life in His name—Because of Your great love for us.

Father, we thank You that in our own strength, we could never love You the way You love us. But—You have given us the Holy Spirit—That we could strive to follow You. That we could be redeemed and restored and transformed by the work You have done.

Father, we praise You—that we can be called Your children—Because of the work of Your Son. We praise You that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God—And that by believing in Him, we can have life. And we pray all of this in His holy and precious name.

Amen.

The final verse of John says this, and there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if every one of them were written down, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written. And if you are a believer, you are a child of God and you are one of those things that if they were all written down, the world itself could not contain them. As you go, go in peace knowing the work that Christ has done to redeem, restore, and transform us.

Go in peace.