

Hope Beyond the Fear of Shame and Failure

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Date: 10 June 2018

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[0 : 00] Now, can you turn with me in your Bible to John chapter 21 on page 1090. Now, we're thinking this morning about the hope beyond the fear of shame and failure that Jesus and the gospel brings. So we're in John chapter 21, and we're going to read together the first 17 verses.

Afterwards, Jesus appeared again to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

I'm going out to fish, Simon Peter told them, and they said, we'll go with you. So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

He called out to them, friends, haven't you any fish? No, they answered. He said, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, it is the Lord. As soon as Simon Peter heard him say it is the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment around him, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the water.

[1 : 28] The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it and some bread.

Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish you have just caught. Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. None of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish.

This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. When he'd finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?

Yes, Lord, he said, you know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my lambs. Again, Jesus said, Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?

[2 : 35] He answered, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, take care of my sheep. The third time he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.

Jesus said, feed my sheep. Amen. Now, I wonder if you were to reflect on your life to date, what you would consider your defining moments to be.

In a sense, your life and mine are these collections of events and memories, things that have happened that are then available for us to replay in our minds.

So we have those moments that we love to think about, times of happiness and success and joy, times where everything just came together perfectly.

[3 : 45] But yet we know that there are other moments, other events, other memories which are profoundly painful. Those two are etched in our minds.

Times of failure, of shame, of disgrace. It could be as simple as being picked last in the playground.

It could be reflecting on words spoken in anger to somebody that we love. People that we failed to defend. Lies that we told to protect ourselves.

Perhaps a parent who saw nothing good in us. Abuse that we experienced. A failure to meet our own expectations or the expectations of others.

Shame has been described as a master emotion. Because these dark strands of our past, they can play and replay in our minds, seeking to persuade us that we are worthless, that we are unclean, that we are hopeless.

[5 : 01] That shame would seek to dominate and define us. Now where does shame come from? Well, biblically we find it way back in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3.

That the moment at which Adam and Eve decide to turn away from God, they decide that they're going to disobey God's word, they're going to eat the fruit they're not supposed to, they discover that rather than becoming godlike, and that's a wonderful thing, now they find that they want to hide.

There is shame that has entered into the human experience. They feel exposed and unclean, and they're seeking to hide both from one another and from the Lord God.

If guilt belongs in the courtroom, then shame lives in the community. I don't know if any of you have read Nigel Hawthorne's book, A Scarlet Letter.

The main character in that book is a young woman by the name of Hester Prynne. And Hester had to wear a scarlet A around her neck as a mark of shame, a badge of shame because of adultery that she had committed in her past.

[6 : 29] A story that really reflects on shame and community. But we know too that as well as shame being something that's heaped on us from other people, it's also something that we can pour on ourselves.

Shame can come because of experiences and actions.

Sometimes where we're the active agent and we have wronged someone, and shame is one of those consequences that we feel, but sometimes we're passive. We feel shame because of wrongs that have been done to us.

And what's really important for us as we set out on looking at this theme is to remind ourselves that when God created man and woman, Genesis 2 verse 25, we're told that they were naked and they were unashamed.

We were not created to bear that weight of shame, and therefore there is hope in God and in the good news of Jesus that that shame can be removed.

[7 : 47] And that's what takes us to today's account in John chapter 21, where we have, in a sense, the rehabilitation of Peter by Jesus the Savior.

But just before we get into that, just an important clarification to make, that we're very much dealing here this morning as we were last week with what we might call low-level anxiety about shame or failure.

But we need to recognize that for some people that anxiety runs much deeper. It might be clinical, requiring medical help, requiring counseling, requiring medication, etc.

Ultimately, the healing of the Lord Jesus is the hope for us all, that he is the one who brings help at that deep spiritual level. But that's not to downplay, of course, the importance of seeking professional help where that's required.

Now, having said that, let's see together how Jesus deals with Peter and how it speaks to us.

[8 : 59] The first thing I want to say is that Jesus offers hope beyond your failure. What is Peter's story up until this point?

Well, we read in Luke chapter 5 of Peter being called from his occupation as a professional fisherman by Jesus to become a fisher of men.

He was going to share in the work of Jesus, bringing the message of Jesus, the news of the kingdom of God to others. But now we find him, along with some of his contemporaries, fellow disciples, and verse 3, Peter says, I'm going out to fish.

And they say, we'll go with you. And they're all out there in the boat. Now, there's nothing wrong with that, but you do get a sense that somewhere along the line, Peter's mission has been lost.

That rather than being a fisher of men, here he is out fishing. Now, why is that? Well, we read, didn't we, in John chapter 18, and we could have read in other places, that Peter had very much failed Jesus in his point of need.

[10 : 18] Peter had been the most confident of all the disciples, saying to Jesus things like, I'll never let you down. Everyone else might, but I never will. I will die for you. Peter could say, did say.

But he abandons Jesus with the others that Jesus arrests, and he runs. And then in that trial scene, he denies even knowing Jesus.

But here's the wonderful thing, that Peter has failed Jesus, but Jesus is not finished with Peter. Here we are in a post-resurrection scene.

Jesus has died. Three days later, he's come back to life, and then he's making these appearances to his disciples. And here is one of these, in which he issues Peter, in a sense, with a new call to mission that recalls that first call to mission.

That we notice that both in Luke 5 and here, the call of Jesus happens in the same place, by the Sea of Galilee.

[11 : 29] Now here it's described as the Sea of Tiberias. And we notice to just how similar the two miracles were. That both times, the fishermen have been out all night and have caught nothing.

Jesus tells them, throw out your net, and there's this huge catch of fish. Here is Jesus deliberately taking Peter back to that moment where he was called at first.

And when John, in verse 7, the disciple whom Jesus loves, having reflected on what's just happened in this massive catch of fish, says to Peter, it is the Lord, we've got this wonderful movement of Peter where instantly he's running towards Jesus.

We might expect the opposite because he's failed him hugely. But he recognizes in Jesus the extension of undeserved grace.

That Jesus is offering kindness and restoration. That Jesus is continuing to provide for Peter despite and beyond his failure.

[12 : 44] We see that physically. In verse 9, Jesus has prepared breakfast. While these professional fishermen couldn't catch anything, Jesus has got a barbecue going, there's fish on it, and there's some bread.

And then in verse 12, there's the invitation, come and have breakfast. So he's providing for Peter and the others physically, but also spiritually. The same word used for fish there is, it's a deliberate choice because in John chapter 6, John who writes his gospel also uses that same word fish.

And it takes us back to the feeding of the 5,000. When Jesus multiplied a few loaves and two fish to feed a huge crowd.

And after that, Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. And he called on people to, as it were, feast on his body and his blood.

An image that before the cross, people didn't understand, and some were horrified by. But now after the cross, it's clear to Peter that Jesus is inviting him to feast on that forgiveness that is available to him because of the sacrifice that Jesus had offered on the cross.

[14 : 08] That here is this spiritual gift of forgiveness, of restoration, of reconciliation. Did Peter feel the weight of his failure?

Of course he would have because he's human. But those fears and that weight is met by Jesus calling him friend and that invitation from Jesus to come.

Jesus offers hope beyond failure. As we read through both Old Testament and New Testament, what we find is a catalog of heroes whose lives are redeemed from failure.

People like Jacob, who lied and deceived to inherit. Moses, who was a murderer. King David, guilty of adultery and organizing a murder.

Jonah, the prophet who ran from God. Saul, the one who was determined to destroy the church of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 30] But all of them received grace and mercy beyond these failures. There is hope for us. I wonder today, is there anybody here holding back from God due to a failure in your life?

imagining that there is some sin, some mistake, some wreck that you've created that's too great for God to want anything to do with you. I wonder if there's anyone here punishing themselves rather than coming to Jesus to find hope and healing.

Martin Luther, the reformer, Luther says this to those who would be tempted to stand on the sidelines thinking that you're too bad.

Luther says, join the company of hard-boiled sinners. Jesus is a savior and redeemer from real, from great, from terrible sins.

We need to beware the lie that would say that we are unworthy and that our sense of worthiness would keep us from the mercy of God.

[16 : 47] Because what we discover in the Bible, what we discover in Peter's story, is that our shame, our sin, our failure is outweighed by our need for mercy and God's desire to extend that mercy to us.

That Jesus' death on the cross is sufficient to cover all of our darkest moments. We are not to put our sin as being something greater than the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

As if we are in a special category. Jesus can heal of all sin. And hope begins when we humbly own our failure, when we acknowledge our unworthiness, but we don't run from Jesus.

Instead, we run to hear that invitation to forgiveness, to restoration, to reconciliation. There's a Christian author from New Zealand by the name of Rita Snowden.

And she said this in an interview. She said, You can ask me what forgiveness means. It is the wonder of being trusted again by God in the place where I disgraced Him.

[18 : 12] There is grace beyond disgrace. That's Peter's testimony. That can be yours too. And what about as Christians when those feelings of guilt and shame and unworthiness rise up again in our own minds?

When those events from our past come back to haunt us? We will, towards the end of the service, be singing a hymn before the throne of God above.

I find myself often going back to the words in the second verse which say, When Satan tempts me to despair, and he will, and he does, and we know this, and tells me of the guilt within, that guilt that is real, and we know that too.

Upwards I look and see Him there who made an end to all my sin. What's our response?

What's our response? It's to pray the gospel. It's to live with hope in the gospel. It's to shift our focus from our failure back onto the cross of Jesus.

[19 : 29] Jesus shows to us the undeserved love of God, and that's our hope beyond our failure. The second thing to notice in the story of Peter here is that Jesus offers hope beyond your shame.

In verses 15 to 17. So if Jesus has deliberately recalled that first call that He made to Peter to become a fisher of men, Jesus also recalls for Peter His denial, takes him back to that time around the fire where He denied three times even knowing Him.

Jesus takes him to that painful place in order that He might provide healing, like the surgeon who needs to cut in order that He might heal.

And there's two ways that this shows itself in John's account. Again, John very deliberately in verse 9 uses a specific word for a charcoal fire.

When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it. The only other place where that's used is in John chapter 18. The same fire, charcoal fire.

[20 : 57] Peter is warming himself while Jesus is on trial and Peter denies knowing Him. And if you've ever lit a barbecue or been around a charcoal fire, you know that it's a strong smell.

And smells can evoke strong memories for us, can't they? Smells that take us back to granny's home cooking. Smells that we associate with Christmas perhaps.

Smells can do that in our brain. They can take us back to places and times and events. You can well imagine for Peter around a charcoal fire, what would burn in his mind would have been that denial that he made.

That most shameful episode of his life. But Jesus takes him back there in order to heal.

We read in verses 15 to 17 that that conversation after breakfast between Jesus and Peter. Just as Peter had denied three times knowing Jesus, that's called to mind three times by that question.

[22 : 12] Simon, do you love me? And by three times receiving the commission, feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep.

Here again is the grace of Jesus. Here is Jesus seeking to bring as it were a memory replacement for Peter.

What will the smell of burning charcoal mean to Peter now? Well, it's around this fire where Jesus showed him great love, giving him work to do despite the fact that he made such a mess of things.

It's significant in the conversation that we see Jesus challenges Peter's pride. It encourages him to humility. Do you truly love me more than these?

Peter was the one who would say, I'm better than them, I love more than them, but gone now is that pride. Peter rests his hope in being known by Jesus, being loved by Jesus, and responding to that love with his own.

[23 : 31] Ed Welch, the biblical counselor, says that the king prefers his ambassadors weak and needy, and those qualities are at the top of an unworthy person's resume.

Jesus here takes Peter in his weakness, in his need, in his shame, and he turns his shame into honor. As he gives him this job to feed, to take care of the lambs and the sheep, in other words, to teach and to lead the church and the message and the ways of Jesus.

Here is hope beyond shame. Shame makes us want to run and hide, but from the beginning, what we discover, it is the goodness of God, the God who moves towards us to cover our shame.

The first time shame entered into the world, what did God do? He came searching for Adam and Eve, where are you, wanting relationship, and he covered them, he clothed them, and he promised a saviour, a deliverer, a champion who would come to bring an end to sin and shame.

It's the same in the story of Peter. Jesus moves towards him to cover his shame. It's the great message of the cross that we bring our sin, our shame, our failure to Jesus.

[25 : 16] He bears it, he carries it, he covers it, so that we might know his love, that his love and his grace might be what define us, not our sense of shame or failure.

Just as we close, John, who writes this gospel, wants us to be absolutely sure that it's the resurrected Jesus who offers hope beyond shame.

So in chapter 21 and at verse 1, we're told that this is another appearing of Jesus. And then in verse 14, this was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Very deliberately drawing attention to that fact. Why does that matter? Well, it reminds us that Jesus has gone through the cross, that Jesus has experienced for his people the shame and the humiliation of rejection.

of being beaten and mocked and spat at and being laughed at and hanging naked and dying under God's curse, dying as though he were a failure.

[26 : 40] Why? Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2, Jesus, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God.

Jesus took that shame and he treated it as a small thing, as an insignificant thing, because of future glory, because of the resurrection, because of his return to the glory of heaven.

His resurrection stands for us as proof. There is hope beyond shame. Jesus at the cross is treated as the scum of the earth.

He faces that judgment for you and for me, so that in him, you and I can live with hope that if our lives are defined by what Jesus did on the cross, that we can trust him, that our shame can be turned to honor.

We may feel, as I'm sure Peter felt, hopeless, ashamed, worthless, but we have in Jesus the king of all glory and honor, and he chooses to associate with us, and that because of his honor, we share in that honor, that we have an invitation, come to me, that can set us free from shame and failure and bring us home.

[28 : 29] There is in Jesus the promise of healing, that that weight of shame and failure that we carry will not be forever, that in the gospel that process of healing begins now, and it will be made complete in eternity, that we will stand face to face before our Savior without shame and full of joy.