

John: The Word Became Flesh - John 21:15-19

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, 4th. Good morning, 4th. Good morning, 5th. Good morning, 4th. Good morning, 5th. That's what I'm talking about. I know you guys aren't used to being in a large room.

We got to fill it with our voices and invite our neighbors so that they can hear the good news of the gospel, amen.

Amen. We'll go ahead and turn open to John. The final chapter, we are going to be finishing up our series, our study in the Gospel of John this morning.

Looking at just 5 verses, the middle of this chapter, verses 15 to 19.

Why don't we pray? Lord, we love the words of Peter who remind us that you suffered once for sin, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order that you, Lord Jesus, might bring us to God.

[1 : 20] And so Lord, we're here this morning because that truth is a reality in our lives. If we have about our need to Jesus, we're so thankful that the righteous was willing to die for the unrighteous.

So Lord, we're here. There's no pretense. Our works didn't get us here. It was solely by your obedience, Lord Jesus, your grace, your kindness directed toward us sinners.

And so we ask that you would meet with us, that you would work in our lives, Lord, no doubt. We were all in a different place here this morning.

Some of us here are feeling very abundant of soul. Others are feeling very scarce. And Lord, wherever we're at, we ask that you would be at work and give us what we need for today.

I pray to Lord that we would be aware of one another, seeking ways to bless and encourage and serve. And Lord, we'll give you thanks for how we've been able to participate in one another's lives today.

[2 : 47] And in that which you disclose from your word. We love you Jesus. It's in your name. We pray. Amen. So as I said, we are finishing up our study this morning in John's Gospel.

Looking at this middle section. If you want to title for the message, I've just titled this message, Peter Restored.

Chapter 21, in the context of the book, is an epilogue of sorts. What is an epilogue? It's that concluding section of a literary work where often the fate of characters and the story are shared. And here we get a peek into Peter's future. We actually get to see something even beyond that which is recorded in the book of Acts. And so just to bring us up to our setting this morning, the context, this is the third appearance of Jesus that he makes to his disciples after his resurrection. We know it's the third appearance because it says that in verse 14 of chapter 21. This time at the Sea of Galilee. Verse 2 tells us there are seven disciples that are present.

[4 : 11] They had spent the night there on the sea. They had been fishing all night long to no avail. They were on the sea. They were fishing for a hundred yards off land.

And this unidentified man instructs them to put their nets on the right side of the boat. They listen. For some reason they listen.

They obey. And as a result, they have so many fish, they cannot haul in the net. Verse 11 says there's over 150 fish in the net.

And it's at this moment where John turns to Peter and says, I know who just gave us those instructions. I know who just spoke to us. And perhaps they're a little *deja vu* sort of remembering what occurred when they were first conscripted into ministry.

Luke 5 records a very similar scene. Jesus saying, put your nets on this side of the boat. They figure out that it's Jesus. And so Peter as a result of figuring out who it was that just spoke to them, impulsive Peter, jumps in to the water, swims at full throttle to shore with the others in the boat following behind him.

[5 : 29] And it says in John 21 verse 12, it says, Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, who are you?

They knew it was the Lord. And it's interesting the way that that is phrased there perhaps. Jesus has, there's something a little different in his appearance.

Scripture doesn't tell us that, but we just sort of wonder. And maybe Tolkien got it right when he created that character of Gandalf. Not that he was writing in allegory, but certainly he went from Gandalf the Gray to Gandalf the White.

No good sermon is without a Tolkien or a C.S. Lewis reference. And that's all you get this morning. So, picking up the scene.

They are now all of them sitting around on the shore of the lake of basically, Galley is a lake. It's called the Sea of Galley. It's not really a sea. It's the early morning hours.

[6 : 31] It's kind of the best part of the day, I think. Right? Maybe there's a little chill still in the air. Starting to feel the warmth of the sun. Scripture describes there's this charcoal fire that's burning.

Maybe it's beginning to die down. Jesus is there with a handful of his men finishing up. What was probably an amazing breakfast. Jesus made it. Wonderful image of hospitality there, right?

Jesus cooking this meal to be a blessing to others. We don't know the content of the conversation over the meal. I'd like to think that there was much laughter.

Great affection for these dear friends, these fellow soldiers. They're now in this familiar place where ministry for many of them began.

And I sort of imagine in my mind's eye this is sort of a scene around the holidays, right? A great meal, a great feast and wonderful smells and the warmth of friendship and fellowship. And it's just a beautiful picture on this particular morning.

[7 : 37] But on this morning Jesus has some unfinished business with Peter. In fact, he has an important question for his dear friend.

And the Gospel of John is the only Gospel that records this conversation. And so let's just work through it together this morning beginning here in verse 15.

The first portion of it, John records, when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

And so the central question we're going to wrestle with this morning is what was Jesus asking Peter here? In fact, who or the what are the these that Jesus is mentioning?

And there's really three possible ways that we could interpret this question. And I would say all three of these interpretations are legitimate questions that Jesus certainly could have asked.

[8 : 45] And perhaps in them there is application for us as well. The first way that we could read this, what are the these referring to?

Is Jesus referring to the fishing boat? The tackle? The gear? Essentially asking Peter, Peter, do you love me more than you love your career?

I think it's a reasonable question. And perhaps for Peter there was a ton of his identity wrapped up, sense of worth related to being competent at his work.

We get this, don't we? We feel good when we're good at something where we're proficient at something. If you come to my house you will find there is an excessive number of gates on our property.

Because I built one and my wife affirmed me so I just built another and she affirmed me again so I built a third. And now everything has a wooden gate because I got pretty good at building gates.

[10 : 02] It's about my threshold of skill but man I built six or seven of them. They're everywhere. They're places you don't even need to go but there's a gate. And I think this desire to be good at something that starts at an early age.

I drove a young man with his mom last week and I asked how was your summer? He was probably five or six years old and I said oh I learned to swim this summer.

I put my head under the water in the deep end. And I was like remembering my own childhood, that moment, feeling so good like mom check it out.

And it's like I had just accomplished, right? Get Nobel Peace for something, right? It's just fantastic. We desire to be competent, good at things in life.

And when we don't feel competent the enemy assaults us as though we're some massive failure.

Men this can happen to us. If career is what makes us tick, where we derive our sense of okayness, wellness, what happens when you don't make the sale?

[11 : 16] You don't get the promotion. You're out of work. And if we put too much stock in our career then what happens is we can become very miserable to live with.

Or maybe women you start measuring yourself against other wives or moms against those super moms. They're out there. You've seen them on social media, right?

And he's like I can't measure up and you just want to sort of crawl into a hole. I think the apostle Paul understood how to transcend this. He wrote in Philippians 1-21 he says hey, for me to live is Christ, period.

And that which where he used to derive sense of worth from he even called rubbish. I'm going to find great joy in life, in living for your glory now Lord Jesus, not my own.

And I would say when much is taken away from us, when we can't be as competent as we once were, we're faced with this. And I remember in my life that season where much was taken away and I would just pray each morning Lord, let me be a blessing to someone else today.

[12 : 36] And I found joy again. And it was enough. It was enough. Well that's the first way we could look at this question Jesus asked. The second way we could interpret this.

Are these the tackle and the fishing boats? Are these the other apostles? So is Jesus asking Peter, Peter do you love me more than you love your comrades, you love your friends? Not his soul joy stemming from career but rather is it stemming from a connection with some other individual? Either by a deep connection with a particular person or many connections with many individuals.

And we can fall into this. Right? Man if I'm just not connected to enough people then my life doesn't have meaning.

Social media is such a weird animal, right? I need to have at least a thousand followers. You really want people follow, I mean like really?

[13 : 45] Or friends. Are they really friends? No one can have a thousand friends. It's just it's not possible. Real friends?

Or maybe it's my joy is going to come if I'm just if I'm connected with this other person. My joy will be derived there.

But they will fail you in life. I think insight for some of our merry folks here like our sense of specialness cannot be dependent on that other person.

Delight in that relationship but our specialness ultimately comes from where? Comes from the Lord. Which then as we understand that actually liberates us to love others well in our brokenness and our imperfection.

I think additionally if this were the way Jesus was asking the question it exposes how we often live too dependent on others for wisdom and help while never neglecting turning to the Lord.

[15 : 05] My phone a friend life is far more robust than my prayer life.

There's a recurring message that you get at least I think once a sermon it's all the time. And it's this message that you hear from your shepherds of you we need to be people that do what that abide that abide that have a robust connection with the Lord.

And I get it it's Jesus is not physically present in the way that your friends are. And so this it takes discipline I would exhort us if the summer has been a detour in your abiding with the Lord.

Now is a great time to begin to spend time again with the Lord personally. He wants to cultivate a righteous heart in all of us so that we actually have a sense of what he wants us to do where we're not always dependent on calling our our godly friend.

Now please call your godly friends but God wants to speak directly to you. And we we we hear him so much better when we are in a posture of receiving a prioritizing time with him.

[16 : 36] I love how Peter says this in 1 Peter 1 he says though you have not seen him you love him. And so this is a wonderful time to begin afresh.

Download a Bible app the dwell app great app to listen to grab a biography the great way that that can be part of your abiding. We have a ton of resources on the on the board out there couple of new books should I be a missionary.

How can I be sure that I'm saved you can use this as part of your devotional time with the Lord.

Those are there they're free but don't grab all of them grab one at a time and if you read it then the next one's free.

Okay that's how it works it's the honor system but the Lord knows. Now both of these are legitimate ways that you could interpret this they're sobering questions and essentially if we interpreted

Jesus's words this way he would be challenging Peter to inspect are there idols in your life that has supplanted me.

Even good things that now have your highest affection. I don't think that's actually what Jesus is asking though. I would suggest that this third interpretation is the best way to read this passage contextually in particular as we consider Peter's words and his actions over the broader narrative.

[18:09] So let me suggest that these here are referring to the degree to which the other apostles love Jesus. So Jesus is essentially asking Peter Peter do you love me more than these other disciples love me.

Now why do I believe this is what Jesus is asking. Well recall who is Peter. Peter is open mouth insert foot that's Peter.

And Peter has been boasting about his affections for Jesus being superior to that of the other apostles. That's what he's been doing.

He's been declaring this in the upper room John 13:37 he says hey I will lay down my life for you. Notice what Peter did not say the supposed leader of the apostles he did not say we will lay down our lives.

No I will. I will do it my life. Brash Peter loud Peter lack of self awareness Peter you got to love this guy.

[19:23] He so he so reminds me and I don't think this is all our athletes but this just seemed like there was a number of athletes this summer at the Olympics from America that were just.

It was all about me and it just was so distasteful that's what we have here with Peter that's been Peter's M.O. Elevated himself in fact he declared to Jesus on the Mount of Olives with the disciples. Jesus is predicting they're going to they're going to fall away. And in Mark 14:29 Peter says to him to Jesus catch this even though they will fall away.

I will not. I mean if you want the entire team to hate you right just throw them all under the bus while promoting yourself and that's what Peter does right.

Peter Jesus asking do you really have greater affection for me than these others because you certainly have boasted about it.

[20:31] And what is Peter's response well let's look at the second part of verse 15. Says he said to him. Yes Lord you know that I love you.

He Jesus said to him feed my lambs. So Peter affirms his affection for Jesus. You know that I love you.

And Jesus's reaction to Peter's response is what. Will then show me. Demonstrate to me Peter by doing something that I am asking of you.

Words are cheap. Do something. Do something. It's like a husband. Telling his bride oh I love you. And then in the next sense now serve me make me feel special.

[21:38] And what is Jesus asking Peter in particular he says feed my lambs right. Feed my lambs Peter. I called you into ministry. Instruct my followers.

Care for them. Pastor them. Coach them up in this life of discipleship. And what Jesus is driving at here with Peter.

You've been a talker Peter. But worship. It's more than words that cost you very little just to speak into the universe. Do something.

Worship is lifestyle. Worship is often costly. Worship requires selflessness. And what is worship it's it's us responding to all that God is rightly in this life.

Worship is more than just words. It's interesting there's a couple of words in the Greek used to explain worship. Proskuneo is used 48 times in the New Testament it means to bow down to kiss the ring to pay homage.

[22:44] It's much of what we do and we adore it's the adoration piece of worship. But there's also a word leitro use 21 times it's translated to serve. It's also it's another word used for worship.

So both of these words they tell us that worship isn't just adoration. It has to transcend that. It transcends what we speak it transcends what we sing.

We can't gather to adore and then scatter not to serve not to act. We can't even gather to adore and not serve when we're present.

Colgis prayed for lampstand their first public service this morning. It's a small church 50 or so people everybody's doing something everybody.

That's what we want to be and why can't we write because that's actually where the joy is when we serve the Lord.

[23 : 45] And oftentimes it looks at like serving one another that's worship that's worship. Jesus is calling Peter to make good on what he has been professing.

Man yes let's gather to adore but let's also serve and when we scatter let's continue to serve.

There's joy in that there's joy in serving the eternal King.

Amen. Amen. This week I picked up a young man and he gets in my car and he looked a little down and I said hey what what are the plans?

What are the plans for today? And he's like well I don't mean to be a downer but I'm going to my grandmother's house and we're going to memorialize and celebrate my brother's one year anniversary of his death.

And I was like well tell me about him and this day and relate the story and Fentanyl was involved in 1920 year old young man lost his life.

[24 : 58] And he was going to his grandmother's house and he was probably mid-twenties to just as a family they were going to spend the day together.

And we get to where I'm dropping him off and I was just listening and I said man can I pray for you? Which is what every Uber driver should do.

It's normal. So I pray for him and just ask the Lord to be present and to help and all the things.

And get done praying, gets out of my car and then he comes back, opens the door, shakes my hand. He's like thank you.

Like I did not expect that and it's exactly what I needed. Thank you, thank you. And it was just, it didn't cost me that much, a little bit of courage, but it was such a joy.

[25 : 59] I got to bless this individual, this family, pray over them, ask for God's help, power, presence, involvement in that moment in their day.

It's a joy. Church there's nothing better than being able to serve and it's how we worship. And Peter, Jesus is calling Peter, make good on that which you have been professing.

He continues to ask, look at verses 16 and 17. He says 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.

He said to him a third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Simon 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. And Jesus said to him, feed my sheep. So two more times we have the same question. There are some interpreters that would view Jesus asking actually a different question based upon the words that he chooses to use for love.

[27 : 04] And if I was to use the Greek here and the first time he talked to Simon, he says, Simon, son of John, do you agapeo me from agape? That selfless type of love.

And Peter says, yes, you know that I filayo you. I brotherly love you. And then he says the second time, Simon, do you agapeo me? Yes, Lord, you know that I filayo you. Third time the question is asked, Simon, do you filayo me?

And then Peter says, yes, I filayo you. And some interpreters would say, oh, well, agapeo is a stronger form of love. Filayo, Philadelphia, brotherly love, affection.

And Jesus kind of backs off and it just says, well, do you just at least love me as a friend. So some interpreters would view this section like that. I do not personally. I believe the words here are simply stylistic.

I wouldn't read more into this series of questions than is there on the surface and why do I believe this? Contextually, there's no reason to believe that Jesus is making a concession on his expectation for Peter to love him holy.

[28 : 16] So I don't think because Jesus asked in the third question, do you filayo me? Do you just love me as a brother versus sacrificial? I don't think Jesus is making that concession. And in fact, Peter's not grieved over the fact that Jesus would ask him, do you love me just a little bit less?

The text says in verse 17, Peter was grieved because he said to him a third time. Peter is grieved because he's getting the same question over and over again.

And he's answering it and Jesus is, for some reason, it's not computing from Peter's perspective. Additionally, why do I see these words just as stylistic?

Well, like most conversations between Jesus, this conversation and all of them, Jesus, Jesus didn't speak Greek. He spoke Aramaic.

Okay? What's Aramaic? Dr. V. don't chastise me. This is a very rough explanation. You can go to him and he will give you the details and correct me.

[29 : 25] But do that privately so the rest of us don't know. Aramaic is sort of this blend of Hebrew and Chaldean, like the language spoken in Assyria, Babylon, because Israel was an exile to Assyria, 722, Babylon about 100 years later, BC.

They picked this up and this was the common tongue. So Jesus would have been speaking this. This conversation is recorded in Greek, but it occurred in Aramaic. And there's really just one word in the Aramaic for love.

Also, if we want to look at the Greek, because God decided that Scripture would be recorded in this particular language, which is very precise, but Agape and Filayo are used a number of times interchangeably, even within John.

I don't think it's saying anything different. John 335 says the Father loves Agapeo. Agape loves a son. But in John 520 it says the Father loves Filayo as a son.

I don't think it's talking about, oh, God loves the Father, loves the son just a little bit less. They're simply used interchangeably. And in fact, Agape love isn't always a healthy thing, 2 Timothy 410, for Demas in love, Agapeo, with this present world has deserted me, Paul says.

[30 : 54] So I guess my point here is when we read the Bible, what drives meaning? Context. Context drives meaning even above particular words.

So be careful when you do those word studies. You're like, ah, what's the broader context? That's going to tell you, that's going to explain meaning even more.

So I believe this question is simply, it's stylistic. You know, Jesus also uses different words for sheep, like feed my sheep. He says, feed my lambs, feed my sheep. He's not talking about different sorts of sheep, sheep or sheep, okay?

John simply knows it's bad language skills to repeat himself, so he's using different words here. But the lesson, context. We don't need to be Greek scholars to understand this book, church. Now if you are one, praise God.

You will benefit the body of Christ greatly. But you don't have to be one to understand God's word. And you certainly don't need to be a Greek scholar to obey it. Amen?

[31 : 58] So back to the narrative here. The key question. Jesus is asking, right? He's accomplishing a couple things, okay?

Two things. First, he's calling for there to be alignment between Peter's words and Peter's deeds. If you are passionate for my glory, Peter, give your life to my service.

And the way that often plays out is in the way that you care for people. Amen? We believe this so much that actually our next sermon series will be devoted to just that.

How do we care for one another well? What does worship look like tangibly in the context of relationship with one another? Sermon series will be called We Will.

And we're going to go through really our membership covenant as a church. How do we have ministry in the lives of one another? Declaring to Jesus, we love you. Now live that out in the way that we serve one another.

[33 : 06] We believe in this so much. We're doing this with our discipleship groups, our neighborhood groups. How do we love one another well? It's what Jesus asked Peter to do.

And we're following in that example. How do we care for one another well? How we in large part worship? And Jesus is calling for alignment here.

Words can be cheap Peter. What do you do with it? But secondly, what else is Jesus accomplishing? He's restoring Peter. He's restoring him to a life of passionate ministry.

And this interaction, it's beautiful. It's so kind. Because recall, Peter three times denied Christ.

By an evening fire on the night that Jesus was betrayed in John 18, we have record of it. It says the servant girl said to Peter, you also are not one of these men's disciples are you?

[34 : 08] And Peter says what? I am not. Very clear. Again, different individual. You also are not one of his disciples are you?

What does Peter say again? I am not. Third individual. We can not see you in the garden with him and Peter again denied it.

And at once, as Jesus predicted, the rooster crowed. And Jesus is basically saying, what does it mean for the rooster crow? It means that it's morning time. And Jesus saying before it's morning, you're going to deny me three times.

And he did. And it's interesting because in Luke 22 verse 61, that at that moment, the Lord looked toward Peter.

Eyes locked. And Peter was crushed by the evening fire. And now we have a morning fire. And Peter sitting next to Jesus.

[35 : 09] And their eyes are locked. And it's here that Jesus restores him. And it's so gracious. It's so kind.

Because Peter, maybe he's getting a little irritated, but Jesus knows exactly what he's doing. Peter, three times you denied me. I'm going to give you three times to identify with me.

And it's so kind. It's so kind. And I think probably in the course of this interaction, by the time Peter started to get irritated, the dots are connecting.

It's a weighty interaction. And it's just overflowing with grace. And I love that we have here at the end of this gospel, this epilogue of Peter being restored.

He's now in a condition to care for others because he has for perhaps the first time emotionally swallowed that difficult pill called grace, the gospel.

[36 : 21] And maybe it was in that moment for Peter that he's like, wow, Jesus really is a savior full of grace. Really, he's a savior, the delights to forgive sinners, even for those that have denied him over and over and over.

And I think at this moment for Peter, he got it. He's staring in the eyes of Jesus. He got it. And it changed him, church. It changed him forever.

In fact, Scripture declares that with the rest of the section. Look at verses 18 and 19. Jesus says, 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, others will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. Something to look forward to, all of us, right?

Here's what it is. Verse 19, this he said to show what kind of death he was to glorify God. And after saying this, he said to him, follow me.

[37 : 31] And I love what Jesus says here as difficult as these words are. You might read this going, man, that's depressing. No, for Peter, this was joy.

Because for Peter, it's like, whoa, I do love God. I will endure. In fact, Jesus is saying, I'm going to persevere to the end.

And I'm going to demonstrate my love for my Savior, even in how I die. I think for Peter it was encouragement, sobering encouragement.

You will stretch out your hands, and that's a describing crucifixion. And what's interesting is by the time that these words are penned, the Gospel of John was probably written around 95 AD.

Okay? So when these words were spoken, well, when they're written down, Peter had already glorified God through his martyrdom.

[38 : 37] The early church fathers, they're unanimous in claiming that Peter died in Rome by crucifixion during the persecution of Nero, around 64 AD. Church tradition says Peter was crucified upside down.

There's not much evidence for that, but that's church tradition, not wanting to emulate how Jesus died. So he said, put me upside down. We don't know if that's the case, but that's the tradition. So the question is, do you think Peter experienced any sense of joy on this particular day, sitting on the shore of Galilee next to Jesus? Yes, no doubt.

I think for Peter he's like, wow, the kindness of Jesus. It's real. It's real. Peter experienced grace. And on this day, he was reminded that despite your failings, despite the fact that you have been proud, brash, inconsistent, guess what?

[39 : 42] Jesus loves you unconditionally. Called him to demonstrate it, but he totally forgave. Totally forgave Peter.

Church, we serve a God who takes broken things and makes them exquisitely whole. And that's in fact why any of us would be here this morning, because we have encountered the grace of God. We believe that the gospel is actually true, that we could be forgiven. And maybe some of you need to hear that this morning, because I think as we hear this, as we're reminded of the gospel, it is fuel for us to then actually love one another well, for us to have ministry in the lives of people. And that's Peter. In fact, Peter is recorded in Acts 2. Who's the first one to get out there and preach? It's Peter.

It's Peter. Grace fueled his life. And perhaps you need to hear that what God says about you actually is true, right?

[40 : 53] Like as the prophet Isaiah said, that as though your sins were scarlet, they would be white as snow. Could that be true? I could be forgiven. I'm not beholden to the sins of the past.

Praise God. I want to be used by him. Lord, what do you want to do with me today? Let me bless somebody. It's fuel. Because as we believe that we're forgiven, we can become a great force for the gospel in this life church.

Amen. And that's why we exist. Father, thank you. Thank you for the story of Peter. Thank you for the way that, Lord, you were so kind.

And maybe in the moment Peter didn't catch what you were doing, but it connected, he got it. And Lord, you didn't have to give Peter the opportunity to repeat his confession of loving you three times, but you gave him that.

You gave him that. And Lord, I love Peter. Because he believed the gospel was true for himself.

[41 : 59] Those words that he once used to proclaim himself, it says in Acts 2.40, that with many other words, he bore witness.

And Lord, we want to use our words. We want to use our lives in your service. So Lord, we commit today. We commit this new academic year.

Lord, you have blessed us with a new space. You've blessed us, allowing us to plant another church and another part of this city.

And Lord, we want to see people experience healing, experience forgiveness, experiencing new life and eternal life. So Lord, fill us with the joy of your salvation.

Remind us today that we're forgiven and let us bless one another well. In your name we pray, Jesus. Amen.