

The End of the Beginning - Part 2

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Preacher: David Calderwood

- [0 : 00] John chapter 21. After this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way.
- Simon Peter, Thomas, called the twin, Nathaniel of Canaan Gallery, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing.
- And they said to him, We'll go with you. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.
- Jesus said to them, Children, do you have any fish? They answered him, No. He said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you'll find some.
- So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved, therefore said to Peter, It is the Lord.
- [1 : 16] When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.
- When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.
- So Simon Peter went aboard, and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.
- Jesus said to them, Come, have breakfast. Now none of the disciples dared ask him, Who are you? They knew it was the Lord.
- Jesus came and took the bread, and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time, that Jesus was revealed to the disciples, after he was raised from the dead.
- [2 : 28] When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, Do you love me more than these? He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.
- He said to him, Feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.
- He said to him, Tend my sheep. He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?
- Peter was grieved, because he said to him the third time, Do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.
- Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted.
- [3 : 34] But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.

And after saying this, he said to him, Follow me. Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had also leaned back against him during the supper and had said, Lord, who is that is going to betray you?

When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, What about this man? Jesus said to him, If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?

You follow me. So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die.

But if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things and who has written these things.

[4 : 40] And we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Well, good morning, everyone. I don't know what all the talk about cold weather is. I've been waiting for this for months. So let's no more talk about cold weather. This is ideal weather.

Well, at least for me anyway. Okay, let's turn to God's word this morning. And I want to introduce it by connecting the gospel with Operation Overlord, which was the code name for the Allied operation to liberate Europe from Nazi occupation.

And it had several phases. There was years of preparation. Then D-Day was the landing in Normandy in which a beachhead was established.

And then the third phase, the final phase, was a push to Berlin, resulting in victory in Europe about 10 months later. I want to suggest that in the same way, the gospel, in a sense, is Jesus' code name for Operation Lord Over Everything to the End of the Earth.

[6 : 09] It was an operation to liberate God's people from the darkness of sin and bring them into light and life in Jesus. And the thing I want you to understand this morning is that it also had several phases.

There were many, many years of preparation. I guess that's what we would call the Old Testament. And then Jesus had his own personal D-Day, as it were. It was launched.

And that established the beachhead of salvation through the brutal, bloody events of his life, death, and resurrection. And then, as we move into chapter 20 and 21 in John, the push begins to take the good news of liberation and renewal in Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Phases in this work of God's salvation. And friends, I suggested last Sunday that John 21 is the end of the beginning. The beachhead has been established.

And Jesus affirmed that when he greeted his disciples on the day of his resurrection with the words, Peace be with you, and breathed his Holy Spirit into them.

[7 : 17] Turn back to chapter 20, verses 19 to 22. I'm going to read them to you now. They're important words to remember in the context of chapter 21. On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, that's the day of his resurrection, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews.

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then his disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, emphasis, Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had acted on their behalf to secure a new state of peace with God. He had dealt with God's wrath, dealt with a penalty for their sins, had secured forgiveness.

And in the picture language of Ezekiel, he had breathed new life into those dead in sin through his Holy Spirit. That's peace with God.

[8 : 34] They also experienced the peace of God. Jesus came to them in that moment in warmth and friendship, though they had abandoned him and may well have expected his reprimand.

He came to them as one with power to overcome sin, death, to overcome the world in rebellion against God. And he came to them speaking peace to fearful, doubting, troubled hearts.

Peace with God and peace of God. The beachhead has been established. But at the same time, John 21 is also the beginning of the end as the next phase of God's operation and salvation begins.

Jesus is, in effect, saying to them, I think, this is who you now are in me, the resurrection man. This is the new resurrection community I've made you and which you have the privilege to help in extending to the ends of the earth so that all my people will be saved just like you've been saved.

And ultimately then, God will be glorified as he has always planned to be glorified. And so this interaction with Peter, in a sense, is Jesus joining the dots for Peter.

[9 : 48] And the question is, is it restoration, is it a challenge, or is it a commission? Well, most commonly, verses 15 to 19 are presented as the restoration of Peter to the ranks of the disciples soon to become apostles because they see Jesus' three questions corresponding to Peter's three denials of Jesus.

But I believe something much bigger is on show in the way John constructs this narrative. Now, have a look at verse 15 there to start with. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

They'd been enjoying breakfast with Jesus, a time of fellowship in which he manifested more of himself as the resurrection man to them. He displayed his commitment to and love of and concern for their needs.

Then, out of the blue, Jesus asked Peter this confronting question and he asked it in a very formal, business-like way.

The fact that Jesus uses the term, uses the name Simon, son of John, is interesting. And it takes me back to chapter 1, verse 42. And I'm going to turn back and read that, chapter 1, verse 40, through to 42, actually, where it's the very first time Jesus meets Simon and it's in the context of Jesus calling his disciples.

[11 : 18] It says this, one of the two who heard John speak, that's John the Baptist, that is, one of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first found his own brother, Simon, and said to him, we have found the Messiah, which means Christ. He brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, so, you are Simon, the son of John? You shall be called Cephas, which means Peter. Now, it's interesting that John, I think, again, takes us back to chapter 1, as the fishing story in verses 1 to 3 also took us back to chapter 1.

So it goes like this, I think, when Peter first met, sorry, when Jesus first met Peter, it was as God's Messiah. We have found the Messiah, God's long-awaited Savior and King.

And it was in that context and in that role that Jesus called Peter to be a disciple or follower and renamed him. Now, in those days, names were really significant.

[12 : 30] They described the whole personality. So therefore, changing someone's name was a really big deal. In fact, it was an assertion of authority or ownership by the one changing the name.

So I think Jesus is saying that Peter was his person. Peter, you are now my person. You are now to live under me as Messiah.

And one day, I will make you to become as solid and dependable as a rock. So here's the point. I believe their first conversation was all about identity and commitment.

First of all, Jesus to him in calling him to be a disciple and then his to Jesus living up to, as it were, his new name, his new status conferred on him by Messiah.

Now, back in John chapter 21, their last recorded conversation is also about identity and commitment. Peter, says Jesus, having enjoyed my fellowship over breakfast, my display of identity and commitment to you, the big question now is how much do I shape your identity and your affection?

[13 : 48] Peter, who or what is your affection and treasure? More than these, is it your fishing buddies and the fishing and the current lifestyle you've always known, the one you've loved, the one you're comfortable in, is that what will shape your future or is it me?

Is that what will shape your affection or is it me? Peter, what will shape your future in life? Will it be me, the resurrection man and the identity, privilege and responsibility of being my person in my new resurrection community?

And so, Jesus pushes him again and again. Do you love me, Peter? That is, he leaves out the comparative bit this time.

It's, do you love me absolutely, not comparatively, but with total all-in identity and commitment from the inside out? Peter, do you love me? Now, it does seem like Jesus was reminding Peter of his cheap words just a couple of weeks earlier.

And again, those words were expressed in the context of fellowship over a meal, remember, in the upper room. And remember, the situation, it's a very tragic situation. Peter, Peter boasted such absolute love for, identity with and commitment to Jesus that says, Peter, I will sacrifice my life for you, Jesus, any time.

[15 : 18] And that was back in chapter 13. And of course, we know now that just hours later, hours later, he had repeatedly disowned Jesus completely and was cowering in the shadows in fear.

Against that, back in chapter 1, chapter 21, against that, Peter still appears to be the natural leader of the disciples. For instance, in chapter 21, the previous night, it was Peter who set the lead in going fishing and the rest of the disciples had gone with him.

So here's the issue. The disciples would follow Peter, but would Peter follow Jesus? Now, into that mix, we've got to remember that Peter had not wanted a crucified Lord.

He really wanted a military saviour who would deliver them from the Romans and make Israel great again. And remember, when Jesus was arrested, it was Peter who had a sword.

It was Peter who unsheathed it and was prepared to fight. He was thinking very much in terms of a physical Messiah deliverer. And the question now put to him by Jesus was, Peter, are you now ready to commit to me as I have manifested myself to you?

[16 : 48] The sacrificial lamb, the crucified Messiah, the king of love and peace, rather than as Peter wanted or even demanded Jesus should be.

Would Peter lead his fellow disciples down this pathway of identity and commitment to the one who delivers spiritually and death into life and life with God?

But there's an even bigger context yet for this discussion. Look back to John 20, 21, the verses I read to you just at the start.

I'll read one of the verses again, verse 21 and 22. So Jesus said to them again, peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

Those two phrases very, very closely connected. And I want to highlight this morning that connection, the second of those connections, as so. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

[18 : 03] Friends, here's the context of this conversation with Peter and Jesus in chapter 21. The disciples, who after all were the first fruits of the resurrection community, are to be patterned on the resurrection man.

Here, from Jesus' own lips, is our identity, shape, and commitment going forward. As for Jesus, so for you who have experienced the gospel of peace in Jesus.

As Jesus demonstrated all-in identity with broken, dysfunctional, rebellious, lost people by being in the world as a human, so we have been called out of the world, renewed, brought into the new resurrection community or church, then sent back into the world by Jesus to pass on the gospel of peace to equally needy people.

Sorry, to pass on the gospel of peace to equally needy people. And as Jesus' success was patterned through absolute love, unswerving obedience towards his father, and total commitment to following his father's salvation purpose, so we are to be shaped by loving, obeying, and following Jesus.

As Jesus taught, modeled, challenged, prayed, cared, nurtured, showed compassion, sacrificed himself, so we are to display all those characteristics.

[19 : 46] So we are to display, in summary, the mind of Christ in every way, at every point in life. That is our identity. That is our task, our commitment.

Of course, that's a huge task. What's our confidence in being able to deliver in such a task? Well, again, chapter 20, that like these disciples, like these first fruits of the new resurrection community, Jesus has also breathed the power of the Holy Spirit into us, so that the mind of Christ grows in our heart and overflows into our actions.

Now, back into chapter 21, in this conversation between Peter and Jesus, and we see here that Jesus uses the same language, loving, following, and obeying.

So, friends, my suggestion to this morning is that Jesus is giving Peter a reminder or a challenge to express his ownership by the resurrection man, rather than some new commission that's laid on Peter as an extra task.

It's as if Jesus is saying, Peter, I have made you my person from the very start. now you need to demonstrate what it is to live under the lordship of resurrection man in the new resurrection community.

[21 : 24] Peter, as you enjoy fellowship in the gospel of peace, so you should be unstoppable in your desire to extend this same privilege to others. How will that be expressed?

Well, primarily in this conversation with Peter, who now I'm saying is representative of the disciples and representative then of all Christians, the first fruits and those following them. Primarily, this will be expressed in feeding, tending, or shepherding, those words are all sort of interchangeable, feeding, tending, or shepherding others in the resurrection community in a way that reflects Jesus and Jesus' ministry commitment.

On the ground, that will look like gently pushing people to live under the lordship of Jesus, the source of life and every need. That's not natural to us.

We have to gently push people and remind them to do that. We've got to nurture clear expression of the mind of Christ or life shaped by God's Holy Spirit at every point.

We've got to teach people and help people to say yes to righteousness and no to sin. We've got to promote unity as the key evidence of Spirit renewed and controlled community as per the teaching and prayer of Jesus on the night before he died.

[22 : 46] If you go back through the chapters in that meal and the evening of Christ's death and then Christ's prayer, unity appears over and over and over. Love and unity, love and unity, unity and love.

Promoting unity is the key evidence of Spirit renewed and controlled community. So Jesus is joining the dots. But there's another thing I want to draw your attention to as I move to a conclusion here.

That is Jesus is pointing out to Peter that all in commitment will make the impossible possible and the possible impossible.

Now that's a bit of a complicated heading as I'm reading that. I'm just thinking, my goodness. Anyway, I'll try and explain it to you. Peter is still having the dots connected to him by Jesus in two very practical points of commitment here as we wind up these verses.

The first is this, in respect of Peter's desire to show total commitment to Jesus, I'm taking you back now to what Peter said on the night of Jesus' crucifixion.

[23 : 56] That is, I am prepared to sacrifice my life for you, Jesus. But of course, fear had caused him to hold back from sacrificing his own life for the sake of Jesus.

Now, interestingly, verse 18 and 19, Jesus informs Peter that such a display remains not only possible for Peter, but will actually happen as it were the second time round.

So the question is, what will make the difference to his commitment second time round? What will enable Peter to stay faithful to Jesus, collapse and fear and retreat?

Well, look at the end of the verse there. Follow me. Following Jesus will be the difference.

That is, Peter, keep your eyes firmly fixed on me, says Jesus. Keep your eyes firmly fixed on me as the resurrection man and as part of the new resurrection community, which will convince you there is something better than this life, something bigger than this life, and that is life with the resurrection man in heaven.

[25 : 13] Friends, Peter was learning that the lordship of Jesus is not just something to live under, it's something to die under if required.

And in his death, Jesus says, you will glorify the father. You brought shame on Messiah when you first stood in retreat and fear and denial, but following Jesus, now as a member of the new resurrection community, having experienced the gospel of peace, the renewal that comes with it, Peter, you will bring glory to the Lord.

And the second practical point in verse 20, 23, is all in commitment to Jesus will stop a wrong sort of competitiveness in this new resurrection community.

Now, it's not clear from the text, but it would appear that when Peter inquired about John's future, that Jesus heard something more than just curiosity in Peter's inquiry.

So the question then is, did Jesus hear competition based in fear that Jesus loved the beloved disciple? That's who John was constantly referred to, the beloved disciple, the one that Jesus loved most.

[26 : 42] Did Jesus hear competition based in fear that Jesus would love the beloved John more than him?

Did Jesus hear resentment because Peter thought Jesus might not ask his beloved disciple to sacrifice as much as he just said he would be asking Peter to sacrifice?

Jesus' answer to Peter is very, very clear. Verse 22, you, and it's a present tense, you, keep on following me.

Jesus apparently hears pretty blunt with Peter. He said, Peter, this really isn't your concern. Even stronger, Peter, this isn't even your business. What you need to do is keep on following me.

You keep your eyes on me. Take your lead and shape from me and not comparatively what I'm asking others to do or not do and not competitively I'm asking you to do more than them.

[27 : 55] Don't do that, Peter. Keep your eyes on me. So do you see how that makes the impossible possible that Peter would step up eventually and sacrifice his life for Jesus.

And it then also makes it possible, this thing that we normally devolve to, competition and comparison, it makes it impossible because if we're just keeping our eyes on Jesus, then there's just Jesus and me, regardless of what Jesus does with others.

My friends, if only we would hate these words of Jesus. if only we would so identify with Jesus and be so shaped by him and so committed to loving, obeying and following him, then we will see incredible displays of self-sacrifice and trust in our church family or otherwise known now as a resurrection community.

if only we would so identify with Jesus and be so shaped by him, so committed to loving, obeying and following him, then we will never see competition or resentment in ministry matters within our church family.

And how refreshing would that be? All would be tending and feeding the sheep. All of that would be done for the good of the sheep and ultimately for the glory of the shepherd.

[29 : 23] Friends, very simple question as we finish John and as we move into this, as we sense our part in this final phase of God's operation salvation.

What are you waiting for? What could hold you back? Be the shepherd Jesus urges you to be.

Feed his sheep with selflessness, tenderness, and with the commitment of Jesus himself. And do it all for the glory of God.

Thank you very much for listening to me this morning. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.