

# Come to LIFE this Easter Holidays

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 12 April 2015

Preacher: Sam Low

[ 0 : 00 ] Father God, we thank you that you are a gracious God. We thank you that in your infinite wisdom, you have revealed to us what we need to know so that we may trust you and live lives that are joy-filled and strengthened by you.

We ask for the ability to hear you speak today. We ask for the humility to recognise failures within ourself. And we ask for the security to be able to confess them confidently, knowing that your love is sufficient.

Amen. Have you wondered why John's Gospel finishes here? It feels like it would make more sense if it finished at the end of the chapter before.

Jesus has died. Jesus is risen. Jesus has told his disciples that they've got a job. He's commissioned them. So why this extra story? Why not skip to the bit where Jesus gets on a cloud and goes up to heaven and that be the end of it?

Why Peter? Why here? Well, we know that Peter is a disciple, but he's not just any disciple. Peter is one of Jesus' three closest confidants.

[ 1 : 11 ] He's the one who uttered the famous declaration, you are the Christ. He's an act first, think later kind of guy, and he gets things done for Jesus.

On the night of Jesus' arrest, when Jesus is explaining that all will scatter once he is arrested, Peter boldly and confidently declares, all else may fall, but I will follow you.

Even if I have to die, I will follow you. Peter is so confident in his conviction, in his fortitude, in his self-discipline, to resist temptation, to endure hardship, even death, that he stands boldly declaring that his commitment and his love for Jesus is greater than any other disciple.

He is so confident that he fails to heed the warning from Jesus that this very night he will deny Jesus three times.

But for all his confidence, mere hours later, not once, not twice, but three times, Peter denies Jesus. And as he says it for that third time, he locks eyes with the one that he calls Saviour.

[ 2 : 28 ] And he is overcome with guilt and sorrow. Confidence that turns out to be false confidence makes our failures all the more painful.

As Christians, we tend to rock back and forth in our Christian life between a sense of bravado and invincibility and at other times, a sense of crippling guilt or failure.

At points in our lives where we feel like we're travelling well, resisting sin, reading our Bibles, there is this confidence. We have dealt with the issues.

It's past now. We can move on to what's next. But the problem, of course, is when we stumble back into those sins that we've dealt with. Those sins that we've told God are now done and finished.

How did this happen? We ask ourselves. I promised God I was done with that. The guilt can be truly suffocating.

[ 3 : 36 ] Can become a barrier in our relationship with God. Something that we try and carry ourselves because we feel like we let God down. We failed to keep our word.

Remember that when we get to this episode in John, Jesus has already appeared to his disciples twice. Peter got to see him both times when Jesus met with the disciples behind closed doors.

And it must have been really encouraging for Peter to hear the words from Jesus, peace be with you. But how could he forget what Peter did?

Was Peter even still worthy to be called one of Jesus' followers, let alone a disciple or a leader in his church? I mean, he might have been able to push that night and his failure and his mistake to the back of his mind.

But now, on this morning, on that night, he stood warming himself around a fire. On this morning, he sits at a fire with Jesus.

[ 4 : 45 ] On that night, he denied Jesus three times. On this morning, he will answer three questions. It's quite possible that the stretch of beach that they're eating breakfast on is the same stretch where Peter first met Jesus, where Peter first heard the words from Jesus, follow me.

Peter. But since then, in his hour of testing, Peter has failed. Peter must have been feeling a deep sense of inadequacy as he sat there eating.

There's not a lot of conversation in the passage. The disciples are almost at a loss for words. It says they know he was the Lord, but they didn't know what to say to him.

Maybe Peter felt a bit like he did when he first met Jesus, when he fell to his knees and said, get away from me, Lord.

I'm a sinner. Maybe that's even how you sometimes feel. Inadequate. Inadequate to resist temptation.

[ 5 : 57 ] Inadequate to point others to Jesus. Inadequate to call yourself a Christian. You know that you've failed. You know that you'll fail again.

And maybe every day you have this question ringing in your mind, this uncertainty hanging over your head. Will Jesus still love me today? Even after all of these mistakes.

Maybe the overarching emotion for you in the Christian life is guilt and fear rather than joy and freedom. The feeling that there is no way you can do what's required today. That even before you begin, you know you're going to fall short.

But that's kind of the point, isn't it? I mean, whether you feel self-confident as a Christian, whether you're in that bravado and invincibility stage right now, or whether you sit there and just want to hide in your room and hope that nothing bad happens, wherever you are, you are inadequate.

What God asks you to do is beyond you. Whether we're talking about obedience or a ministry like what Peter will embark on, you are inadequate.

[ 7 : 16 ] Peter is inadequate. And yet, Jesus chose Peter. He called him out of the fishing boat to be a disciple, to be a disciple maker.

Peter's initial interaction with God made it clear that he was inadequate. Peter knew it as he fell on his knees, as he stood in the presence of his perfect saviour, Jesus.

He knew he didn't belong somehow. There's no surprises here for Jesus. And the same is true of you and me. God knew what he was signing up for when he called you to follow him.

Jesus died for you while you were still a sinner, not after you had sorted yourself out. And what Jesus is doing in this story is not heaping guilt on Peter.

He's not harping on about his failures. He's showing him the absolute sufficiency of what he has done in his death and resurrection. See, somewhere along this journey, Peter has somehow forgotten how he started.

[ 8 : 27 ] He's begun to think that it's his responsibility to be good enough for God, to be capable enough for this ministry. He started thinking it's about his character and his commitment and his ability and his goodness.

And you and I do the same thing. We hear the gospel. I'm saved by grace, by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

It has nothing to do with me. But then a month later, or two years later, or ten years later, we start to take responsibility for things that are not ours to carry.

We start to feel this burden to have to be good enough to get God's love, to please him, to maybe deal with some of the sins we've done again that we said we wouldn't do anymore.

Grace becomes our first step on our path instead of the foundation that empowers and holds up everything that we do as followers of Jesus. But the forgiveness and love offered in Jesus is unconditional.

[ 9 : 38 ] It's irreversible. There is no failure that you can do that will undo what Jesus achieves in his death and resurrection. When Jesus calls you into his family, he stamps you permanently loved, adopted, forgiven, paid for, precious, redeemed, permanently, irreversibly.

It cannot be undone. And then by grace, he empowers you to do whatever it is that he needs you to do. Jesus isn't yelling at Peter.

Peter. He's showing Peter something that Peter needs to be reminded of and maybe we need to be reminded of as well. Love is the only issue.

Heart is the question that Jesus wants to ask Peter three times. See, you will fail if you try and be good enough for God. I can tell you that with absolute confidence.

You will fail if you try and do things for God in your own strength. because apart from God, you can do nothing. Not even be a Christian, let alone be a part of his mission to transform the world with the hope of the gospel.

[ 11 : 00 ] Love is the question that Jesus takes to Peter. Not, how's your preaching going? Not, have you got a plan for church planting? Do you love me? Peter's heart is the issue here.

even though Peter has failed and will fail to express that love in perfect obedience, it's the only question that Jesus asks. Peter is about to become a significant leader in the early church. He'll ultimately be crucified for his ministry. He will preach the famous Pentecost sermon which will see thousands of converts. so Jesus is using Peter's failure to remind him that if he tries to do any of this in his own strength, he will fail.

But, with the power of God, all things are possible. With the power of God, a failure like Peter can be used to unleash God's ministry on the world.

To unleash the life-changing hope of the gospel. Peter gets offended by the third question. He rightly protests, Jesus you know.

[ 12 : 20 ] And Jesus does know. He knows Peter's heart. He knows everything. But that's the point. These questions aren't there for Jesus just to double check. These questions are there for Peter. Jesus is graciously wiping clean the guilt for Peter from his three denials.

He doesn't have to. The cross is sufficient. But this encounter is Jesus showing Peter that your failures are not the main issue. Here your heart is the main issue.

You will fail. You will be inadequate. But if your heart loves me, no amount of action from Peter counts for anything if he doesn't love Jesus.

And even though it's true and right to say that love will often and maybe even usually express itself in obedience, love is not made up of action. Jesus knows Peter's heart and even in his failures, Peter is held secure in the love that God has for him.

This episode is essential because it makes it clear that Peter's acceptance and God's love for Peter will never be conditional on Peter's ministry or his spiritual success or his ethical success.

[ 13 : 43 ] John writes later in his letter 1 John, we love because he first loved us. The love that undercuts our love for God is his immovable, unchangeable, irreversible love shown to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The essential ingredient in our love for God is his love for us. Peter's inadequate love becomes adequate through the gracious transforming power of God's love for him.

Hear that again. Listen and reflect and soak in this truth. God requires a love from you that you are incapable of giving and so by his unshakable and unchangeable love he empowers you to love him. Even your failures to love God are covered by the sufficient love from God. God's love triumphs over our failures.

It restores us. It renews us. It redeems us. It empowers us. It reinstates us when we fail. And it gives us the strength required to do what we cannot do on our own to love and serve God.

[ 15 : 16 ] This episode is about giving Peter one last bit of preparation before he embarks on this massive task that he's faced with. He is called to feed Jesus' sheep to nourish and encourage and support a flock of new and scared Jesus followers.

For him to do that he must first know himself the security and sufficiency of Jesus' love as well as his own inadequacy.

Peter must be stripped of all self-confidence and be left basking and rejoicing in the adequate and overwhelming love of God.

God is about to give a key job to perhaps the most spectacular failure of the disciples. Maybe barring Judas. Peter is the one who in the presence of Jesus denied his Saviour three times. this is the failure par excellence and yet the love of God washes him clean embraces him as a child and sends him out empowered to change the world.

[ 16 : 36 ] I believe it was the grace of God to Peter and to us that Peter failed so monumentally at this point in history. This episode at the end of John's Gospel isn't out of place it's perfect.

Because if Jesus can and will love Peter even after this failure even after staring him in the eyes as he denied him what else is there that Peter could possibly do that's worse?

There is almost no possibility for Peter now to doubt God's love. love. He has stood face to face with his saviour in his moment of failure and been re-embraced as a dearly loved child.

When things seem difficult for Peter when he's discouraged when he has a big fight with the apostle Paul when he wounds some of the Gentile believers because he's reverting back to Jewish customs God loved him when he failed here so Peter will know that God's love will remain secure. That God's love will endure no matter what happens. And you and I can know too. When we stuff up when we let Jesus down when we stumble in sin when we're greedy when we're self seeking when we say a harsh word when we're dishonest God's love is bigger and more powerful than any failure that you can bring.

[ 18 : 16 ] We no longer have to worry about whether or not God's love can stand firm in the face of our failure. This side of the cross, this side of the risen Jesus we hear the words of Romans 8 echo loud.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This story makes it abundantly clear that there is security in the gospel. There is security for us in the love of God even in our imperfect and at times straight up disobedient state.

God's love is sufficient. God's love is secure and so there is permission for us to fail. There is permission for us to be real about who we are.

Perfection and ability are not required in God's family. we do ourselves and we do each other a disservice when we pretend that we have things in hand when deep down every one of us in this room without exception is struggling with sin right now.

[ 19 : 44 ] We do ourselves and we do each other a disservice when we take credit for that which God does through us because deep down there is nothing that we can contribute apart from what God has provided for us.

The joy of the gospel life the joy of the Christian community the joy of the church is that we have the joy of honest confession we don't have to pretend we are all inadequate and yet God loves us and empowers us to do what we are incapable of doing ourselves like Peter we just have to love God and lean on him when was the last time that you felt so secure in God's love that you were able to acknowledge weakness or failure to someone in this community is this a community that is safe for anyone to walk in and be transparent about who they are and their failures or are we claiming victories and confidence that's not ours to claim are we setting an expectation a standard that is not fair and not real for people who would walk in to hear the gospel of

Jesus I wish that I could tell you that I'm good at this but I'm not I take far too much confidence from my ability to stand in front of a group of people and speak or to plan an event or to run a meeting and that pride in me leads me to judge what I see as weakness in those around me what that means is I'm horrified about admitting my own failures because I'm quick to jump on them and other people this story tells me God's love holds me in spite of my weakness nothing I do for him or his kingdom is mine it's his it's his strength it's for his glory and when I am too embarrassed to admit my own weaknesses all

I do is heap that pressure onto other people as well the great encouragement from Peter is he failed spectacularly and his savior went back and had breakfast with him just to make sure he knew that he was still secure in God's love we are secure therefore we are safe and it is the invitation of God for us to therefore be honest for this to be a place where anyone can walk in regardless of their history regardless of their mistakes and know that in Jesus there is a love that is bigger and stronger than any of that the other grace here in this story is that God shows us the danger and the hopelessness of fighting in our own strength Peter has shown that humanly speaking he has nothing to offer if Jesus leaves this to Peter's ability and his conviction and his fortitude then we're going to just get more denial episodes in spite of

Peter's enthusiasm and confidence and bravado unless God works through him it'll count for nothing Peter and we are drawn by this encounter to be people who pray first and act second people who depend on God who recognize that we need God and then empowered by him can go out head strong and confident in the work that God can and will do through us the grace of God is that you are not required to have the ability to do what God wants you to do you're simply required to ask him for the ability and the strength everybody knows about Peter's failure he has a reputation as the disciple that denied but what that does is help him come to God empty handed and ready to be used we've got to try and understand what the disciples were going through at the end of the gospel even though

[ 24 : 26 ] Jesus told them what would happen the resurrection took them completely by surprise and so these men are scrambling to process everything that Jesus has said to them in the last three years about who he is about what it means to follow him about the mission that he's just given them and the life of a Christian is starting to take on fresh clarity for the disciples yes they will be world changers yes they will be leaders among God's people yes they will care for the poor they will be self sacrificial they will put others first many of them will die for this cause but it is only by God's grace and the provision of his strength and his patient love for them that they can offer anything even the breakfast that they're eating with Jesus in this story is kind of a snapshot of the Christian life Jesus provides them with a miraculous catch of fish by the time they get to the beach

Jesus already has the fire going there's already fish cooking there's already bread ready to go and yet he still says this in verse 10 bring some of the fish you have just caught Jesus doesn't need their fish there's already fish cooking and he provided the fish that they're about to contribute the life of a Christian the life of a Christ follower is not about being perfect or skillful or even moral the life of a Christian is about being dependent on the immovable consistent unchanging overwhelming love and empowering of God at its core the Christian life is a life that is secure in God's irreversible love stable and empowered by God's

Holy Spirit and consciously and even joyfully inadequate within itself let me pray father god please give us such confidence and security in your love that we feel no need to pretend give us the security to willingly and honestly and joyfully confess our sins to one another trusting in your forgiveness please strip away self sufficiency strip away the things that we trust in that aren't you and glorify yourself in our weakness empower us to be a light for you in this world for Jesus sake Amen