

# Re-enactment & Restoration

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn back with me to John chapter 21 and verse 15, page 1094.

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. And 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. We're not sure exactly how many times Jesus did appear to his disciples after he was raised from the dead, but John tells us that this was the third occasion.

[ 1 : 15 ] Now that doesn't include the times that he appeared to individuals of his disciples like Mary and like Peter. But this chapter begins, of course, as we know, with the fishermen, probably a fortnight or so after Jesus rose from the dead. And Jesus had already appeared to them in the previous chapter in the upper, in the room in which the disciples were, where it was locked.

And he appeared to them twice, once when Thomas wasn't with them and the next week when Thomas was with them. So he'd already appeared to them. So they knew that he was alive again. We're not entirely sure at what frequency he would appear to them, but we know that he did. And we believe that it was for two reasons. First of all, it was to show, simply to show himself to his disciples and prove beyond any doubt whatsoever that he was alive once again. They knew he had died on the cross.

They had seen him being taken down, the body being taken down, and had seen him being buried in the tomb. But now he was alive. And he appeared to them on several occasions to prove that he was alive.

But the other reason was to restore them to their calling, to the original purpose for which Jesus had gathered them in order for them to go out one day with a message of the gospel. They would never have been able to do this if they weren't absolutely sure that Jesus truly was alive. He had risen from the dead. But now, having seen him and having been with him and having met with him, they could now go out into all the world and proclaim without any hesitation whatsoever that Jesus is the Son of God, that he came to pay the penalty for our sin, and that he was alive. Now, this chapter begins with the fishermen among the disciples, resuming their work. Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing. Now, I've heard people criticizing Simon Peter for saying that. And the criticism goes like this. They say, well, he didn't have much faith. He should have known that Jesus at the very beginning had called him to be a disciple and to be a fisher of men. That meant that he was going to be a preacher, an evangelist. And what they say is that in going fishing again, he was losing sight of what Jesus had called him to do. I don't necessarily, that could have been the case. I'm not saying it couldn't have been. We don't know what was in Peter's mind when he did this. But I'm not going to rush to the conclusion that poor Peter, there's enough about poor Peter to criticize without us choosing passages which don't give one way or the other any evidence. And we would have to climb inside Peter's head to know what exactly motivated him to say, I am going fishing. We just don't know. I'm going to think the best of Peter. And I'm going to say, well, he knew that Jesus was alive. And he knew that the story wasn't finished. But until such time as Jesus made it clear to him what he was to do, then he was going to resume the normal operation, his normal routine in which he was earning money and earning a living for himself and for his family and so on and so forth. And there's an interesting application in this as well. For anyone who suspects, perhaps who knows even amongst this gathering today, there are those of you who God is going to call for a special purpose, perhaps the ministry, or perhaps even missionary work or whatever. If you suspect that

God is going to call you or God is in the process of moving your heart in that direction, don't stop what you're doing. I've heard, I've met with Christians sometimes from time to time and they say, well, I believe God is calling me, but I don't know where he's calling me. So I'm going to resign my work. I'm going to,

I'm going to go away from my work. I'm just going to sit and wait for him to call me. I think that's foolish. God has called you, God has called you to where you are today. The work that God has given you is the work that he's given you today. And you carry on that work until such time as God, don't resign and then wait in some darkened room for God to shine a light in that room. No, he's not going to do that. He's going to come to you where you are. And we have to recognize that the work and the skills that God has given us are the work and the skills he wants us to be about.

[ 5 : 46 ] And I believe that in any case, there was nothing more suspicious and Peter going back fishing than simply to earn a living because he needed that. And because that was the work which he was accustomed to. Now you may disagree with that. This is one thing that's, that's open, of course, to question, but what I'm going to say is we don't know why Peter went fishing. And so it's not for us to assume the worst. Now, I wanted to suggest to you this morning that the reason why Jesus met with his disciples on this occasion by the shore of the Lake of Galilee, there's two reasons. First of all, there were, first of all, he was reenacting something for the disciples and he was restoring the disciples to their rightful position. But then I want us to notice also that as the chapter progresses that he is reenacting something for Peter and he is restoring Peter to his rightful position as an evangelist and as someone who was going to be a fisher of man. So there's two reenactments and there are two restorations and I'll explain how these work late in a little moment. There's two reenactments. One was for the sake of the disciples as a group and the other was for the sake of Peter as an individual. First of all, I want us to look at the reenactment in which his disciples were restored to the place where Jesus has said to them at the very beginning, follow me, I will make you fishers of men. And in which he showed them very clearly the kind of work that they were now about to embark on. Now, why did he have to restore his disciples? Well, you'll remember, of course, that on the night that he was betrayed, not just, it wasn't just Peter that denied Jesus. All of them forsook him and fled. We very often focus on Peter as if he was the only guilty one. Every single one of the disciples, they forsook him and they fled. That meant that when Jesus rose again from the dead, there had to be that process, if you like, or that action of restoring his disciples because they had in effect denied him as well by running away from the danger zone where Jesus was. So, he did this by going all the way back to the very first time he called them to be his disciples. If you want to read that, you read about it in Luke chapter 5. We don't have time to do that right now. And I can't help thinking, and I'm sure this has struck you as well, perhaps read this often enough. I can't help thinking how strikingly similar each event is in this fishing miracle, if you like. I'm not sure whether it was a miracle or not, simply because Jesus happened to know where the fish were. He knew that supernaturally, but again, I don't want to go into that in any great detail, but how strikingly similar it was that the fishermen amongst the disciples had gone fishing and they had spent the whole night and they caught nothing. They went out, got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. Just like an exact representation of the very first time that Jesus had met with them. They had fished all night and that they had caught nothing. And then Jesus stood on the shore and he spoke to them in the boat. I guess he was probably just far enough away for them to not immediately recognize that it was Jesus. But he said to them, cast, do you have any fish? They answered him, no. And he said to them, cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. So they cast it. Now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish. And it was at that moment

that they suddenly, their minds went all the way back to that first occasion when Jesus had gone out with them in the boat. And when he had told them to cast down the nets once again for a catch and in which they simply were not able to bring in the number of fish that they caught. And at that moment, they realized that the man on the shore was Jesus. But they realized as well what he was doing. He was casting them all their memories all the way back to that moment that he had gathered them together as his disciples and to what he commanded them to do. Follow me. I will make you fishers of men. Now there's another way as we read the story even further in which he reinforced what purpose he was going to have for his disciples. And that was when they came to the shore and when he had already prepared some fish for them. There was a barbecue, if you like, on the beach. I'm not being facetious. It really was.

He had coals on the beach and he was cooking fish for them. The interesting thing is that these perhaps were not the fish that the disciples had caught. There's two words for fish in Greek. One of them is a word that means big fish and the other is a word that means small fish. And the fish of the disciples had caught, they were all big fish. That's why it says big fish. But the fish that Jesus had prepared on the beach, they were small fish. And he had prepared them, he had cooked them. And when they got to the shore, there he was. And he just simply gave them the fish and bread. Small fish.

The last time that happened was way back when he had fed the 5,000. That was the diet that they ate. All these 5,000 people. When Jesus had taken the five loaves and the two fish and he had multiplied them in order to feed the 5,000 people who had gathered on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. And it was through the disciples and through their distribution that this was to take place. Now, what was that? But once again, a reenactment of the feeding of the 5,000 in order that the disciples would be reminded that their work was now going to be going through the multitudes of the world and in providing the food of the gospel and bringing the nourishment and the transforming power of the gospel to the masses of people that they were going to come into contact with. So Jesus was restoring the disciples and he was reenacting these events that were to confirm to them what their work was to be from then on. The second reenactment and restoration, of course, was Peter himself. It was for the benefit of Peter because at that point Jesus turned to Peter and he spoke particularly to him. Now, Peter must have felt incredibly uncomfortable at this point because there they were sat around a coal fire and

[13:03] Jesus and his disciples, they were all... Last time Peter had sat around a coal fire was the moment that he had denied Jesus when he was asked if he knew Jesus and he said he didn't even know him. So Peter, for all kinds of reasons, must have felt dreadfully guilty at that moment and I reckon he was silent at that point.

And it was at that point that Jesus asked him this all-searching question. He said, do you love me? Do you love me? The reenactment was the coals of fire. The reenactment was the three questions that were put to Jesus. Not anymore, are you a follower of this man? But this time the question is coming from Jesus himself and this time it's, do you love me? Do you love me more than these? And we've just read Peter's reply. Three questions. Each one of them was the same but there was a cloud overshadowing their relationship. Now I want us to say several things about this question, this searching question, do you love me? And I want us to apply it to ourselves, not just to Peter, because I believe that in many ways this question, in fact in every way, this question can be put to you and to me this morning. Wherever we are, whatever our relationship is with the Lord, it can be put as a searching question, a very challenging question. I want us to see first of all that the question that Jesus put to Peter was instigated by himself.

Which means that the question as to whether or not we love Jesus is instigated by Jesus himself. It's not a question that we would naturally ask. It's a question that God asks us. It's a question that exists because God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. It was out of the love that he had for a broken and a fallen world that he sent his only son into the world. It's instigated by Jesus' love for Peter. So the question today that is put to you and to me is instigated by Jesus himself. It is God that asks us and he asks us out of his love for you and for me this morning. Secondly, the question that Jesus asked Peter, it was a question that drew Peter to him. I'm sure in some ways, on one level, Peter would have been a million miles away in terms of his shame, the shame and the embarrassment that he had felt. And yet on another level altogether, he wouldn't have been anywhere else. Because he knew that deep down, whatever shame and darkness he felt inside, whatever guilt he was experiencing, he knew that he was rejoicing at the same time that this Jesus who he had watched dying on the cross and being buried in the tomb was now alive again. He couldn't explain it.

He couldn't understand it. But there he was, right in front of him. And that was the best sight he saw. He would spend the rest of his life, he could spend the rest of his life just looking and wondering at how Jesus could possibly have been raised from the dead. So it was a love that drew Peter to him.

[16:38] Whatever questions there were, whatever Peter had to confess to Jesus, whatever shame he felt, he was drawn to Jesus. And that's the same for you and for me if we're followers of Jesus and yet we're conscious of not having lived as we should. At the end of the day, deep down within our hearts, the question that Jesus asked Peter is the question that he asks us. And it's a

question that draws us to him. Even in pain, it draws us to him. The third thing I want to say about the question is that exposes Peter's sinfulness. It exposed Peter's sinfulness. Perhaps you're surprised that this is the question that Jesus asked to Peter is the question that Jesus asked to Peter in relation to how he had denied him.

Perhaps if it had been us, we would have said something like this. Why did you deny me? Or do you not feel a sense of shame and guilt about what you did?

Or do you realize how serious your denial was? After all that has been done for you, after the change that's come into your life and everything that God has done for you, do you realize how serious your denial was? Or we might ask something like this. What were you thinking about when you denied your Savior? Or how can you be sure that you will never do this again? How can you give any assurance or any promise that you will never do this again? That's the kind of question that we would ask because we would focus on the wrongdoing itself, on the failure itself. But you will notice when you really think about it that that question covers everything. Do you love me? It covers everything. It covers everything that we would ask. For example, well, the question, why did you deny me?

There is no answer to that because sin is irrational. Can any of us ever explain why we fall as Christians? You can't. You can tell the circumstances behind what we did or what we thought or you can explain all of that. But it actually doesn't answer the question why. Because as followers of Jesus, there's never a reason. That's why Paul said in Romans chapter 6 when he was asked the question, shall we sin that grace may increase? How can we? God, may it never be, he said, may it never be. How can we who are dead to sin live any longer? It doesn't make sense. When I sin, when I do something wrong, I can never turn to God and say, well, I did this because. There's never an explanation for it. It's always irrational. And then the kind of question we would ask, well, do you not feel a sense of shame and guilt? Well, Jesus knew he felt that sense of shame and guilt. And everybody else knew. And that wasn't the answer to the problem in any case. The answer is never found in the extent of our guilt and extent of our shame. Nor is it found in realizing how serious the denial was. Peter did know. But in actual fact, there's never a moment when we do realize how exactly how serious our sinfulness is. Because we can't because of our sinfulness.

We can't do it. Or even the question, what were you thinking about when you denied me? How is that going to restore Peter? But the question, do you love me, is a question that goes all the way straight into his heart. And when you examine it in its proper light, it really is the most searching, painful question that Jesus could have asked. Just as perhaps today it's the most searching and painful question that God is asking you and asking me. Whatever our circumstances. Perhaps you have to say today, well, I don't love Jesus because I've never come to faith in him. And this question, therefore, has no relevance for me because I'm not a Christian. Well, if you're not a Christian, that doesn't mean that the question doesn't have relevance for you. Do you love Jesus? That's still the question. Do you love him? And it's a question that you know that makes you feel uncomfortable. Because God's first command to every one of us, regardless of who we are today, is this. The command is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength. And if we are believers, then love for Jesus and our own sin, they don't sit comfortably together. We will never be at peace while there is active, deliberate sin in our lives. And that's a good thing. It's a good thing not to have that peace. It means that we will right away that we will attend to it. And it means that right away we'll see the third thing that this question arouses. And it's this, that love for Jesus will expel our sin. It was Thomas Chalmers that talked about the expulsive power of a new affection. In other words, the answer to sin in the Christian life is affection for Jesus, is asking the Lord to increase our passion for him and to draw us closer to him and to open up our hearts to his truth and to his love. And as he does so, we begin to really hate more and more and more the things that God hates in our lives. And as we hate them, we push them out by his power and by his spirit.

[ 22 : 53 ] We push them out. So the question, do you love me, as an entirely relevant fact, the question is the question that is not just the probe or the light, the searchlight, but it is the answer to what we are in the future. Now, some people at this point, they try to make something of the Greek words that Jesus uses when he asks this question. And they say that when Jesus asked the question, do you love me?

The first time, first use of the word love is the word for strong love. And then when Peter answered him, he answered him using the word for love, which is a weaker word for love. But nobody's

agreed on this.

And in fact, scholars have said, actually, I think we make too much of it, the difference between these two words. The word could be used either way interchangeably at that period of time. And so it doesn't actually matter. What matters is, like all the Bible, is what the word meant to the person at the time. And there's no question. The English Bibles are quite right just to translate this word with the same word as we use in English, love each time of the way. In fact, the fact is that Jesus doesn't know anything but the strong word for love. When he talks about his love, you can't get stronger than the love that Jesus has for his people. But the fourth thing is this, that love is always comparative. Look at what Jesus said, do you love me more than these? Now, the question there is, what are the more than these? What are the these? In which Jesus asked Peter, do you love me more than these? And there's two suggestions. First of all, it could have been the disciples. Jesus asked, asking him, do you love me more than these other people love me? Now, why is he asking that? That's what it meant. Why is he asking that? Well, because if you remember, way back before Jesus was arrested, Peter was the one who said, even if everyone forsakes you, I will never forsake you.

Even if everyone denies you, I will never. He was comparing himself to the rest of the disciples. And in effect, he was saying, look at all these, they don't have what I have. They're going to forsake you. And if they do, I will still be here with you. I will even die for you. He was making a comparison. So this could have been Jesus now, after the event, saying to Peter, do you still love me? Do you still believe you love me more than these? And again, there's a very important application for us this morning. And that is that whenever you're tempted to compare yourself favorably with other Christians, stop. Stop. Right away, let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall. Always remember how vulnerable we are and how inclined we are to falling at any given moment. But the other suggestion is made is, do you love me more than these? I.e. the fishing boats, the nets, the work that you have.

[ 26 : 13 ] Do you love me? Are you prepared to leave, to walk away from your old life once again? That's probably what I think this question meant. Do you love me more than these? Love is always comparative, isn't it? It's always comparative. If a man loves a woman enough to marry her, that doesn't mean he doesn't love other people. But there comes a point where his love for his girlfriend or his fiancée means that he commits himself to her and she to him. And in which he says, well, in comparison with everyone else, my love for you is absolutely unique and I'm putting you first. That's the kind of love that Jesus demands. Love that puts God first and others next and ourselves last. God must be the center. Jesus Christ must be the number one, the focus of our living.

And in asking Peter these words, do you love me more than these? He's asking him, are you prepared now to walk away from your old life? It's not that his old life was a wrong life. It wasn't. He was a fisherman. There's nothing wrong with fishing. But are you prepared to leave your boats and your guaranteed income and your comfort zone and the environment in which you have been brought up?

Are you prepared to leave the Lake of Galilee that you know as your life and move out into the world to perhaps people that you don't know, cultures that you don't know, the Roman culture? Are you prepared to go all over the Roman Empire today with the gospel and to take your life in your hands for so doing and ultimately give your life for me? That's the love that Jesus demands. even if it means being taken prisoner and dying for the sake of the gospel. And that's exactly what Peter had to do one day. And that's what it means as well for us. What was it that Jesus said? If anyone would come after me and do it does not hate his father and his mother's and sisters and brother for my sake, he cannot be my disciple. Now, of course, that didn't mean that a Christian must hate his father and mother. Of course it doesn't. It means that they are loved less than the Lord Jesus Christ. God takes the highest place, the place of the highest affection.

He is our Lord and our governor and our leader. And that means that whatever, you know, if there's one thing I've experienced in the Christian life, it's this, you don't know what's ahead of you.

[ 29 : 13 ] You don't know where God's going to take you. You don't know what providence there is in front of you. Well, I suppose that's true for anyone. But it's even more true for the Christian because the Christian is led by God. God has a purpose for that person. If you're following Jesus today, he has a purpose for the way you're going to live your life and where you're going to live your life and what you're going to do with the gospel and with your Christian life. And you have to be prepared to set aside your own comforts, your own old lifestyle for the sake of the gospel.

But God will replace that. Whatever you give up for the Lord to obey him and his commands, God will replace that. He will see to it that he will guide you in everything that you do and he will replenish anything that you give up for him. And after all, when it comes to giving up things for the Lord, there ought to be no question with any of us. What has the Lord given up for us? What has he given for us? He's given his own life. He's done everything that possibly could in order for us to be his people, to be his flock and to be his children. There isn't a greater privilege in all the world than being Jesus. And that is the reason why love must be obedient. If you love me, said Jesus, keep my commands. And that means every day that we follow Jesus, that we are followers of Jesus. The work that Jesus gave Peter to do was not the work that Jesus gave to John to do. And it's not the work that he gives us to do. We're all different. And yet each one of us must be motivated in whatever we do and wherever we are by affection for the Lord Jesus that says, I love him because he first loved me. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. We pray that your word will reach into our hearts now and search us and will not leave us, that it will grab hold of us and will draw us to Jesus. We ask, Lord, for anyone who answers that question this morning in the negative, that they don't love Jesus. We pray that you will change that. We pray that as your word takes hold in their lives and their hearts, that you will draw them to a saving relationship, to a new life, to a transformed life, to a forgiven life. We pray that you will work in them very richly and very powerfully. We pray, Lord, that for those who do follow Jesus and for those who love him with all their heart, we know that our love is not what it should be. And every time we fall and every time we backslide, we bring about a question mark over our own love for you. But we pray that as you restored Peter, we pray that you will restore us to a right relationship with yourself so that we can go on in confidence and so that we can rise out of our failures and into new strength as we wait upon you. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.