

John 21:1-19

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[0 : 00] As we come to the scriptures this morning, I'd like us to consider the words that Jesus comes and shares with Peter in particular. But we see here that he has words to encourage our hearts as well as we seek to serve him. We have here God's plan to make himself known to people by using the disciples that follow him. And as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in our day, then we can learn from this passage of scripture how God can use us in reaching out to those who have yet to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For many of the disciples fishing had been their life until the Lord Jesus came and called them to leave their nets and to follow him. It was the one thing that they were able to do. It was their living. It had been part of their lifestyle and it was a very familiar thing for them.

And then Jesus came and called them to abandon their nets and to become fishers of men. After the resurrection, Jesus told his disciples to wait and to remain in Galilee. They went back to where they had come from. And while they were there, they decided, as Simon Peter says to the others, I'm going to go fishing, they decided to join him, to go back to something that was familiar. You can imagine the turmoil that they must have felt as the one that they had given up their livelihoods to follow had been taken from them. He'd been crucified.

He'd been laid in a tomb. The tomb was empty. He'd appeared to them. And they went back to their hometown and they wondered what was going to become of them. Where were they going to go? What were they to do now? And so they went back to the very thing that they were familiar with, to their life of fishing. It must have been some sort of comfort for them to be in the boat, on the sea, doing the one thing that they knew that they were able to do. Going through all the emotions of the past few days, it must have been some comfort for them to be together and to be at sea fishing. But there are lessons for us to draw out from this experience that we can learn from. And first of all, there's a scripture of being effective in our mission and outreach for the Lord Jesus Christ. How to be effective in doing the work that God has called us to be part of. We see that having spent the night fishing, they caught nothing. They had nothing to show for the fruit of their labor. They had spent all night with their nets. And yet the very thing that they knew that they could do, the very thing that they had kept their families fed on, turned out that they had nothing in their nets at the end of the night.

The very thing that they could do, they failed to do. They had no catch of fish to bring back to the shore the following morning. They were skilled fishermen. They went out at night. Now, I'm not a skilled fisherman. I only went fishing once in the whole of my life. When I was on holidays, staying down in Cornwall as a young boy of eight. And we went on a fishing trip from a little port called Mevagissey. And we went out to sea and we caught mackerel. And I was very pleased to be coming back with a catch of mackerel. And I took it back to the farmhouse where we were staying. And the farmer's wife cooked it for breakfast the next morning. And before we got to the beach that later that morning, I saw the mackerel again. I haven't seen it alive one day and on my plate for breakfast the next day. It took me until I was 16 to enjoy another mackerel from the age of eight. So I don't claim to be a fisherman. But the disciples knew that the best time apparently to go fishing was overnight.

And even though they went at the best time with all the skills and the abilities that they had, they still had nothing to show for a night's fishing. Bruce Milne says in his commentary, Today in the West we have more tools, we have more books, more resources and aids to help us as we seek to reach out to the lost and bring them to know the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 35] And yet we see fewer people come into faith for all the tools and for all the resources that we have available to us. The trouble of the know-how approach is not the knowledge in itself, but perhaps the temptation to trust in the tools rather than in the one that we seek to serve.

We can rely on our resources, we can rely on the tools that we have available, but unless we are relying on the Lord himself, then our efforts amount to nothing. And that is where the breakdown occurs in this story that John's Gospel tells us. There was nothing wrong with the disciples' abilities, there was nothing wrong with their knowledge, there was nothing wrong with their nets, even when they had the great haul of fish. At the end, their nets weren't broken. But they went in their own strength, relying on their own abilities. And that's where things started to come apart for them. When they follow Jesus' instructions as they come near to the shore the next morning, they have a greater haul of fish than they can bring to land. They have to drag the nets behind them. How do we show our dependence upon the Lord when we seek to share the good news with those that we want to share the good news with, whether they be family members or work colleagues or neighbours or people in the community? How do we show that we are depending on him, not on our own abilities to engage them in conversation and to try and persuade them to follow the Lord themselves? It's reflected in the way in which we pray as we throw ourselves upon him to ask that he would be at work in these people's lives, that he would give us the right words to say, that he would help us to know when it is right to speak and when it's right to remain silent, when it's right to testify through the very actions that we can do, rather than just speak God's words straight and direct to them. Dependence on the Lord in prayer shows our reliance on him as we ask him to help us to use us for his glory, for his work. Effective mission and outreach lies in the discovery of us not being able to produce the fruit that we would long to see, but looking to him to produce the fruit. For it is his work, it is by his Holy Spirit that he opens the eyes of the blind and stops the years of the deaf and helps people to come to that saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus

Christ himself. What we are able to do without Jesus is nothing, but with him all things are possible. And so the disciples learn an important lesson. In verse 3, that night they caught nothing.

But under his guidance, under his directing, they bring in a haul of fish. 153, they even counted them, there were so many, they took the time to count the great catch that they brought back.

In John 15 verse 5, Jesus reminds his disciples again, apart from me, you can do nothing. It's a good reminder for us, as we long to see people come to trust the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves, that we so need the Lord Jesus working with us, through us and in us, and in the lives of those that we're trying to reach.

[8 : 09] That no matter how hard we try in our own strength, we will achieve nothing. Apart from me, you can do nothing. And so we don't rely on ourselves, we don't rely on our techniques, we don't rely on our own knowledge.

We are to trust on the Lord Jesus Christ. And we show that through our praying to him, to help and to interact, and to bring and to draw these people to himself, through the way in which he will be pleased to use us and others, as he seeks to make himself known, and reveal himself to them.

And so the secret is to be ever close to Jesus, to be ever listening to him. It's one thing to call out to him, it's another thing to listen, and to be ready to heed what he says.

And so the disciples follow his instruction, and they throw the nets out on the right side of the ship. Now I don't know whether that was the right side, or whether it was the correct side, but no matter which side it was, it was the side that the fish were waiting, and he brings to them the catcher fish that they were then able to share for breakfast.

The second thing that we see in these verses this morning is the scope of the work that's to be done. The catcher fish was astonishing. It was far beyond their own expectations, unable to bring it back over the side of the boat.

- [9 : 34] But the disciples are still thinking of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. Later on in Acts chapter 1, they ask Jesus, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

They still think that Jesus is only interested in their own people. And they have yet to grasp that the Lord Jesus came not just for the sins of his own people, but for the sins of the world.

That all nations were to be blessed. That all nations were to be reached with the sound of the gospel and the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their vision of God's work was far too small.

But they were to see, through what Jesus was sharing with them here, that he was going to touch the hearts and the lives of many people, not just those amongst the people of Israel.

They needed to see that God's work began with their people, but his work was going to spread much further abroad. And that had been hinted by Jesus earlier on in the gospels.

- [10 : 37] In chapter 4 and verse 42, they said to the woman, We no longer believe just because of what you have said. Now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the saviour of the world.

The woman at the well, who went back to her own community and said, Come and meet one who knows everything about me. And she brought them, and they listened to him, and they realised that he was the saviour, not just of the Jews, but the saviour of the world.

And Jesus speaking to his disciples in John chapter 10, and verse 16 onward says, The scope of his mission was much further than his own people.

He was to reach the peoples of the nations of the earth. And so the lesson here is that there is a great harvest to be had amongst the peoples of the world. And though it will never be too large to be able to accommodate it, the full amount to be brought in is that none that will be brought in will be left out.

There are those that the Lord is calling to himself, from every language, every people, every tribe, every nation. And our privilege is to be part of that work, whether that's reaching people who travel and come to us, or whether we travel and go to them.

- [12 : 07] From every language, every people, every tribe, every nation. Christianity is spreading around the world faster today than at any other time in the history of the church.

That's an amazing fact. Perhaps we don't feel that it's true in our own circumstances, in our own context here, even in Scotland, we see declining numbers attending the church.

How can we say that Christianity is spreading faster? Well, it is. When we look around the nations of the earth, we see many people today responding to the invitation to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fields are white for harvesting. The world waits to hear. And the places where we see people responding to the gospel, not so much here in the West, but in Africa, in Central and Eastern Asia, in the Far East, we see people coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

in their hundreds. Many of the places where the gospel is reaching people today are amongst the poor, where people are responding to the good news of Jesus Christ, who can satisfy their souls.

- [13:17] coming in faith, in prayer, and throwing themselves at the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, lacking many of the material blessings that we have, but knowing the treasures that are to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord.

These verses speak to us this morning about a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, a communion that we have with him, whereby he knows us, and we know him.

And Jesus challenges Peter, and he says to him, Do you love me? He talks to him in an intimate, in an in-depth way.

There was a relationship to be had with the Lord Jesus Christ. And that relationship is sometimes difficult, because we are asked honest questions. And Peter has to give an honest answer, as Jesus shares with him on the show.

A relationship that he wants with us. And before we can be used by him, in reaching out to others, we need to guard our relationship with him.

- [14:27] We need to be in communion and fellowship with him. Jesus reminds his disciples that he will be taken away from them, and in a little while he will be restored to them again. And in that meantime, the Holy Spirit would come, and he would guide them into truth, and he would equip them, and he would help them, in the task that they were to do, in terms of spreading the good news, to those that they had the opportunity to do so.

But they needed to keep in relationship with him. They needed to walk alongside him. It was a practical relationship, expressed in everything, dependence on him for our work, depending on him for our food, for our care, for our loved ones, for the day-to-day blessings, that we so need in our lives.

And Jesus was right there, in the middle of all that was going on for them. Just as he was right there, in the middle of the boat, and he was providing for them, with a great catch of fish, he was also providing them breakfast, on the shore.

And as they get out of the boat, the fish and the bread, has already been prepared, ready for them to share. And yet he encourages them by saying, go back and bring some of the fish that you've caught.

And it was Simon Peter who ran back, and he brought the fish that the others had landed on the shore, when he had already run ahead of them. You see, Jesus is able to reach people without us, but he has deemed that he would rather do it with us.

- [15:59] And so, even in the example of Peter coming to bring some of the fish that they had caught, to bring to the table. So the Lord Jesus Christ wants to bring us into his work, that we can be partners together in that.

Whether that's through praying, whether that's through encouragement and supporting, or whether it's going ourselves, we can be part of his work, because he gives us the opportunity to give, the gifts that he has blessed our lives with, to him, for use in his service.

Right there, alongside him, he gathers this team again, to be partners and co-workers in his work. We're reminded by Paul, as he writes to the church in Philippi, and God will meet all your needs, according to his glorious riches, that are found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He's able to meet our needs, but he's also prepared to take our gifts, and use what little we have to offer, for his work and for his glory.

And there were three steps that we find then, as we come to conclude in these verses this morning, three steps to following Jesus, into effective witnessing for him in our lives.

[17:14] First of all, there was a barrier that had to come down. From verse 15 onwards, he takes Peter aside, and he questions him about his love for him. Peter had three times denied knowing Jesus, just as Jesus had predicted, in readiness for Peter, as the arrest came, and he turned to him and said, you will deny me three times before the cock crows.

Peter said, no Lord, never, that will never be. And then he experiences those three occasions, and Jesus' eyes come across the courtyard, and they fix on Peter, and Peter runs out and weeps bitterly, because the Lord Jesus knew what he was doing, and what he had done.

And here Jesus reinstates him, by three times asking him, does he love him? A barrier needed to be overcome. There was that awkward silence.

Jesus knew that Peter had denied him, Peter had known that Jesus had known, and they needed to put matters right beside one another. It's interesting that they're at the same side of the sea, when Peter was called initially.

He was back at the same place, where he had been with his nets, when Jesus came and said, leave your nets and follow me. And he takes him right back to where they started, so that they could start afresh.

[18:38] I find that very interesting, that sometimes he'll take us back, to the place where it all began, so that we can put right the things that have gone wrong, and we can renew our relationship, and we can move forward together again.

And so he takes Peter right back to the very shore, where he had called him to follow him initially. And they put matters right alongside this very place, where it had all began for the both of them.

But these barriers needed to be dealt with. The breakfast led to the confrontation with Peter. Jesus wanted to forgive Peter, to reinstate him, to help him to see that he was still useful for the work.

Notice the loving way that Jesus does this. First of all, he calls him Simon. The name that he had been given before Jesus came along.

The name that Jesus referred to him initially, when he called him from his nets. And then he renamed him Peter, the rock. But I'm sure Peter felt more a Simon than a rock on that occasion.

[19:48] He didn't feel that he had anything to give, because he had failed so miserably. And so Jesus calls him Simon. He calls him by the name that he can relate to.

He doesn't make out that he's anything more than Simon. Simon, do you love me? In his own strength, he would only ever be a Simon.

But in the strength that the Lord can provide, he will become the rock. And he will become the great evangelist that Jesus has intended him to be. But he needs to be able to overcome this past history in order to be the man that God has made him to be.

He has not yet lived up to that name, Peter. And so Jesus calls him Simon. He deals with him where he's at. He sees his own limitations.

And he knows that he has to, again, come before his Saviour and acknowledge his past. Simon, trusting in Jesus, will become Peter the rock, who will help establish the church in the days to come, just as Jesus has planned.

[21:01] But there's the principle here that we need ourselves to grasp. Before Jesus can be followed and served, then we have to deal with our past. We have to deal with our failings.

Even though perhaps we have served the Lord faithfully, when we've let him down, we need to come back to him and confess our sins before we can move further forward. We can't overlook our failings.

We have to address the things in our lives that God points out to us are wrong and sinful and not helpful. Jesus is insistent on this and gives Peter the opportunity to address his past and to declare his love for the Lord Jesus Christ again.

Do you love me? Yes, he was hurt. For three times, Jesus asked him the same question. But he came to the point where he really understood that Jesus was now able to use him again.

And he was able to be part of that work that God had called him to serve in. He had to learn this principle. And it was one that he went on to teach himself.

[22 : 09] If we turn the Bible over to Acts chapter 2, verse 37, Peter, having learned to confess his sins, is dealing with people who question him in verse 37 of Acts chapter 2.

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

Repent for the forgiveness of your sins. Peter knew what it was to be forgiven and he encourages others to go down that same route.

Repent, know God's forgiveness, and serve him. A relationship with Jesus begins when in his presence we face up to all that we have grieved him over and acknowledging that before him we throw ourselves upon him for his mercy and for his forgiveness and by his Holy Spirit he cleanses our hearts, makes us as one who is righteous in his sight and we can serve him.

Failure is never final with God. He seeks to restore us to himself. He doesn't put us out on the side to be left, but he takes us aside to bring us back in to his fellowship and to his service.

[23 : 52] So no matter how the evil one will tell us that God is done with us because we have failed him, remind him of what he did with Peter and remind him of what he tells us in his word.

That if we say that we are without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins he is faithful and he is just and he will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

What a wonderful God we have. That even though we fail he still encourages us to come back to him that we may be useful to him in his work, in his service.

Peter, do you love me? If he uses that word to us this morning what is our response to him? I did love you once but I have so failed you that I cannot say that I love you anymore.

He would say to us confess your sins know his forgiveness and the joy of serving him again. Let the past not hinder what we can do in the future but give us this opportunity again to put ourselves right with the Lord God this morning that he can use us once more in the work to which he has called us.

[25 : 15] Having dealt with his sin he has a responsibility to accept. The experience of being forgiven clears the way for service. And Jesus says to Peter as he declares his love for him that there is a work to do he tells him to feed his lambs to feed his sheep and again a second time to feed his sheep.

There was work to be done. Following Jesus means that we take up a responsibility one for the other. And it begins amongst God's people.

A commitment to God involves a commitment to his people. And here first of all Jesus gives him the responsibility of others who follow him. The lambs the sheep together they are to be fed they are to be taken care of they are to be provided for and tended to.

How will they know that we are Christians? By the love that we show one towards the other. And that is a challenge to any congregation to any church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How do the people on the outside know that we are followers of the true and the living God? They will see it by the way in which we care and we love one towards the other. And so there is our first responsibility.

- [26 : 32] How do I show our love for the Lord in the way in which I love the people within the fellowship? How do I go out of my way to show that I care for those that God is teaching alongside me to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Do we take that responsibility seriously? does my life reflect the fact that I love the people of God and I care for them in practical ways?

A challenge to all of us. Sometimes people come to a church and they walk out of the church and they say nobody spoke. Well if they had spoken perhaps somebody would have spoken back to them.

We can always blame other people for not doing what we want them to do to ourselves. How do I show love towards God's people? How do I show interest in the people of God?

Maybe he wants to challenge us to think again how we serve one another even before we start to serve those who are outside of the church today. And so there was a barrier to pull down.

- [27 : 43] There was a responsibility to lift up. But there was also a cross to be carried. And having accepted Peter back into his team Peter is confronted by the kind of death that he's going to die and we're told that he himself was to be crucified.

In the end in old age he would be taken and put on a cross carried to where he didn't want to go. but it was because of his love for the Lord Jesus Christ that this would come about.

Again Bruce Milne says to die for Christ is the most positive of lifestyles for death for Christ is the door to living with him. Death is not the end but it's the start of our eternity in his presence forever with the Lord.

the end for each of us is that we see him face to face now through a glass darkly but then face to face or the joy that no matter what life is to be ahead of us the end is when we shall see him face to face when he shall bring us at last into our eternal home no matter how hard our service for him might be no matter how hard life in this world might become the joy for each of us is that day when we will behold him face to face.

What a reward what a blessing what a privilege what an end to this life as we enter into eternity with him and so we are each given a cross to be carried but the joy of the Lord is our strength the comfort of the Lord's presence will keep us and the hope that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ that on that day we shall see him face to face will bring us at last to our eternal reward which is to be in his presence.

- [29 : 53] What a joy for Peter to know that no matter what his past had been there was still work to be done and the hope of heaven everlasting ahead.

May God encourage us to serve him today. Let not our past failings make us redundant but let us come before the Lord confessing our sins that he may enable us to be part of his work again whether that's through our support our encouragement whatever gifts that he has given to us to be used for his glory and look forward to that day when at last we shall be in his presence.

May he encourage us then through these words of scripture this morning let us pray. Our gracious Father we thank you that you are a God who restores his people there are times when we will fail and disappoint you we'll disappoint others and we disappoint ourselves but oh you are a God who is slow to anger abounding in mercy and faithful to the end you are a God who is able to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness thank you for this reminder in John's gospel this morning of how Peter was taken from the edge and brought back into the fellowship of his saviour again that he might become Peter the rock on whom the church was to be established the one who would be an influence amongst many people the one who from his own experience and the lessons that he learned was able when asked what we must do he was able to say repent and believe oh father we thank you that we have that same good news to share with those who themselves would come seeking you today thank you for the word of truth that we have to hold out to them that if they too repent and believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ they too can be saved so we confess our sins to you this morning we confess our failures and our disappointments and we ask that you would restore to us a right relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ today that we may use the gifts and the talents that he has so blessed our lives with that you may be glorified help us to show love for the people who serve alongside us help us to know in what practical ways we can be useful to one another and help us to know as we go out into the week to come how we can reach out to those that are still lost and need to know the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ so bless us we pray use us for your glory and bring us safe at last into your kingdom on that day when we will behold our saviour face to face oh we thank you for that joy that is yet to be but until that day may we serve you faithfully as we ask it in the precious name of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ for his name's sake and for his glory we pray

Amen we're going to conclude our time together as we sing to God's praise the traditional Psalm 51 on page 281 Psalm 51 and from verse 8 through to the end of verse 15 the tune is Saint Kilda of gladness and of joyfulness make me to hear the voice that so these very bones which thou has broken may rejoice and so on Psalm 51 from verse 8 of gladness and of joyfulness take me take me to hear the voice that so these very bones which has broken may rejoice all my in in with his blood and life inside from my sin he is a clean heart

[34:19] Lord renew all my strength be within end cast me on from thy side glory thy holy strength away restore me thy salvation joy with thy peace let me stay then will I teach thy reason to those that transgressors be and those that sinners are shall be eternal and to thee

O God of my salvation God he promet guilty end be from the guilty end set me then shall whiten the Lord sing of thy righteousness thy righteousness my close lips o Lord find thee let them be opened and shall thy praises thy praise thy might our

Lord he remit and now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

To the only God our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time and now and forevermore. Amen.

Thank you.