

John 21

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[0 : 00] Let's read together. 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 Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing. 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. 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.

[1 : 03] 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, a hundred fifty-three of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.

And Jesus said to them, come and 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 would the fish.

This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

He said to them, 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?

[2 : 09] 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.

But when you were 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 also had leaned back against him during the supper, and had said, Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?

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

[3 : 13] You follow me. Well, this morning, for our send-off Sunday, we're looking at the final chapter of John's gospel.

Some of Jesus' last words to his disciples before he would leave them on earth and return to the Father. This season of the year is a time of looking back to the past and looking forward to the future.

And whether you're graduating or moving on or whether nothing in your life is changing and everything is simply just the same as it was, it's a good opportunity periodically to look back and to look forward.

So we're going to look into this passage this morning. As Jesus, what we'll see is that as Jesus equips his disciples for the future, he does it by reminding them of the past in three particular ways.

This closing chapter of John is fascinating in that what Jesus says and does points back to at least three prior incidents in the course recorded in the New Testament gospels that Jesus and his disciples have already been through.

[4 : 29] One at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, one at the middle, and one toward the end. And I think Jesus deliberately orchestrates the way this scene unfolds in order to sort of replay these prior events in his disciples' minds.

It's as if he was, you know, if you're graduating, perhaps you may walk around the campus this weekend and remember the first day that you arrived and a conversation that you had during sophomore year with a friend or perhaps something that happened just last week.

And you'll have these memories that are triggered in your mind as you look at the places where you've been and the people you've been with. Or it's sort of like, so this last chapter is a bit like that or it's a bit like watching the highlights on SportsCenter after a baseball game.

And they point out the defining moments of a game or the end of a symphony where the theme and the variations are woven together in a grand climax or a surprising conclusion of a movie that puts a new twist on various strands of the plot.

So what we want to, the main point here is that Jesus equips us for our future by reminding us of our past. So I want to look at three lessons that he teaches us looking back and looking forward.

[5 : 41] So first, Jesus teaches us to abide in him. The story begins with Simon Peter and six disciples going fishing in the Sea of Galilee, or here it's called the Sea of Tiberias.

Now it's a bit of an ambivalent beginning. You know, if you've read the Gospel of John, the last couple of chapters, Jesus has been crucified. He's now risen from the dead. He's revealed himself to his disciples.

And now we see the disciples are sort of hanging out. Peter's like, let's go fishing. And they're like, sure, we'll go with you. Now on the one hand, fishing is a perfectly legitimate activity for Jesus' disciples.

One person said even though Jesus was crucified and now is risen, his disciples still have to eat. And that's very reasonable. And according to Matthew and Mark, Jesus had actually told them to go to Galilee where he would see them.

On the other hand, I think in these first few verses, the disciples seem rather aimless, even a little bored, and powerless. They fish all night. Experienced fishermen, then they catch nothing.

[6 : 48] Now, of course, this wasn't the first time that they had found themselves in such a situation. The whole situation would have reminded them of what we read earlier in the service from Luke 5.

This is the first flashback from the past. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when he first called these men to follow him, if you want to turn back there, the same guys, at least Simon Peter and the sons of Zebedee, were fishing in the same lake.

Luke calls it the Lake of Gennesaret. John calls it the Sea of Tiberias. It's the same thing. It had multiple names. And they fished all night and they had caught nothing. And then Jesus had come along and he had the nerve to give these experienced fishermen advice on how to catch some fish.

He had said, go out into deep water, let down your nets for the catch. At first, Peter was protesting, but we've worked all night. We've caught nothing. He says, okay, fine, I'll do it.

Does it? Lo and behold, the nets are full. And so when the same kind of thing happened again, the disciples immediately recognized who it was standing on the shore in the early morning light.

[7 : 56] It's the Lord. Both times, the disciples had been working hard apart from Jesus and their work had resulted in nothing. And when they heard and obeyed Jesus' voice, their nets were filled to overflowing.

What's Jesus trying to remind them of? He's trying to remind us of our dependence. Now, of course, in a general sense, all of us are dependent on God as his creatures.

The scientist Stephen Jay Gould wrote, the laws of science contain many fundamental numbers like the size of the electric charge of the electron and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron.

Maybe you understand those things, maybe you don't. But he says, the remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life.

Now, Stephen Jay Gould is an agnostic or was an agnostic, but he and many other scientists recognize that we live in a universe that seems amazingly fine-tuned to sustain physical life.

[9 : 01] And we've discovered the laws of gravity, we peer into the mysteries of quantum mechanics, we marvel at the capacities of human brain, but we did not create and we do not sustain any of these things, even though that is what sustains our physical life every day.

These things that we don't even think about. The laws of the universe that remain constant and the way that God upholds our lives, even if we don't recognize him.

We're fundamentally dependent on God as his creatures in a very basic way. You know, in a more particular way, Jesus is reminding us, those of us who believe in him, that we're absolutely dependent on him as his disciples.

Jesus said in John 15, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in me, you will bear much fruit, and apart from me, you can do nothing.

Now what does it look like to abide in Jesus, to live in dependence upon Jesus? Well, Jesus talks about abiding in his word, letting his word constantly be sinking into our hearts and shaping our lives.

[10 : 14] He talks about abiding in his love, resting in the assurance that we belong to him, and nothing can snatch us away from his hand. And that if he was willing to lay down his life for us on the cross, how much more will he give us all things that we need?

Jesus also speaks about abiding in prayer, coming before God every day to ask for what we need, abiding in communion with God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And I think one of the key indicators of whether we're living in dependence upon God, whether we're abiding in Christ, is our practice of prayer.

Do we feel our need to pray as much as you feel the need to eat in order to satisfy your hunger every day? In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray for our daily provision.

Give us this day our daily bread, for our daily pardon. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us for our daily protection.

[11 : 21] Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Do we feel that need to pray every day for our provision, our pardon, and our protection? You know, even if we don't feel our need for prayer, are we so convinced of its importance for our spiritual well-being that we discipline ourselves to do it?

You know, if you're sick, or if you're depressed, or if you're taking certain medications, you might not actually feel hungry. You might not actually feel like eating at all.

But if you want to, if you want to care for your body, and if you want to promote your own physical health, you'll discipline yourself to eat, even if you don't feel the need for it, because you realize, my body isn't functioning the way it should.

And in order for me to get better, I will have to eat healthy foods. And in the same way, there can be that discipline of praying, even when we don't feel like it, even when our spiritual senses are a little bit dull, and we have to discipline ourselves and say, I need to pray.

Even though I feel self-sufficient, even though I feel like I'm not in a desperate situation, I need, I'm absolutely dependent on God, and I need to be in prayer.

[12 : 40] So God reminds us of our dependence. You know, sometimes God reminds us of our dependence in a situation like the disciples found themselves in. They fished all night and caught nothing. Maybe you've been searching for a job all year, and you still haven't found one.

Sometimes God reminds us of our dependence through hard situations, sickness or job loss, loneliness. But you know, it's also a blessing when God sustains us in our dependence on Him through a time of prosperity, when everything's going well, and when you have the job you always wanted, and when you have great friends, and you might otherwise be tempted to embrace the illusion that we are self-sufficient and self-made.

It's a blessing when God sustains us in dependence on Him. Whether it's in a time of adversity or a time of prosperity, it's true nonetheless. And so Jesus reminds us of that.

Now Jesus reminds them of their dependence by pointing back to this first episode, but He also provides for them in great abundance. What happens in Luke chapter 5 and in John chapter 21?

Well, they throw out the nets, and then they get this amazingly large catch of fish. Now there's this interesting difference between the two stories. In Luke, everything starts to fall apart.

[14 : 08] The nets start breaking. The boats start sinking. Peter says, Go away from me, Lord. I'm a sinful man. They can't handle the abundance that Jesus provides. But in John, verse 11 points out, although there were so many fish, the net was not torn.

And when Peter sees Jesus, he runs to Jesus because he knows He's the Lord. Now, what's the significance of this detail? Well, the nets full of fish are a symbol of the disciples' calling.

Right? Jesus had said, Don't be afraid. From now on, you will be fishers of man. Right? This is a, I will send you out into all the world with the good news of Jesus Christ to welcome people and to gather people into my kingdom.

And you know, that calling that Jesus gives us to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to bring all kinds of people from all over the world into his kingdom can feel overwhelming and intimidating.

We might feel like Peter and the other disciples did in Luke. The nets are breaking. You might think, you know, what if God brings a whole bunch of people who are totally different than me into our church?

[15 : 27] Or what if God brings people into my life who have overwhelming physical needs? Or what if I'm asked to take on a position of leadership and responsibility that I feel like is over my head?

Now it's true, following Jesus can feel overwhelming at times. But what Jesus wants to reassure his disciples here is that he's promised to be with us and to equip us.

And that we can depend on him, we can abide in him, and he'll equip us for whatever task he calls us to. Although there were so many fish, the net was not torn.

That we, and the net in one sense can represent the promises of the gospel of Jesus. Jesus says, anyone everywhere who believes in him will have eternal life.

He's a merciful Savior, and anyone who comes to him will not be driven away. The promises are true, and they will hold, and they will not break. And that's what Christ has given us.

[16 : 29] So that's the first thing. Jesus calls us to abide in him by reminding us of our dependence. Second, he calls us to invest for him. Now this is verse 9 through 14.

When they got on land, they saw fish and bread prepared by Jesus. Jesus was acting as a host. He had cooked breakfast for them, inviting his disciples to share a meal. And verse 13 says he took the bread and gave it to them.

Now, once again, Jesus was deliberately reminding them of an episode from the middle of his earthly ministry when he had fed a whole crowd of people, 5,000 men plus women and children, with bread and fish.

And when he took it and gave it to the people. In the Gospel of John, it appears in chapter 6. It's the only one of Jesus' miracles recorded in all four of the Gospels.

So if you want, you can flip back to John chapter 6, this event that Jesus was reminding his disciples of. Now, what was the point? Why did Jesus want to remind his disciples of this particular event?

[17 : 35] On the one hand, it was a symbol of his abundant provision. Going along with the first point, with only five small loaves of bread and two small fish, Jesus fed a large crowd and there were 12 baskets full of leftovers at the end, one for each of the disciples.

But you know, the story isn't just about Jesus' amazing provision, amazing though it was, but also Jesus' insistence that his disciples be involved in the process. If you go back to John chapter 6, verse 5, it says, Jesus saw that a large crowd was coming toward him and he said to Philip, where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?

Verse 6 said, he said this to test him for he himself knew what he would do. Jesus intentionally involved his disciples in his ministry. Now, Jesus was the Lord of all creation.

All things had been made through him. If he, I mean, if he could really do this miracle and multiply five loaves of bread and two small fish to feed 5,000 people, he didn't really need the five loaves of bread and two small fish. He could have made it out of thin air.

But no, he says, I want you to be invested in this with me. He received a small boy's lunch, willingly offered.

[18 : 51] He involved the disciples in organizing the people and distributing the food and cleaning up afterwards and in John 21, Jesus followed the same pattern. He says, he was already cooking the fish and bread on the fire and Jesus says, bring some of the fish that you have caught.

You see, Jesus is sufficient. Jesus can accomplish his work on his own but he calls us to be invested alongside him. And even though our resources may seem insignificant and insufficient compared to his, he multiplies them for the good of his people and the glory of his name.

So let me ask us, brothers and sisters, can you remember a time when Jesus called you to invest sacrificially from your own limited resources and then he multiplied what you offered him?

Offered to others in his name. Maybe you heard that someone in the church was sick and you took the initiative to make dinner and bring it over to their house and encourage them.

And maybe they sent you the sweetest thank you note about how much it meant to them to know that they have a church family and they have people who care for them in that kind of way. Or maybe you took the time to meet one-on-one for several months with someone who had questions about Christianity and they came to faith in Jesus and they're walking the same path with you now.

[20 : 23] Maybe you took the difficult step of gently confronting a brother or sister who seemed to be straying from the ways of Jesus and they listened.

They listened to what you said and they changed their ways and they thank you for it. Maybe you introduced yourself to someone new before or after church even though you're naturally an introvert and they were standing 10 feet away not talking to anyone alone and you were standing by yourself and honestly you would have been more comfortable just standing 10 feet away and not saying a thing.

But you thought because let me go and introduce myself because that would be a blessing to them even if it's not my personality type. And maybe they now tell others how welcoming they found this church to be.

Now I know it doesn't always work that way right? Sometimes you invest and you give and you share God's word and share what he's given you and you don't see multiplying fruit of your labor in the Lord.

Jesus was very realistic about this in the parable of the sower. Jesus says sometimes the word falls along the path. People don't want to hear it at all. They just brush you aside.

[21 : 42] They don't thank you at all for the ways that you're trying to do good to them spiritually. They don't even care. He says sometimes the word falls on rocky ground and people get really excited about it for a little while but then when the going gets tough the excitement doesn't last.

He says sometimes the word falls among thorns and it gets choked out by the worries and cares and riches of this life and it doesn't mature. But he says sometimes the word falls into good soil and takes root.

And he says through perseverance over time it multiplies thirty, sixty or even a hundred fold. And you know doesn't that make it all worth it? When we see Jesus taking our humble offerings our humble efforts that we offer to him as expressions of worship and share with others and in some cases he multiplies them far more than we could ever expect or imagine.

So Jesus is encouraging us invest for him. Abide in him invest for him and don't hold back.

Bring what you have to Jesus and let him multiply what you offer. Third abide in him invest for him and finally be restored through him. Jesus reminds us of our dependence he reminds us of his power to multiply what we invest in his kingdom but finally he reminds us of our failure and his forgiveness.

[23 : 21] You know when we look back honestly on our lives whether it's just the last week or the last year or the last decade we look honestly we will be reminded not only of our dependence on him and his abundant provision for us or our investment in his kingdom and his multiplying of our efforts but we will also be reminded of our shameful failures and our darkest moments.

verse 9 says Jesus made a charcoal fire on the beach the only other time in the entire Bible where a charcoal fire is mentioned is three chapters beforehand in John chapter 18 verse 18 and Jesus was on trial before the high priest and Peter was standing in the courtyard and the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire because it was cold and three times someone asked Peter Peter you aren't one of that man's disciples are you and three times he replied I'm not Peter said more than a few stupid things in the course of his life with Jesus but that night had been the worst of them all the same night that Jesus was handed over to die and what we see here is that knowing his past failure Jesus pursues Peter with forgiveness you know

Jesus doesn't wait for Peter to approach him with repentance instead he pursues him with forgiveness sometimes if we have been wronged our response is simply to wait for the other person to approach us with repentance we say they wronged me they ought to take the initiative to make amends if they genuinely repent I'll consider forgiving them but they ought to make the first move but that is not what Jesus does here or with us generally Jesus doesn't wait for us to repent he graciously pursues us with his forgiveness now how does Jesus do that well first he brings us face to face with our past failure Jesus approached Simon Peter and took him aside Simon son of John do you love me more than these now you might wonder why does Jesus apparently compare

Simon's love for Jesus with the other disciples love for Jesus why does he ask him do you love me more than they do well on the night that Jesus was arrested that's exactly what Peter said you will all fall away but after I'm raised up I'll go ahead of you to Galilee and Peter immediately replied even though they all fall away I will not and later that night Peter had denied Jesus three times and so Jesus asked do you love me more than these in other words he was bringing Peter to face this question would will you confuse your love me with a false sense of superiority over all the other disciples and I think Peter got it because he didn't say yes Jesus I love you more than they do he just said yes Lord you know that I love you and he didn't compare himself anymore because he had been humbled and then two more times

Jesus asked Peter the same question do you love me verse 17 says Peter was grieved he was hurt sometimes it's painful to be brought face to face with our past failures you know when Jesus pursues us with his forgiveness he brings us face to face with our past failure many times we're afraid to do this past when when we've been wronged or when others have wronged us and our instinct is pretend that nothing ever happened or sweep it under the rug or make excuses for ourselves or others or we're afraid that if we really face what happened that we'll never be able to get beyond it isn't that why we don't face the past because we're afraid if we really face it we'll never get beyond. And so we suppress and deny and minimize and blame and excuse and don't talk about it and remain distant from each other, but Jesus doesn't do that. Jesus brings Peter face to face with his greatest failure, precisely so that Peter will be able to move beyond it forever.

[28 : 06] Jesus takes a far more painful route, and yet it is ultimately a far more healing and restoring route. Jesus exposes Peter's shame, Peter's unfaithfulness, Peter's impulsiveness rooted in his insecurity and fear and pride, and he does it not in order to rub salt on Peter's wounds, not to punish him, not to shame him, not to exclude him. Instead, it's as if Jesus puts his hand on Peter's shoulder and walks him back to the scene of his greatest failure by a charcoal fire in the early morning light where Peter had denied him. And in that same setting, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, calls Peter into a new future of faithfully following him. As you look back on the past year over the last few years or your time in New Haven, is there a dark night that haunts you?

Is there a failure or series of failures that has left a stain on your memory and shame in your conscience and you wish you could forget? The good news of this passage is that Jesus forgives and heals and restores, even after our worst failures, that he walks with us to the place of our sin and folly and shame. And in that same place, he stands with us as our Savior who was crucified, bearing our sins, and as our risen Lord who sets us free from bondage, and he calls us into a new future of faithfully walking with him. He redeems and restores, and he even reinstates. Peter's past past failure did not permanently prevent him from future usefulness in God's kingdom.

In fact, Jesus entrusts Peter with the responsibility to care for his people, to feed my lambs, take care of my sheep. And in verse 18, Jesus says to Peter, he basically says, one day you're going to die for me. Even though you deny me three times, even though you've said a bunch of stupid things, and you still will say some more stupid things, you will be faithful to the end.

In your life and even in your death, you will bring glory to God, so follow me. The end result of Jesus' conversation with Peter is that Peter is no longer defined by his past failure. Peter has been restored and commissioned and called to follow Jesus and glorify God all the way to the end. This is the power of Jesus who pursues us with his forgiveness and calls us into a future of following him. And Peter responds, verse 20 to 21, he says one more stupid thing.

Even after all this, he turned and saw John and said, Lord, what about him? Goodness, Peter.

[31 : 19] Isn't it encouraging that Peter is one of the disciples? It means we, you can be in. Jesus said, if I want him to remain alive until I come back, what is that to you? You follow me.

Abide in me. Invest for me. Be restored through me. And don't get distracted by comparing yourself to someone else. Peter was called to an active life, public preaching, sometimes getting thrown in prison for preaching about Jesus, being set free by angels, traveling from place to place, healing the sick, raising a dead person to life. Even once, he was a doer, we might say. John was a thinker, insightful and reflective and extensive writer, giving us not only his gospel, but three letters in the book of Revelation. Peter's life ended in martyrdom, bringing glory to God in his death. John lived the longest of any of the apostles, as far as we know. Which was better? Wrong question. Their callings were just different.

They were both called to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, just to express that in different ways. Some of you will be called to a life of influential leadership. Others of you will be called to a life of faithful obscurity. Some of you will stay in New Haven the rest of your life until you die here. You might as well reserve the cemetery plot in advance. Some of you will go and travel the world and move 20 times in your adult life.

Some of you will glorify God through public gifts of teaching and leadership. Others of you will glorify God behind the scenes by serving and showing mercy and helping and administrating.

And Jesus' final word in the Gospel of John is don't compare yourself to your brother or sister in Christ. Don't be constantly looking at them. Simply look to Christ. He's the author and the finisher of our faith. He's the one who's gone before us and paved the way. He's the one who sent his spirit to equip us for everything that he's called us to. Brothers and sisters, abide in Jesus, invest for Jesus, and be restored by Jesus. Let's pray.