

# Restored

John 21:1-17

**Simon Peter** is famous as *the great blunderer* among Jesus' disciples. Impulsive. Strong-willed. Thick-headed. When Jesus predicted that all the disciples would deny him and be scattered, Peter said, "Even if all of these jokers abandon you, I never will!" Just a few hours later, what did Peter do? Deny three times that he even knew Jesus!

***Peter should give us all great encouragement that God can and does use ANYONE.***

Even when we are confused; even when we mess up; even when we flat out deny and disown Jesus – still He calls us back to Himself and sends us back out into ministry.

The gospel accounts present a powerful contrast between ***Peter and Judas***. Both betrayed Jesus. But only one came back to Him. Judas represents "**worldly sorrow**" – guilt and shame that leads to despair and death. Peter represents "**godly sorrow**" – guilt and repentance that leads to forgiveness and restoration. Judas gave Jesus no opportunity to forgive and restore him – and so Judas shows us the consequences of sin when you fail to repent. But Peter shows us God's desire to forgive and restore us.

Today we will see ***how Jesus restores us when we fail*** – **four steps** in His restoration process.

## **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

### **1. He helps us See Him**

"After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way." John 21:1

It took a while for the disciples to understand what was happening. Jesus had told them three times that he would die and rise again – but they didn't really know what that meant. This was the third time Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection, but they still didn't know about the ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and their ongoing relationship with Jesus. It was a confusing time.

Can you relate? ***Are there times when you don't understand what God is doing in your life?*** Are there times when you lose sight of Jesus altogether – when you wonder where He is or what He is doing? Especially after we have failed and fallen, we can get the feeling that God has abandoned us.

But that is precisely when Jesus comes to us to help us see Him – to help us know that He is with us and He is still working in our lives.

## **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

### **1. He helps us See Him**

“Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.” John 21:4

They were out fishing all night. The sun was just breaking over the horizon. They must have been exhausted and frustrated. Plus, we know they were confused in general. **A shadowy figure** on the shore calls out to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” You can guess the annoyed answer from the seven fishermen – “No.”

But when this person on shore tells them to cast the net again, ***they don't question the instruction***, nor do they ask Him who He is. They just obey. And suddenly the net is bursting with fish.

Of course, this moment brings us back to **when Jesus first called the disciples**. This was Peter's decisive moment. Remember that encounter? At that point Peter objected, even though he knew it was Jesus. He reluctantly obeyed and, of course, the nets were so full of fish they needed two boats to haul them in. Experiencing that brought Peter to His knees, professing Jesus as Lord and saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8).

***How did Jesus demonstrate His authority to Peter?*** By silently commanding every fish in the Sea of Galilee to come at once into this particular net. “Come,” Jesus called, and they came. Peter knew that was impossible and he felt his sin and weakness exposed before the glorious Lord of all things.

***Isn't this the grace of how Jesus restores us?*** He brings Peter right back to where their relationship started! It's the same body of water, just called by the regional name - Tiberias. This is Peter's home, his familiar fishing grounds; almost certainly his boat. You wonder if Jesus was in the same place as when he first called out to them three years before.

They couldn't tell it was Jesus due to the low light, and apparently he was far enough away they couldn't tell by his voice. But the instruction was very familiar and the result removed all doubt.

## **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

### **1. He helps us See Him**

“That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’” John 21:7

They all probably realized it at the same time. John is the one who said it. Peter is the one who wrapped his cloak around himself and dove in to swim to shore. And there is the contrast

with Judas. ***Judas ran away from Jesus.*** He ran away from forgiveness and restoration. ***Peter swam toward Jesus.*** He dove in and got to Jesus as quickly as he possibly could.

What is your approach to Jesus right now? Are you avoiding Him? Are you walking or running AWAY from the Lord, like Judas? Or are you running toward Jesus as fast as you can?

Especially if you have some burden on your heart – especially if you have failed recently and are feeling conviction over your sin – don't make the mistake of hiding it from the Lord (He knows about it already) and running from the Lord (you can't escape Him anyway). Jesus is calling out to you. He is showing you that He is still there. He is still working. He has not forgotten about you. He has not abandoned you. So don't run from Him!

That's the first step in restoration – Jesus shows us it's Him. He's there. He's at work.  
Second:

### **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

#### **2. He reminds us of His Power and Love**

“So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish... large fish, 153 of them.” John 21:6,11

This was how Jesus revealed His glory to the four fishermen to begin with – and He reminds them that **He is still in control**. He still rules over all things. The wind and the waves obey Him. The fish in the sea obey Him. Everything obeys Him. Jesus is Lord. He has authority over all things.

We need to remember this. We need to hold on to this truth. Jesus IS in control. ***Your life may feel out of control*** but know these two truths: Jesus is with you and He is in control.

Sometimes God likes to dazzle us with His sovereign power, sometimes it's more subtle. I've mentioned this before but nine months ago I was flying back from a conference in Chicago and there was a young man sitting next to me. We got to talking – just getting to know each other – and it turned into a wonderful spiritual conversation the Lord used to remind Mike that God loved Him. But it was also a way God reminded me of His love.

Mike's sister is the best GI doctor in Tampa – maybe the world. Last fall she was changing from one hospital to another and wasn't taking new patients. But Mike gave me her personal cell number and he talked to her about our son, Seth. So Dr. Seminerio had her office work Seth in and started him on a new treatment protocol for his GI symptoms that has literally changed his life. I'm not overstating it. He was on strong antibiotics for a total of 27 months because his other GI doctors didn't know what to do to manage his unique auto-immune condition. One appointment with Dr. S and she suggested an infusion that Seth started and

within a couple of months had him off the antibiotics and as healthy as ever with his GI symptoms. Amazing. 27 MONTHS. You aren't supposed to stay on antibiotics for 27 DAYS.

This was God's way of saying, "Look – I can command 153 fish in the Sea of Galilee to jump into a certain net. I can certainly pick out the right pharmacy rep to get onto the right plane and into the right seat so he can connect you with his GI Doc sister. Easy peasy."

Jesus is in control. He commands the fish. He is in control of your story too. Do you see Him? Remember His power. And also remember His love. Look at verse 9.

### **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

#### **2. He reminds us of His Power and Love**

"When they got out on land, they saw **a charcoal fire** in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread." John 21:9

The only other time in John that **a charcoal fire** is mentioned... was when Peter denied knowing Jesus. So this mention of the charcoal is no accident. Jesus is setting the scene to show Peter that ***He meets us exactly at the point of our failure***. That is how He shows us the full extent of His love and mercy and grace.

Where Peter had betrayed Jesus, the Lord gave Him freshly cooked fish. Where Peter had failed, Jesus fed him. Fish and bread of course remind us of the feeding of the 5,000 – how Jesus multiplied the little boy's lunch to feed the multitude, with 12 baskets left over. And it reminds us of the Last Supper – the bread and wine; the body and blood of the Lord.

***When we come to Jesus in humble repentance, He transforms our failure into a fresh experience of grace.*** We see this with Peter. We see it with Saul who became Paul. We see it with King David, Abraham, Moses and Samson.

And I bet you've experienced it **in your life as well**. I know I have. It was my teenage failures with secret sin that showed me my real need for the cross. It's not the FAILURE that brings you closer to Jesus – it's the repentance and restoration that brings you to that fresh experience of grace.

Have you come to Jesus recently? ***What is YOUR CHARCOAL FIRE?*** What is the place at which you have betrayed Jesus or let Him down? That is where Jesus calls you to Himself. That is where He is preparing a healing banquet – IF and WHEN you are ready to come back to Him in humble repentance.

**My charcoal file is pride.** My independence and self-reliance is the place where I so often neglect and deny Jesus. I do my Experiencing God study. I have my times of prayer. But a lot

of the time I operate as if my work matters more than God's work. Prayer can be just a little ritual I get out of the way so I feel better about doing whatever I want, however I want.

***This little charcoal fire is the place where I have had many meetings with Jesus.*** I

remember as a youth pastor, right out of college, thinking I had all the answers. The youth group I took over had around 20 high schoolers and another 10-15 middle schoolers, a lot like here at Oakwood. I figured after a few months with me we would blow the doors off, double – even triple. What do you think happened?

I'll never forget that **first winter**. I had been there 6 or 7 months and it was time for our winter retreat. Up in Chicago that involves things called snow and sleds and toboggans and skis that go on the white stuff, not the blue stuff. That group of 30-35 students in the summer, when we were riding in the church bus up to wintercamp had seven adult leaders and SIX total students. Six. We had one more leader than we did student.

I felt like a total failure. I felt like nothing had worked. Eventually I realized that I was making it all about me. Jesus called me to a little charcoal meeting to remind me – ***“it's not about you.”*** After that I started to learn what it means to put Jesus first in the ministry – to make it about Him, not about me; to trust in His power and plans, not mine.

That was my first of many meetings at that particular charcoal fire. And in the grace and mercy of our Savior, ***He keeps calling me back there and keeps the fish and bread warm for me.*** What is YOUR charcoal fire? How has Jesus met YOU at the place of your failure? How has He reminded you of His power and love?

That is how Jesus gently, graciously restores us. He helps us see Him. He reminds us of His power and love. Third:

### **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

#### **3. He calls us back to Himself**

***“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’” John 21:15***

See how personal this is? ***“Simon, son of John.”*** There were seven men out there fishing. Jesus calls Peter away from them and calls him by his given name, “Simon.” Remember, Jesus is the one who renamed him Peter, “the Rock.” Dwayne Johnson was not the original Rock – Peter was.

Jesus calls each of us by name. Remember John 10? “My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me.” If you belong to Jesus, you hear His voice, you know Him as your

shepherd. You know when He is calling you back home. And there are two things He specifically calls us back from: competing loves and comparing lives.

### **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

#### **3. He calls us back to Himself – from competing Loves**

“Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’” John 21:15

Three times here Jesus asks the same question: “Do you love me.” Of course, Jesus knew His heart, but Jesus also knew that it’s important to express emotions like this OUT LOUD. When it comes to repentance and re-commitment, it’s not enough to feel something – it’s important to SAY IT. Jesus didn’t need to hear Peter’s profession; **Peter needed to say it.**

It’s not clear what the “more than these” refers to. Is Jesus asking Peter if he loves Jesus more than the other six disciples? I don’t think so. I think it’s Jesus asking, “Do you love me more than you love the approval of these six disciples? More than you love the approval and applause of other people? More than you love fish and fishing and the Sea of Galilee and the whole area around here. Do you love me more than ANYTHING?”

***Why did Peter fail when he denied knowing Jesus three times?*** It was because, in that moment, he loved something more than Jesus. He loved his own LIFE primarily – all of the disciples were afraid of being captured and killed as Jesus was. He loved the opinion of people, his reputation. Since Jesus was condemned as a criminal he didn’t want to be associated with a condemned man. When Jesus was doing miracles and everyone wanted to make Him King, Peter was glad to be first in line beside Jesus. But now that Jesus was unpopular and affiliation with him meant danger, dishonor and possibly death, Peter didn’t want that as much.

Why do we fail when we turn to other things for our happiness and fulfillment? We fail because, in those moments, **we love something more than Jesus.** We believe, deep down, that money or pleasure or popularity or success is what we REALLY NEED to be happy and fulfilled in life. I remember one time when I was struggling with purity issues and shared that with an older pastor. He said to me, “Darin, it’s really very simple. What do you want more? Jesus or that?”

You have to decide. ***What do you want more?*** Jesus, or that other thing? Jesus calls us back to Himself, away from all competing loves. Next to our love for Jesus our commitment to everything and everyone else should be like HATRED. This is explicitly what Jesus said about family commitments, “If you do not HATE father and mother, sister and brother, husband or wife... you cannot be my disciple.”

Think about it. If you are married or in a committed relationship right now, **do YOU want to share that person's love?** How would you feel to hear that your husband was in love with another woman or your wife was involved with another man? Jealousy, anger, fury. And rightly so. God gave us these exclusive attachments to show us what His jealousy is like. God taught the nation of Israel that He is a JEALOUS GOD. He will not allow us to share our love with other gods. He loves us too much to let us pollute our love with other false, secondary loves.

And He also calls us back to Himself from comparing lives. Look at verse 21.

### **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

#### **3. He calls us back to Himself – from comparing Lives**

“When Peter saw [John], he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about this man?’” John 21:21

Throughout this gospel John has referred to himself as **“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”** It may sound arrogant, but he doesn't say he was the disciple who most loved Jesus but that he was the disciple most loved BY Jesus.

Don't you know – **we should ALL feel that way?** I know for sure that I am Jesus' favorite. I am the disciple He loves. But so are you. You should feel that to Jesus, you are the one he loves. He has set His affection upon you. He chose you. He called you. He proposed to you because He wants to be one with you forever. He loves you uniquely and has special plans just for you. This is the advantage of the divinity of Jesus – He has INFINITE love to share so He can have an exclusive, intimate bond with each of us and not find his time or attention diluted in the slightest.

Peter knew there was a special connection Jesus had with John. Maybe he was a little jealous of the intimacy John had with Jesus, sort of like Martha was with her sister Mary. But look at Jesus' response to this question:

### **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

#### **3. He calls us back to Himself – from comparing Lives**

“If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” John 21:22

Jesus had just told Peter that **he would die with his arms stretched out** – a reference to crucifixion. Peter sees John nearby and wonders if Jesus has a similarly grim prediction for John. And Jesus says, “That's not your story. That's his story. You follow me. Don't compare stories.”

Only God knows the details of every person's story. We are not in a position to judge another person. We simply don't know enough. The story is told of **a business man on an airplane**,

preparing for a big presentation and struggling to get his thoughts together. The entire flight a baby is crying and the mom seems unconcerned and unable to get the baby to quiet down. Halfway through the flight the man loses his temper and shouts out, "Can someone get that baby quiet?" The Mom breaks down and starts crying and shares that the baby's father just died in a terrible accident and they are flying to the funeral.

**"Everyone is fighting a battle you know nothing about."** We saw that on the wall of a hospital. And that's the reality. Each person has his or her own story; their own battle. So you can't judge another person because you simply don't have enough data.

Peter looked over at John and said, "What about him? What's his future?" Jesus said, "That's none of your business. You follow me."

In ***the Horse and His Boy***, one of the Chronicles of Narnia, Shasta is a runaway slave who has many harrowing adventures including being chased by lions. At the end of these adventures the boy is feeling very sorry for himself when suddenly he is met by The Lion, Aslan Himself. Aslan – the Jesus figure – helps Shasta understand what had been happening to him and that he wasn't so unfortunate after all.

"But we were chased by lions!"

Aslan corrected him - "Not lions. One lion."

"How do you know, sir?"

"Because I was that lion."

Shasta realizes it was Aslan who was with them all along. He wonders about his friend, Aravis, because the lion had wounded her. He asked Aslan why He did that to Aravis. The Lion responded: ***"I am telling you your story, not hers. No one is told any story but their own."***

We want to know why God allows one thing in our lives and something else in the lives of another. For Peter it was the way he was to die.

- For you maybe it's an illness you have to endure.
- It may be the job you really want.
- It may be the marriage or family situation you want.
- It may be the appearance you want and someone else has.

Comparison is always a dangerous activity. No matter how good you have it, you can always find someone better off. ***The trouble with jealousy, as with judgment***, is that you don't



know the whole story. Just because someone is thin or fit doesn't mean their whole life is happy and in order. Just because someone has a good job and a lot of money doesn't mean their life is stress free. Just because someone has the appearance of a happy marriage and a good relationship with their kids doesn't mean it's all laughs and smiles under the surface.

This is another reason **we need small groups** – we need to be in close relationship with other believers – because as we share our struggles we hear other people who have similar struggles or harder things they are dealing with. When you rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn it's a form of GRATITUDE for what God has given you. Envy is ingratitude. Jealousy is judgment.

Jesus calls us away from comparing lives, back to Himself. “What is that to you?” Whatever God is doing in someone else's life is between Him and them – not you. One more step in Jesus' restoration process:

#### **How Jesus Restores us when we Fail:**

##### **4. He sends us into Ministry**

“He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’” John 21:16

Three times Jesus asked if Peter loved him. Three times, when Peter insisted he did love Jesus, the Lord told him, “Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep.”

Jesus finds Peter back out fishing – going back to his old life. Perhaps Peter felt he was now disqualified from being a leader in the Christian community and he had no other option but to go back to his trade. But as he had when he first met Peter, Jesus again called Peter away from fishing to ***his true calling to shepherd people.***

**Jesus is the good shepherd.** He is gathering all of His sheep together – calling them, one by one, to come to Him. And as the sheep come together into One flock, Jesus needs under-shepherds to care for His sheep. Peter and the apostles were the first overseers, the first shepherds, responsible to care for the early Christians.

When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples it was the example of what He expected of them. “I have washed your feet, so now you should wash one another's feet.” Our calling is to love and serve one another as Jesus has served us. ***All believers are shepherds, helping to gather in and care for His flock.***

Even when we mess up, Jesus restores us and sends us back into ministry. Sometimes there are consequences that follow us for a while. But Jesus helps us see that He is still there, still

involved. He reminds us of His power and love. He calls us back to Himself and He sends us back into ministry.

When Kristin and I were in Kentucky, we led a team to **New Orleans** to do follow up after Challenge 2012. I bet some of you were there in New Orleans. 5,000 students from the Evangelical Free Church were there for a week, and as usual in a Challenge Conference, they went all over town to pray with people, serve the city and share the gospel. After the conference they gave us 150 or so cards with names and phone numbers to follow up with, along with a church planter who was there in the city.

We brought four others from our church in Kentucky, including a couple named **Pam and Jerry**. They were fairly new to our church and were excited to come along for this trip. As we were driving the long trip from Louisville to New Orleans, we heard their story. For both of them it was a second marriage. Both of their first marriages ended in messy ways. And for years both had been single, struggling with whether God was punishing them for their failings. When they met and fell in love it was the beginning of a work of restoration in their lives. Being accepted at our church – not judged – was a further encouragement.

But this trip to New Orleans felt to them like their restoration to ministry. They had felt a lot of judgment from the church due to their divorce and wondered if they would ever be qualified to serve the Lord again. They were so grateful to be included in the trip – and for years after told us how meaningful it was that we invited them with us.

Have you ever felt disqualified? Have you ever messed up and wondered if God was done with you? Peter certainly did. Three times he denied even knowing Jesus. But Jesus came to Peter, as He does to each of us.

- Can you see Jesus at work in your life?
- Can you feel Jesus reminding you of His power and love?
- Are you ready to respond to Jesus calling you back to Himself?
- Are you ready to get back to work for the Lord?