

## **John 21:1-19**

### **“Peter’s Restart”**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In January, my wife and I had a baby, and for the next three months, I took parental leave. I would like to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for allowing me to have this time. However, during this parental leave, a great storm blew up in our relationship. In that storm, we were exposed to each other's sins, limitations, helplessness, and weaknesses. But God was there with us as a couple. And, with his help, I believe we were able to “restart” as a family. Peter, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, met the resurrected Jesus. He had to deal with his own heart, and in doing so he was able to “restart.” Today, we will look at how Jesus led Peter to a restart from John 21.

#### **John 21:1-19.**

- 1 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way.
- 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.
- 3 Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.
- 4 Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.”
- 6 He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.
- 7 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.
- 8 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.
- 9 When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread.
- 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.”
- 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.
- 12 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.
- 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish.
- 14 This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 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."

16 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." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."

17 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."

18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go."

19 (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."

These are the living words of God. Amen.

From this Gospel of John chapter 21, we see how Jesus gave Peter the opportunity for a "restart." First, Jesus showed Peter his sin and helplessness; second, Jesus showed Peter and the others respect, hospitality, and encouragement; third, Jesus loved Peter and showed him his will. To summarize today's message, when God gives us a restart, he shows us our sin and helplessness, he humbles and encourages us, and he loves us and shows us his will.

Chapter 21 is the final chapter of John's Gospel. On the third day after Jesus was crucified, he rose again and appeared to his disciples. Jesus appeared to the disciples not once, but many times, and according to John, this is the third time. This event in John 21 is not recorded in any other Gospel. Only John describes this event.

First, Jesus showed Peter his sin and helplessness. Please look at verses one and two.

**John 21:1, 2.** *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), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.*

Verse 1 says "After this . . ." which refers to Jesus' resurrected appearance to the women and disciples in the previous chapter, chapter 20. Jesus appeared to them again in chapter 21. Lake Tiberias was the name given to Lake Galilee during Roman rule. This is where Peter and the other disciples first met Jesus. It is about 150 km north of Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified—about as far as Karuizawa is from Tokyo. It would take about 3 days to walk this distance.

Why were the disciples on the shores of Lake Galilee? Jesus said in Matthew 26:32, "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." And in Matthew 28:10 Jesus said, "Do

*not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.*" After he was resurrected, he told them to go, because he was going to Galilee. According to John 21:2, the disciples who had come to Lake Galilee were Peter, Thomas, and Nathanael, who is also called Bartholomew in the other Gospels. Then there were James and John, called the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples not mentioned by name, for a total of seven. In verse 3, Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." And they said, "We are going with you." They went out and got into the small boat with him, but they did not catch anything that night. But, why at this time, did Peter say he was going fishing?

Before Peter met Jesus, he was earning his living as a fisherman catching fish on this Lake of Galilee. But when Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men," Peter immediately left his nets and followed Jesus. However, now he took his nets and went fishing again. Theologians have been divided on the reason for this, with some saying that Peter's going out to fish was an act of disobedience to Jesus' command, while others say that they had to make a living even after Jesus' missionary work was over, and so they returned to being fishermen. There are various opinions on this. What can be said, however, is that Peter is catching fish again, despite Jesus' invitation to make him a fisherman in the spiritual sense. He is trying to go back to his former life, even though he has already met the resurrected Jesus. Peter's heart had not yet been dealt with. That day Peter and his disciples stayed up all night trying to catch fish, but they did not catch any.

Let's continue with verses 4 and 5.

**John 21:4, 5.** *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."*

The resurrected Jesus appeared on the shore, but no one seemed to recognize him. It was still early in the evening and the boat was about 100 yards (about 90 meters) from the shore, so it is not surprising that the disciples did not recognize him. From the shore, Jesus called out to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" This call was very casual in the culture of the time. In Japanese, it is a casual way of saying, "Brothers, haven't you caught any fish to eat yet? They answered honestly, "No." Then, in verse 6, Jesus said to them, "*Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.*" So, they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish." Jesus told them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. The disciples obeyed the call and cast their nets on the right side of the boat. Seven disciples were in a small boat, but even with their strength they could not pull up the net.

At this time, Peter may have recalled his first encounter with Jesus. The first half of Luke 5 describes the event of Peter's encounter with Jesus. Again, Peter had worked all night and caught nothing, but he listened to Jesus and let down his nets again. He called for help, and even though two boats pulled up the net, it was about to sink. After this happened, Peter bowed down to Jesus and said, "Lord, get away from me. For I am a

sinful man." Jesus then said, "Do not be afraid. From now on, you will be a fisher of men." In saying this, he called Peter to follow him.

Peter had lived with Jesus for three years and had seen many things that Jesus, the Son of God, had done. But at this time, he was going back to his old way of fishing, trying to catch fish on his own, instead of relying on God's power. Through this event, Jesus showed his disciples and Peter that they were sinners and powerless to accomplish anything without his power. When God gives us a new start, He shows us our sin and helplessness.

After my wife and I had a son, I realized my sin, weakness, and helplessness. Into the normal household chores came the responsibility to take care of our child. I didn't know why he cried, I had to deal with a lot of dirty and wet diapers, I was woken up many times in the middle of the night, and had to stand up and hold the baby, who weighed over three kilograms, in my arms to help him fall asleep. One day, my wife said to me, "Our conversations consist only of you explaining what you like to do. You don't ask me questions or try to have a conversation with me." She said to me, "Our communication is only one-way."

At that moment, I was shown my helplessness in not being able to meet the needs of our son and my sin of talking only about what I liked and not caring about or engaging my wife who was also struggling with knowing how to raise our child. Fortunately, God was with us. We prayed for each other, confessed our sins to each other, and were able to have a restart as a family.

Brothers and sisters, we too can make a fresh start with God. But in the process, we will be confronted with our own sin, weakness, and helplessness. We will also face these problems even after we have made a new start. But the Lord does not destroy those whom he truly loves because of their sins and weaknesses. Rather, he leads us to trust him more and more each day. So, let us first acknowledge our own sins and weaknesses, repent of our sins, and turn to God as we make a new start with Him.

Jesus showed Peter his sin and inability to start anew. But God serves, humbles, encourages, and offers forgiveness.

**John 21:7, 8.** *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. 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.*

That disciple whom Jesus loved was John who wrote this Gospel. John said to Peter, "It is the Lord." Then Peter who had stripped down, put on his jacket and suddenly jumped into the lake. Peter is a man of action. When Jesus revealed to His disciples that he was going to die on the cross, Peter was the one who took Jesus aside and admonished him. When Jesus was about to be arrested, Peter was the first to take out his sword. Here, the

other disciples were left behind in a small boat with a big catch of fish, and they rowed the boat back to the shore with paddles.

**John 21:9-11.** *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, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.*

When the disciples returned to shore, they were met with a startling sight. Jesus had built a fire on the shore, and bread and fish were already roasting on it. The disciples had just come ashore, so the fish that were being grilled were not the ones caught by the disciples. Jesus had prepared them. Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught," and when Peter pulled up the net, it contained 153 large fish. The net was so heavy that the disciples could not pull it up, but it was not torn.

**John 21:12-14.** *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 with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

Jesus offered the disciples breakfast of grilled fish and bread. The disciples already knew that it was Jesus, so no one asked him. John writes that Jesus revealed himself to the disciples three times, including this incident.

The disciples, seeing Jesus serving them, would have remembered another scene. When Jesus was with His disciples in a secluded place with a crowd of five or four thousand people, he took pity on them and blessed them with five loaves of bread and two fish, which they ate and were filled. Also, the night before his crucifixion, Jesus served them bread and wine, saying that these were "my body and my blood." In the Israelite culture of that time, the sharing of a meal in this way indicated an intimate friendship. When Jesus was crucified, Peter betrayed him, and his disciples fled. Now, to these very disciples, Jesus shared a meal and intimate fellowship.

Peter and his disciples had fled from Jesus and betrayed him. But now, the risen Jesus served them. Jesus demonstrated that he is always with them, providing for their needs, inviting and encouraging them into fellowship. Truly, Jesus is Immanuel, God with us.

In the middle of my seminary studies, I found myself in a situation where it was difficult to go any further. I was experiencing stress in my relationship with my roommate when he strongly told me, "You are not fit to work in the church, perhaps you should reconsider your calling?" Also, although I was living at the seminary by receiving donations from others, my own savings began to bottom out, and I found myself in a difficult situation. However, the wife of an elder at the church where I was serving told me, "A friend of mine runs a workshop where people who are struggling in body and mind live together. Would you like to live with them three days a week? We will even give you a stipend." I accepted the offer and started living with them three days a week. Through taking care

of, serving, and living together with these people around me, my own heart was touched. The joy of serving others was given to me, and I had peace in my heart. I knew that God was giving me grace. My financial needs were also met, leading me to be able to finish seminary.

Jesus served, loved, fellowshiped with, and encouraged Peter and the disciples in order to give them a restart. Now Jesus has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. We cannot see him with our eyes. But Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit to love, serve, and encourage us. Grace City Church Tokyo has been able to start anew despite many challenges because God the Holy Spirit is working in us to love, serve, encourage, and provide for our needs. If we believe in Jesus as our Savior, we can always start anew by the power of the Holy Spirit, because God is at work. Praise be to God for his grace that is always with us!

Jesus then speaks very personally with Peter as part of his "restart." Jesus shows both his love and his will for Peter.

**John 21:15-17.** *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." 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."*

It is not mentioned in the Bible, but Jesus may have talked with Peter personally after the meal as he walked along the shore. Jesus said to Peter, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*" In the Japanese Bible, the phrase is "more than these men love," but when we read the original language, it is "more than these things," which seems to have a broader meaning than "more than these men love." In other words, he is asking Peter, "Do you love me more than the disciples and more than the miracles that I performed?" And Peter says "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." If you look at the rest of the passage up to verse 17, you will see this exchange repeated three times.

Peter says, "Lord, I love you. I am ready to go to prison or to death to be with you." The day before Jesus was handed over to those who would kill him, Jesus knew that Peter would betray him and he said, "*Peter, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will say three times that you do not know me.*" And indeed, Peter did betray Jesus by saying that he did not know him three times after Jesus was arrested. We are told that Peter was heartbroken in this exchange, here in John 21, because of the sin he had committed when he denied Jesus three times.

Note also that the word "love" used by Jesus and Peter is different. Jesus used the word "agapao," while Peter responded with the word "phileo." Jesus' use of "agapao" means love from God, but Peter's use of "phileo" means love as a friend or friendship. It is not clear why the two men used different words for love. What is clear, however, is that although Peter may not have fully understood what Jesus meant, he understood that

Jesus loved him, forgave him, and gave him a calling to "Feed my sheep," and "Follow me."

**John 21:18, 19.** *Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are 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."*

Jesus used the words "Truly, truly, I say to you" to indicate to Peter what would happen to him in the future. When Jesus uses these words, he is saying that what will happen is surely God's will. Jesus said that "when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." According to verse 19, Jesus said this in order to show Peter by what kind of death he was to glorify God. In other words, Peter would give his life for the name of Jesus; he would be martyred. There is much written about Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, but nothing is recorded about the end of Peter's life. According to one theory, he was persecuted during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero and martyred by being crucified upside down. Just as Jesus commanded Peter to follow him, Peter did this, even giving his life for the sake of his Savior.

Jesus loved Peter and showed him his will in order to give him a fresh start. Indeed, the will of God expressed to Peter was the will of Jesus, that he would be martyred, that he would give his life for the sake of God's name. Because of Peter's true heart-change, he was willing to follow Jesus to show God's greatness, even if it meant that his life would be lost. Knowing Jesus' love and his will was necessary for Peter's "restart."

Katherine Leary Alsdorf is the director of the Center for Faith and Work, started by Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. In the beginning of her book, "Every Good Endeavor", she gives her testimony of how she was led to this work. She was convinced that as a Christian she wanted to work in the business world, and for ten years she served on the boards of newly founded high-tech companies in New York, Europe, and Silicon Valley, California. Her job was to create and launch products in a culture that is very imaginative and driven to create new things. After working hard morning and night, they were finally able to bring their product to the world. However, when the IT bubble burst, the company was forced into bankruptcy. She asked God why he had not allowed the company to succeed. However, six months later, she received a request from Redeemer Church to join them as they were launching a ministry to integrate faith and work. She was called by God to help others who struggled with knowing how to better live out the hope and truth of the gospel in their workplaces and jobs. She may have experienced great failure in her work. But God loved her and showed her His will to know Him more deeply.

When we start anew, we too receive God's love, and then God shows us his will. It may not be what we had hoped for. But the will that God shows us is the best way, and his

will is the way that his splendor and greatness is expressed. As we start anew, God will love us and show us His will. Through our prayers to God, let us be confident of His love and seek His will.

To all of you who believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, we can always start anew. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, suffered the wrath of our sins, forgave us, rose from the dead on the third day, and triumphed over death. From this living God we have received forgiveness of sins and grace. Let us receive this forgiveness and grace and make a fresh start. The God of Immanuel is always with us.

Let's pray.

"Loving Father God, thank you for sending your Son to die on the cross for our sins. He was crucified for our sins, died, but rose from the dead on the third day. Therefore, you have given grace and forgiveness of sins to those who believe in you, and you allow us to make a new start. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. When we are made new, we must face our own sins and weaknesses. But we thank you for exposing our sins and weaknesses in order that we can love you deeply. We repent of our sins. Please renew us day by day. Lord, you know our needs and you are always giving us grace and encouragement. Because you live, we can face tomorrow. We praise you! And, as we start anew, you show us your will. For us, that will may be different from what we think it should be. But your will is the best, and it is the best way to express Your greatness. We ask you, Lord, to change our hearts so that we may follow your will. We offer this prayer before you in the name of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."