

Restored to Serve

John 21:15-19

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Turn to John 21 -- We are, you might say, we're on our last Sunday night emphasis of the Easter season. That's what's happened in the past three weeks. We've been focusing on the appearances of Jesus actually, after his resurrection. And we're going to close out tonight with the story in John 21, and it starts at verse 15. You might know that the New Testament actually records 10 to 12 resurrection appearances of Jesus after the resurrection. And there's some difference in opinion, some think that certain resurrected appearances might be reported a couple of times in Scripture, depending on the context, but it's 10 or 12 times that Jesus came and everyone agrees it pretty much started with Mary Magdalene in the tomb, and the appearances were climaxed, of course, when Jesus was ascended into heaven. And even after that, there are at least three or more appearances of Jesus. One is when Stephen was being martyred, he saw a vision of Christ in Acts 7 and then, of course, Paul's vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus. And of course, John Jesus appeared to John on the Isle of Patmos as he was exile there and from where we have the Book of Revelation. And but Jesus probably 10 to 11 times. And it had been a rough week for the path for the disciples at Easter. And just to set the context that you and I know well, in the last week, those disciples received probably far more teaching than they could assimilate. You can imagine hearing all that we know that went on and they were assimilating that. Also there, their hopes for a outward kingdom had been shattered with Jesus's death. Judas, of course, had betrayed them. In fact, all the disciples had fled Jesus as a Rast and Peter had been denied Jesus three times after that arrest, Jesus endured those unjust trials that the beatings, the torturing, the dreadful crucifixion that they had witnessed first, and then sightings of Jesus begin to occur, as I said first with the ladies. And then on that Resurrection Sunday and probably this was blowing the mind of the disciples. They rejoiced, but they were cautious. Were these viewings of Jesus a matter of visions or dreams? Was it something real they were trying to process. So as you know, what they did was they or some of them migrated on back up to Galilee. They left and they when they got there, a number of the disciples decided at Peter's lead that they would go fishing. And Peter said, I'm going to go fishing. And other disciples joined him and they went to the Sea of Galilee in this text, the Sea of Tiberius, of course. And they didn't catch thing, spent all night fishing, and it was very unsuccessful. And then a man on the shore starts yelling at them when they're about ready to call it quits. And he says, Take your nets and put it on the other side of the boat, which would have been a very unusual request. But these disciples did it. And of course, you know, they hauled in a huge load of fish. And like good fishermen, they counted 153 fish. And it turned out to be an amazing experience. And of course, then John recognized who the man on the shore was as it was Jesus. And when he realized it, Peter got excited and put on his cloak and jumped in the water and started paddling to shore that hundred yards as the other disciples gathered to gather the boat and drag the net full of fish up to the beach so they could unload it. And then they enjoyed a wonderful breakfast together with their Lord and Savior.

And that's where we pick up the story in John chapter 14. John says This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead, specifically the third time to the disciples as a group, although most think it was probably about his seventh appearance.

Then verse 15. And when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Peter Simon, Son of John, Do you love me more than these? And he said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. And he said to him, Feed my sheep. And he verse 16, that is Jesus said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And he said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. And he said to them, ten my sheep. And he said to him a third time. Simon son of John, do you love me? And Peter was grieved because he said to him a third time, Do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know, everything. You know that I love you. And Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. And truly, truly. Verse 18, Truly, truly. I say to you, when you were young and you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hand and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. In verse 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. The reading of God's Word. May God continue to bless us with the truth of Scripture as we study it together.

You know, for a brief time in the 1980s, the Vietnamese pot bellied pig enjoyed great popularity as a pet. Maybe you had one if you were around then. But unfortunately, they didn't have a long reputation of being pets. They did not live up to their reputation as being ideal. Most Vietnamese pot bellied pigs were aggressive. They were destructive, and they would weigh up to £150. And what do you do with an unwanted pig? Pork roasts are not the answer. The meat was tough and stringy, but into the picture stepped a man by the name of Dale Riffle. He came to the rescue and someone gave Dale one of these potbelly pigs and he fell in love with it. And the pig he named Rufus. But Rufus was a challenge. He refused to use his litter box and he developed a craving for eating carpet and wallpaper and drywall. So Riffle, true story, sold his suburban home and Broad bought a five acre farm in West Virginia. And there Rufus was joined by 180 other potbelly pigs. And according to the magazine, U.S. News and World Report, they together snoozed on beds of pine shavings soaked in plastic swimming pools and listened to piped in classical music. They never needed to fear that they would one day become bacon or pork chops. And the man relating the story brought it around to be an interesting application to you and me as believers. He wrote this. It is amazing that someone would fall so in love with pigs, but it's even more amazing that an infinite and perfect and holy and majestic awesome God would be so passionately in love with insignificant, sinful, sometimes openly rebellious, frequently indifferent people like you and me.

Now, I don't mean to insult you by equating you with a potbelly pig. But it is amazing consideration if we think what group what Dale Riffle did was strange. Just imagine what God does with us by His mercy and grace. But it just doesn't stop with that love. Remember the story of Zacchaeus? In that story, Jesus said this -- for the son of man came to seek and just save the lost. He didn't just love us. He worked out a complete program whereby he might purchase our salvation despite our unworthiness. And this must have been a profound lesson for Peter, that disciple. Because as we read through the letters, the epistles that Peter wrote, we see the echoes of his amazement at what God did in Chapter one of Peter, He writes in verse four We have been born again to a living hope, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfailing, kept in heaven for you, who, by God's power listen to this, are being guarded through faith for a salvation, ready to be revealed. At the last time, he was amazed that he was being guarded by the power and the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the second Peter Chapter two, He would write in verse nine. Then the Lord knows how to rescue the Godly from trials. And in a chapter later verse Chapter three, verse nine The Lord is patient toward you

not wishing to any in the context we know any of His chosen ones should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Why was Peter preoccupied with this? Why so impressed, so convinced that he would be guarded and kept secure? I think it started after the resurrection and is very interesting. One of those resurrection appearances weren't to the disciples as a whole, but was to Peter probably on Resurrection Sunday in I Corinthians 15: 4 to 6. Reread what Paul says that Jesus was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures that he appeared to Cephas and then to the 12, and then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time. We know nothing about that appearance to see us, but it was probably the beginning of Jesus's restoration project to bring back who one of the great leaders of the early church. Then Jesus, of course, on Resurrection Sunday appeared to that, to the two men on the road to Emmaus. And we learned that from Jay Shaw's sermon a couple of weeks ago and then twice to the disciples on Resurrection Day, once with Thomas, and a week later he appeared to the disciples our first time without Thomas and the second time with Thomas. And some think that what followed was this encounter in Galilee by the Sea of Galilee. Some consider it probably the seventh appearance of Jesus to in this world after the resurrection. Now we see Jesus with these disciples. In fact, this meal probably made such a powerful sound impact on Peter that he spoke about it when he was preaching to the Gentiles in Acts Chapter ten. In Chapter ten, Peter said this, But God raised Jesus on the third day and made him to appear not to all people, but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

This encounter had a profound impact on Peter. One who had openly denied him in public now was being reclaimed because we know what had happened in in this situation that Peter had denied him. In fact, Jesus had predicted that he would deny him when they were on the Mount of Olives in Matthew chapter 26, Jesus said that he would He would deny Jesus before the before the rooster crowed. And we find that Peter replied in verse 35, Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. And God smiled. How much of us have often we have done that? But within hours, of course, Peter denied Jesus before people who really didn't matter. A servant girl, another bystander. And then after the resurrection, Jesus takes the initiative to come to Peter, both to restore Him and in a sense, to commission his ministry, or, as one commentator said, to declare himself unmistakably before the other disciples. Jesús focuses on Peter. Of course, all the disciples really need to be restored. They all failed miserably when Jesus was arrested. But He focuses on Peter and He asks him three times this question Do you love me? Do you love me and do you love me? And as we think about those, there's several issues that crop up I assume you have probably I'll read this passage maybe many times. Maybe you've heard it spoken on this. I know you have heard it spoken on in the sermon or you've studied it just on your own. And it's interesting to see some of the issues there, because it's clearly a parallel from the occasion of Peter's denials. You know, when Jesus followed or when Peter followed Jesus and he's hanging out around a charcoal fire. And it's interesting, that's one of the indicators, because on both occasions he was there in a charcoal fire. And most think that that's very intentional by the gospel writers to indicate a similarity that in a sense, as he denied Jesus, he will be reclaimed by Jesus. And of course, just as there were three denials, I never knew him, I never knew him, I never knew him. There were met with three questions Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? It seems a clear parallel. And of course, the words truly, truly. Because when Jesus predicted Peter's denials, he said, Truly, truly, you'll deny me before the rooster crows. And here in this text, there's the same truly, truly used when he predicts Peter's death in the future.

So there's very little doubt that this occasion was directly connected with Peter's denials. And Jesus is restoring him. But it's interesting when you get into the study of this, that the Greek is a little interesting here because the use of the Greek words for love differs. And it's very, very much discussed and debated. In fact, commentators spell tons of ink essays and essays on why, when Jesus says, Do you love me? He uses the word agape, which means God's unconditional love. And then he uses the word philia. And he says in a sense, to Peter, do you agape me? Do you philia me? And then Peter responds, Yes, I feel I owe you the term of friendship. I philia you and I believe you. And that's been a source of great discussion is what's going on there because some commentators don't think that it was just stylistic. There was no deeper meaning in the exchange of those words. And the reason they say that is because the original conversation wasn't in Greek, Peter and Jesus was probably speaking in Aramaic, and there's not that kind of distinction in Aramaic was probably more like English. We don't have a bunch of different words for the word love. We have the word L-O-V-E love, but also you find in John that the word love is sometimes used interchangeably, the word agape and philia. Some think that this was just stylistic. Others say No, God's inspiring of John through using the Greek, He used different words and therefore there's a deeper intent here why Jesus changed from Agape to philia and that kind of stuff. And it's an interesting it's absolutely interesting. But strong, powerful, reformed theologians on both sides just differ. And I'm not about to take sides with the likes of some of these great scholars in the past days. I'm just not sure -- we can't be dogmatic. But then there's a third exegetical thing that's quite interesting is Jesus in verse 15, the first time he challenges Peter, he says, Peter, do you love me? And the first time he says, Do you love me more than these? Do you love me more than these? And what's he talking about there? And there are three options. Some people think he's saying, Do you love me more than these things? This boat, the nets, these fish, In other words, your occupation, your livelihood. Do you love me more than that?

Or he could have been saying, Do you love me more than these disciples, these men, because you built up a great bond of affection with your fellow servants here. Do you love them more than me? Or a third alternative? Is he saying, Do you love me more? Then these disciples love me? In other words, they all may say they love me, but do you love me more than what they might say in their relationship with me? And again, there is great debate among wonderful biblical scholars, and we need to be careful. And the reason I'm going into this is to stress something -- it's very easy when we study the Bible and maybe this is more of a pastoral thing to get all caught up in some of the nuances in the doctoral issues and some of the textual issues which are important and they need to be discerned and they need to be studied, but they don't need to take us away from the point of the text. For instance, this is a profound message. He's asking the same of you and me when he asks, for instance, Do you love me more than me? Does he mean equipment? Does he mean more than these men? Does he mean more than these men love me? My answer is all of the above. He's calling Peter to love him more than his livelihood. He's calling Peter love him more than any other relationship, including the disciples. He's calling them to love him more than they love him. And the reason this is important is it seems just in the little debates and skirmishes we sometimes have as Christians that we forget the point is he's being challenged. I don't know why Jesus or why the Holy Spirit inspired different Greek terms using agape and philia. We may never know God had his purpose is, but we never want to miss the point of the text, the challenge, because it's a challenge for each one of us to reflect on what he is challenging Peter with.

Mark Do you love me? Mark Do you love me more than these? Do you love me? I And you know, perhaps that's a great question, especially for those of us that have been Christians for a long time.

Perhaps our relationship with Christ has cooled over the years in the busyness of things or the boredom of things have left our spiritual life, our relationship with Christ a little stale. Perhaps there's certain sins with which we struggle that have brought down the tone of our intensity in our relationship with Christ. Perhaps it's broken relationships or unmet expectations. Perhaps it's personal difficulties that we have encountered, or just the hardships of life have cooled our fervent love for the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why this passage is so challenging. You and I are in a distance, Ron, it's not a sprint. We accept Christ. I don't know, in our teens, perhaps in our early twenties, some time in college or perhaps even a decade later. But we're going to walk with Christ for a very, very long time. And these words sometime increase in relevance. It's easy upfront when we are so overwhelmed by the mercy and grace of God that we just love Jesus. But what happens when we've heard that gospel 500 times and we've sat in services, it's very easy to grow cool in that perspective. So in this passage we see a wonderful message not only for Peter but for you and me as well. And it's interesting to see what Jesus does. It's a great picture of the way he would encounter perhaps not only Peter, but you and me as well.

Number one. He starts with questions. He starts with questions. He doesn't ask Peter to explain his denial. He doesn't give a lecture or he doesn't rebuke. He doesn't threaten discipline, but he asks questions. Jesus was a master of asking questions. One commentator I read estimates that Jesus in the Gospels asked 339 questions of people that he was encountering rich, poor, influential, not Gentile, Jew - 339 Questions because he was very curious. When one writer says that Jesus used questions the way a surgeon uses a scalpel to delicately cut into a new level of understanding. And it's remarkable to watch just a study of Jesus, his use of use of questions really convicts me as I encounter others and want to talk about spiritual things. I want to rush to tell what I believe rather than said listen and ask good questions because questions engage others. Jesus used them to teach. He used them to instill faith. He used questions to force listeners to think, to cut through objections. He used questions to help them understand their own conclusions, to coerce an answer. It's fascinating to see that use of questions.

Leslie and I have noted so often in in just like in parenting, and we've had occasion when children might need some counsel rather than barge in and lecture away to perhaps ask some poignant questions that might get to the heart of what real issues are -- rebukes and threats make us defensive, but questions tend to open our hearts, and that's exactly what Jesus is doing with Peter. And I hope, as I ask myself these questions, it'll do the same to me. Mark, do you really love me? Do you really love me? He ask the questions, but he doesn't just ask questions. He ask the right questions. Do you love me? He didn't say to Jesus. I mean, Peter, He didn't say to Jesus. Didn't say to Peter, Do you love my teaching? Do you love the fellowship you enjoy because of me? Do you enjoy the ministry? Do you enjoy other people? Can I ask anything about that? In fact, I know that there are people that love coming to church that might love the people of the church, the teaching of the church and may not know Jesus. Jesus goes for the jugular. Do you love me? That's what the essence of the Gospel is aiming at a relationship of love between us and the Lord Jesus Christ.

He didn't ask Peter, Why did you deny me? Peter, Do you even believe in me? Peter, do you trust me? But he asked. No, no. Do you love me? And that's quite important. It's the most fundamental human relational quality that we certainly see in Scripture that speaks of unconditional affection and devotion and commitment and loyalty. It kind of groups all that together in a remarkable way. You know, occasionally we sing a song here, and I've heard Daniel play it many times. It's hymn number 529. Look at it. And this is a song. And this is going to sound strange that in a way, haunts me. It's easy for me to sing in this hymn book. how he loves You and me. how He Loves you and me. But this says, how I love

Jesus. And there's always a little hiccup, a little pause in my thinking when Daniel will sing it frequently or it's sung in the congregational worship. There's some little element of conviction that comes over me because the words don't maybe don't come out quite. The conviction is blessed assurance. Jesus as mine, great as our faithfulness. Those are I don't want to say they're easier to sing, but this is Oh I love you and me stands up to it Tells me all the Savior's love who died to set me free. It tells me of his precious blood, the sinners perfect plea, the last stanza. It tells me of the one whose loving heart tells of one whose loving heart can feel my deepest woe. Who in each sorrow bears a part that none can bear below. Oh how I love Jesus. That's where I see the interactions deep in my soul as I struggle with the various things of this life that I might not enjoy. But that's a very profound hymn that we may not contemplate enough, but it's exactly what Jesus is challenging Peter. When Jesus asked, Do you love me? He's not seeking information. Not at all. He's doing at least four things. Jesus is cleric clarifying a priority of love for him over all others, over all circumstances.

It's akin to those marriage vows. You if you're married tonight, you probably stood before some maybe in some church. And a pastor challenged you with words like this. I take thee and your spouse to be my wedded spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward. And then those words, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish. And you could add if you're talking about Jesus, because death won't do us part.

Imagine that's the nature of my relationship with Jesus, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, and some of us will experience both in sickness and in health. And all of us will experience both of that. To love and to cherish. Because death won't do us part. That's the priority of love and Jesus, his mind when he's challenging Peter about his future ministry and about us. Jesus here is not just clarifying the priority He's building conviction. Three times. Peter Do you love me? Peter? Do you love me? Peter? Do you love me? Three times he was asked to affirm his love for the master. Right there in front of these other disciples. There's no mention that he was separate by himself. Right there before those disciples is Jesus is driving truth deeper into his brain, deeper into His understanding. He's building conviction, but he's also igniting passion in Jesus. It's interesting. In verse 17, Peter is grieved because he's insistent on a third time asking, but he's capturing not only his brain, but his heart, building some passion, so much so that Peter is actually upset.

You may recall that the great indictment that was given in Revelation 2 to the church in Ephesus applies here. Jesus says you have perseverance to the church at Ephesus. You have perseverance and have endured for my namesake and have not grown weary. But I have this against you that you have left your first love. This was a powerful message of a church that had its act together, one commentator said about the Church of Ephesus at this time, most of the Ephesians Christians were now second generation believers, and though they had retained purity of doctrine and life and had maintained a high level of service, they were lacking in deep devotion to Christ.

How the Church today needs to heed the same warning that orthodoxy and service are not enough. Christ wants believers hearts as well as their hands and their heads. He wants our passion. He wants our thinking. He's clarifying the preeminence. And then he turns not only in this passage to ignite passion, but to commission Peter for the Kingdom service. He says, Feed my lambs tend my sheep, feed my sheep. And this, of course, is his understanding. It reflects his understanding of the great need that will exist in the church for apostolic teaching and apostolic leadership. But I think it's got a great need in the church for every believer to be engaged in blessing the church with what God has blessed me. He's

saying to Peter, Peter, this is your assignment. You'll be serving among those who are vulnerable, who are immature, who are dependent, who are needing nourishment. And this is your assignment, Peter. Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep and feed my sheep.

You know, to us, we read in I Corinthians 12:17, he says to each is given the manifestation of this spirit. Why? For the common good. Paul is speaking about in I Corinthians, about the spreading of spiritual gifts. And they're not given just to bless me. They will bless me, but they're given so that I might bless others and be used by others. But it doesn't start with those gifts. It starts with the priority in my heart, a love for the Lord Jesus Christ. And I realize not everybody will be called to serve Christ professionally or teach formally, but all of us are called to serve Christ for the common good, to serve the Lord Jesus in the church before our watching world. And that can be doing a whole wide range of things, but serving the Lord Jesus, where He places us, where He plants us for His glory as an expression of His love. So that service begins not with training or knowledge, but it begins with a love for the Lord Jesus. We're called to become a great influencer in the church and in the world for Jesus Christ with gifts that He has given us.

And it's a remarkable thing to understand that we have this privilege to represent the Lord Jesus Christ here before watching World. And we have opportunities. This Impact Weekend. It's just a great one coming up where you and I can use our gifts and our interests. But out of a heart of love for the Lord Jesus Christ, I will use that time to step out and serve the community and serve perhaps the church wherever God might lead you. That's what we're all called to do. Clearly, loving Jesus is not about our comfort, but about His glory. Jesus makes it clear to Peter in verse 18 and 19, What does He say to Peter? He says, Truly, truly. I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted. But when you're old, you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go. And they, as he said, to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God and after saying this, he said to him, follow me.

You know, that's a remarkable challenge because we know Peter didn't know at the time that he would be crucified like his Lord and savior. And at the time, he would choose to be turned upside down in that crucifixion. And it must have been a terrible way to die. But he didn't feel worthy to die as his Lord and savior. And I tell you, that kind of sacrifice calms because he loves the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we may not be crucified or even severely persecuted for our beliefs, but all of us will go through hardship. All of us will go through difficulty.

You know, Leslie and I in the last few months have really appreciated how many Briarwood people have reached out to the Love ministry? My mother is at Danberry and she's 97 and she's getting, we think, pretty near the end. And it's been a very, very difficult time with some various physical ailments. And I read this passage about Peter to her this afternoon, and she said she recognized that and said there'll be a time, mom, you know, there's a time in all our lives when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted. But when you're old, you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you to where don't want to go. That's my mom's life right now is hard. And that may be your life coming up. That may be around the corner for you to be forced into circumstances that you don't like that you wish would change – again it might be a broken relationship. It might be a physical ailment. But your ability to navigate those and come out on the other side is a wonderful and gracious and thankful believer in Christ will come because your priority is -- Lord, whatever happens, I love you. I love you for what you did on the cross. When you purchased my salvation, you took the punishment for

sin that I deserved. And coming before you, I recognize myself as a sinner. And I ask for you to save me. And you begin to build that relationship with him. And it becomes hopefully for each one of us, far more than just a matter of church involvement or far more than identification with the group, far more than the sort of wearing of a cross on a lapel or a necklace. It becomes a powerful magnetic love for the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he says, Peter, just follow me. Follow me. And, you know, it's my heart. It is my desire that I be a follower and not a groupie. You know what a groupie is? You know, it might be a groupie follower of a rock band, and they buy tickets and go to a bunch of concerts to be entertained. Or it might be a groupie of a football team, and they spend lots of money and cheer their favorite team on. They might be a groupie of any number of things. You might be a NASCAR groupie and I've known some of those to follow NASCAR all around the country, but they're not really followers. Followers are where you engage in the event you're engaged in the people of the event, you represent the event and you serve the event, whatever the case may be. And that's what you and I are called to be. We've got a lot of Christian groupies out there. We need some Christian followers who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. Father, I thank you so much for the privilege of being able to know and to serve you. I thank you for the blessing of what the gospel brings in each one of us, and I pray specifically for those of us here who may be struggling --Perhaps we're tired, perhaps we're overwhelmed by certain circumstances, and I pray that we can come back to the point when we say, Lord, you may not answer all my prayers very quickly. You may not change my circumstances the way I would like. But whatever you do, because of what you did, Lord, I love you. And I thank you for what you have done for us in Christ. Continue to use us for glory. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.