

Love Is Proved by Service
John 21:1-25
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Introduction

I have read a lot of books in my life. Some books have been good, some have been bad, but I continue to read books. I remember one day when I had just turned sixteen years old. It was the day after my birthday. I was by myself, sitting on the floor of my room, feeling a little sorry for myself, and I was reading a book. I had been at a birthday party for a friend and we had a pool party together, for we had the same birthday, and we had celebrated our birthdays together for a number of years. When it came time to pass out the birthday presents, she received a great number of presents, and I got one, from my girlfriend at that time. So here I was in my room the next day and two of my friends walk into my room, and they had ropes in their hands. All of a sudden, they forced me to the ground, tied me up, carried me outside, put me in my friend's Land Rover, and put a burlap sack over my head. I was not happy. After a while we arrived somewhere and I was thrown through the air and landed in some sand. I sat there and I was mad. They took off the burlap sack, untied me, and I stared daggers at my friends. I don't remember saying anything. I just stared at my friends for a long time, maybe it was only a few minutes, but it felt like it was forever.

If you have read some stories, most of the books lately have the main story, and then the last chapter is labelled "Epilogue." It is not really a part of the story, but it gives you some interesting information about the story: who survived and hints at what might happen in a sequel. I hate to admit this, but I have often looked at the epilogue of the book when I am only half way through the story. In fact, I did it just this week.

What is the epilogue of my kidnapping story? Well, as I was sitting on the sand, my friends brought out some birthday presents for me, and we had my birthday party. I think it took me about an hour before I calmed down and enjoyed the party. All my friends were there, my mom and dad were there. My mom told me later that my friends asked her if this party idea was okay. She told my friends I would not be happy, and boy I was not!

This section at the end of the Gospel of John we are looking at is what I consider the epilogue of the gospel. John 14-17 dealt with the upper room discourse, chapters 18-20 described the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.

The main story of Jesus' life is complete, but the author had a few other things he wanted to write and communicate to us. Jesus' life and ministry was crucial to the gospel message, but what He did for His disciples after the resurrection is also important. Here are the two passages that bracket the epilogue:

John 20:30-31 *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

John 21:24-25 *This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*

The end of John 20 tells us that there was more to Jesus' life than what was written down. The passage from John 20 sounds like the end of the gospel, then surprisingly we have the epilogue, and then the final comments at the end of John 21.

Lesson

Point 1: Jesus directed the disciples (v. 1-8)

Some have criticized that the disciples had left Jerusalem and gone back to Galilee to be fishermen again. But was this wrong? They had left Jerusalem after the week of unleavened bread. They followed Jesus' instruction to return and see Him in Galilee:

Matt. 28:10 *Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”*

Instead of remaining idle, waiting for Jesus to return to them, they decided to go fishing. We should not conclude that Peter and the others had abandoned the mission that Jesus had given them. They were not wasting time either, for fishing was their profession. Peter and the others were waiting for the next command that Jesus was going to give them. Peter said that he was going fishing and the other disciples agreed to go with him:

John 21:3 *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.*

It was just like another time when they went out and caught nothing (Luke 5:5). When it was morning someone, whom they did not recognize, who happened to be Jesus, said to them:

John 21:5-6 *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 will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.*

They actually listened to the unknown person, who gave them a command, to throw their net on the right side of the boat from where they had been fishing. They had failed all night long, but with the new day they cast their net again and the number of fish they caught was more than they could haul into the boat. Now if you had been in a boat offshore and some stranger told you to do something, like cast your net in again, would you have listened to him? If it was me, I probably would have argued with him and tried to ascertain if the person had any expertise with fishing, and then maybe I would have listened. But, the disciples, seemingly without question, threw the net back into the sea and the net was filled with fish. The “person whom Jesus loved” (v.7) told Peter that he knew that it was their Lord. Peter put on his outer garment, threw himself into the sea, and swam to shore, leaving the other disciples to do the hard work of bringing the boat to shore dragging the net full of fish.

Jesus had appeared to them again. He immediately helped them, though they did not recognize Him. He directed their efforts from failure to success. He was still providing leadership to them after His resurrection, and they needed to listen to Jesus, and do what He said. They had not been left alone, but He was with them, guiding and directing them. Though they would not always see Him, He would continue to be their guide. Jesus also fulfilled the promise that He would meet them in Galilee.

Point 2: Jesus provided for the disciples (v. 9-14)

John 21:10 *Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.”*

When the disciples made it to shore, they saw the charcoal fire with fish laid out on it and some bread. Jesus asked for more fish to be brought, and Peter went to the boat to get them. The resurrected Jesus was still the humble servant, providing for their needs. Jesus knew that they would be hungry after a long and frustrating night of trying to catch some fish and what they caught was included in the meal.

Two times in the Gospel of John charcoal is mentioned: here in John 21:9 and in John 18:18. Do you remember what happened there?

John 18:17-18 *The servant girl at the door said to Peter, “You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.*

Peter had been in the high priest’s courtyard after Jesus’ arrest and Peter was confronted with the question of whether he also was a disciple of Jesus. How did he respond? He denied Jesus, not just once, but three times, and after the third denial the rooster crowed. How do you think that Peter felt after this? The gospel of Mark tells us:

Mark 14:72 *And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.*

In our passage today, Peter, instead of putting distance between himself and Jesus, dove into the water to get to Jesus first before any of the others. Peter was the one who went to get more fish for the meal. He did not run away, he did not hide, but he went right to Jesus and stayed by Jesus. Jesus invited them all to breakfast, including Peter, and they all knew that it was Jesus who had called them and had prepared a meal for them. This is a picture of intimate and friendly fellowship. Jesus served them Himself giving the bread and the fish to the disciples. Jesus provided for all of the disciples. This was the same Jesus who had washed their feet in the upper room, who had given them bread for the Passover meal, who had died for them on the cross, who had been resurrected, and who was now providing their daily bread at the seashore to all of them, including Peter who had denied Jesus three times. Not only did Jesus guide them and provide them direction, He was now also providing for their physical needs. Jesus cares about both our physical and spiritual needs, and He is always ready to provide us help, even when we feel that

we are miles away from Him. All we have to do is turn to Him and trust that He will provide for us what we need.

Point 3: Jesus restored Peter to ministry (v. 15-19)

John 21:15,19 *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.” ... “Follow me.”*

After the breakfast Jesus spoke directly to Peter, but not in general to all of the disciples. Some think that Jesus and Peter walked away from the group at this time, but it seems more likely that they were still with the group, for what Jesus was going to say to Peter the others needed to hear also. Peter had denied Jesus three times the night of His arrest. All of the disciples needed to hear that Peter was being restored by Jesus, since he had denied Jesus in the presence of others. I do think they walked away following verse 19.

Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him: the first time it was “more than these,” probably a reference to the other disciples, the other two times Jesus just asks “do you love me?” Remember Peter had stated others might fall away, but he never would, and yet within hours he had denied Jesus three times. Here was Jesus confronting Peter with a reminder of his denial of his Lord with all the other disciples as witnesses.

Much has been made about the two words used for love in this passage: Peter in each of the three times said that he loved Jesus, using the word *phileō*, meaning a close brotherly love, while Jesus asked him the first and second time did Peter *agapaō*, meaning the higher love, the unique love that is displayed by God. These words are often used interchangeably in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) and also interchangeable elsewhere in the Gospel of John and there are differences of opinion on the significance in this passage. The loftier sense of *agapaō* is only used when the context makes it clear, and it is not in this passage.

Three times Jesus told Peter to do something after Peter’s responses: “*feed my lambs*”, “*tend my sheep*”, and the third time “*feed my sheep*.” Jesus was telling Peter that he was to take care of Jesus’ lambs and sheep; they are not Peter’s lambs and sheep, but Jesus’ and His alone. Peter was being restored to ministry. His ministry was to be focused on those who are following Jesus and he was to take care of them as if they were his own. Peter was the leader of the early church as we see in the first half of the book of Acts: to take care of the young in the faith, the lambs, and the more mature in the faith, the sheep. In fact, if Peter truly loved Jesus, then he would take care of God’s sheep: (1) **feed** them (stresses feeding them His word), (2) **tend** them (stresses guarding them, guiding them, leading them to pastures, protecting them from predators, and assuring them their overall health), and (3) **feed** them (once again: spiritually nourish by feeding them the Word of God).

I think the most important thing in this repetition of questions by Jesus was that Jesus restored Peter to ministry, since he had rejected and denied Jesus three times before both unbelievers and at least before John the disciple. Peter was ashamed at what he had done. Jesus asked Peter three times to show that the threefold denial had been forgiven. Peter affirmed Jesus three times before the other disciples, and then he was ready for ministry. He had been forgiven and

recommissioned. This commission was a pastoral one: to take care of those who are Jesus', not Peter's, flock.

After indicating the kind of death that he would die to bring glory to God, which tradition says was Peter's martyrdom through crucifixion, but hanging upside down by his own choice. There was no indication of denying Jesus then. Jesus told Peter to follow Him. Peter was called to follow Jesus for the rest of his life and that he would die for Jesus. We have no indication in the gospels, the Epistles, or church history that Peter denied Jesus again. At this point in the story Jesus and Peter walked away, followed by John.

Point 4: Jesus focused Peter's mission

John 21:21-22 *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? You follow me!"*

Notice that Peter's first response after being restored to the ministry and told to follow Jesus was not "Yes," but a question about someone else, that is the Apostle John. Peter was not focused fully upon Jesus and the mission that he had been given, but upon someone else. Peter's focus was to be on Jesus and Jesus alone. He had to decide for himself whether he would follow Jesus with a full and undistracted heart. In fact, Jesus indicated that what happened in John's life was none of his business. Peter was to focus on his relationship with Jesus and the ministry that he had before him. This was a powerful and pointed challenge to Peter personally. What was Peter's focus to be on? Himself? Others? Or on Jesus Himself?

We all have gifts and we have the obligation to use those gifts to serve others. This service is not for our benefit but for others. Ministry is helping people. We are here to bring glory to God and to praise Him, not to make us look good or better than others. We are called to help others and to bring honor and glory to God alone, to obey Him and be steadfast in every part of life. We must use the gifts that God has provided us. If you don't know your gifts, find out what they are because we all have at least one gift from the Holy Spirit:

1 Cor .12:4-7 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

Peter had a big decision to make: was he going to serve Jesus fully and completely without allowing distractions? Or was he going to be focused on others and not do what Jesus wanted him to do? This is a choice we all have to make. We are called to love Jesus fully. We are called to use our gifts for the common good. We are called to know Him better. We are called to follow Jesus and do what He says even if we don't understand why. We are called to have faith and trust God in every step of our lives, no matter the cost. That is what Peter was asked to do: "Peter, are you going to worry about someone else or are you going to do what Jesus wants you to do?" That is the same question we wrestle with throughout our whole lives. Be focused on what Jesus wants in our lives and He will reveal to us how we can serve Him. It is God's job to work in all of our lives and it is our job to do what He tells us. For Peter, look at what he did in the first half

of Acts. He was the leader in the early church and it was he who brought the gospel first to Gentiles as well to Jews.

Application

The applications from this lecture are focused upon what the main points are:

(1) Be sensitive when you are directed by Jesus to do something: He will lead us and He will transform our lives as we are sensitive to His guidance. This is something that Elijah had to learn also:

1 Kings 19:11-13 *And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.*

(2) Allow God to work in your life and don't hinder the process: Don't get in God's way but be a partner in what God is doing:

Luke 18:15-16 *Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.*

(3) If you sin, confess it, and be restored: None of us are perfect and we need to confess our sins to God and be restored to doing what He wants us to do:

1 John 1:7-10 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

(4) Be focused on what God wants us to do and not be distracted by others: We are called to serve Him and use our gifts and let God work in our lives as He sees fit, keeping our eyes upon Him:

Phil. 4:8 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Let us stand to sing and I will close us in prayer after we are done.