

THE RISEN CHRIST REINSTATES PETER

John 21:1-25

Key Verse: 21:15

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'"

Chapter 21 is the epilogue of John's gospel. In this passage Jesus restores his love relationship with Peter and the other disciples by helping them to catch a boat full of [fish](#) when they failed, even though they had tried all night. The Risen Christ reinstates Peter as a shepherd for God's flock and as the top leader of the early Christian church. Jesus also teaches him God's holy mission. After the resurrection the meeting between the Risen Christ and his top disciple Peter is indeed beautiful. Let's go to the seashore of Tiberias and listen to the Risen Christ.

First, Peter went out to fish (1-4). Look at verse 1. "Afterward Jesus appeared [again](#) to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias." Here, "Afterward" relates Jesus' death on the cross to the glorious resurrection of Christ. The religious leaders had killed Jesus. But Jesus rose again. Jesus had been a brother-like shepherd. But the Risen Christ is like a glorious king. The Risen Christ said in 20:17b, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Jesus is the Risen Christ. After defeating the power of death through his resurrection, he had appeared to Mary Magdalene and wiped the tears from her heart. The Risen Christ had appeared to his disciples and given them the peace of God and the [Holy Spirit](#) (20:21-22). The Risen Christ is the mighty God. The Risen Christ knew that Thomas was a doubter. Still, he humbled himself and appeared to Thomas, the doubter, to heal the sickness of doubt in his heart. Jesus did not abandon him. Rather Jesus gave him the most famous word of God in 14:6. It says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

What was the spiritual condition of his disciples? Look at verse 2. Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together to rely on one another after Jesus' crucifixion. After a few days, they faced the cold realities of the world; they felt hungry, they had to find a way to survive. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went fishing. But that night they caught nothing (3).

It was on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. One morning three years before, Peter was washing his nets there. Though he had worked all night, he had caught nothing. He was tired and hungry. At that moment, Jesus, who had finished speaking to the crowd, said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." It was a ridiculous thing to do, for in the daylight fishing was impossible. But when Simon and his coworkers did so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break (Lk 5:1-11).

In the past, Peter was a man of no dream. He had just worked and lived because others worked and lived. But his dream was born when Jesus showed him his almighty power through the great catch of fish (Lk 5:1-11). A dream sprouted in his heart. Later it grew. In his imagination Peter thought that Jesus would establish a messianic kingdom on earth and rule the world. This dream prompted him to make an immediate decision to follow Jesus. But when Jesus was crucified, Peter's human dream was broken into pieces and floating on the Sea of Tiberias. Moreover, he was disappointed in himself, for he had denied his Master three times. He never imagined that he would deny his Master before the eyes of the enemies of Jesus. Because of this, he could not forgive himself. He was in deep despair. Still, he was too young to die and too despairing to live. So he and his fellows went out to fish. They got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing (3b). To Peter, everything seemed to be over. But to the Risen Christ, it was a new start to help Peter. As Jesus had promised to meet them in Galilee after his resurrection (Mt 26:32), he went and stood in the breeze on the shore of Lake Galilee. But his disciples, who were returning from their fishing during the night, could not recognize that it was Jesus who was standing there (4). They were too tired to do anything.

Second, Jesus restores them from their immediate failure in fishing (5-9). Look at verse 5. "He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No,' they answered." Jesus was ready to help restore them from their immediate failure in fishing. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some" (6). It was not a proper time for fishing. But they obeyed anyway. Then, they made a great catch of fish. Their net was full of large fish, numbering 153 (11). This is the second time Jesus helped restore Peter from his failure in catching fish. Generally, people reward those who succeed and punish those who fail. Jesus knew Peter had failed, both as a fisherman and as his disciple. But Jesus did not mind. Rather, he wanted to restore him from his failure by helping him catch a large number of fish. There is no failure in Jesus. Whoever comes to him after much failure and despair, our Lord Jesus is ready to restore him. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Look at verse 7. "Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'" What did Peter do when he heard, "It is the Lord"? Usually, people take off their clothes when they jump into the water. But Peter wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. Peter, in spite of himself, revealed his tremendous respect and love for Jesus.

Third, come and have breakfast (10-14). Look at verse 10. "Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.'" The Risen Christ, though he was ennobled and glorified through his resurrection, cooked breakfast for his disciples, who were hungry and tired and said, "Come and have breakfast" (12). It is amazing that the Risen Christ cooked breakfast like a mother. Jesus' most beloved disciple, Peter, betrayed him three times. But Jesus did not punish him. Rather, the Risen Christ prepared breakfast and had a beautiful beach party for Peter and the disciples. When Jesus said, "Come and have breakfast," none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew that it was the Risen Christ (12b). They knew that it was the Risen Christ who was crucified and who rose again from the dead. They knew that it was

the Risen Christ who was the glorious King through his resurrection. They knew that it was the Risen Christ who prepared breakfast for them and said, "Come and have breakfast." This scene of the beach party is full of grace. It was an unforgettable love feast. Later, John associated this love feast at the beach with the heavenly feast in Revelation 3:20b, "...I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

Fourth, "Do you love me?" (15) Jesus wanted to restore a love relationship with Peter. Look at verse 15. "When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.'" In the last part of Jesus' question, "more than these," points out Peter's problem. "More than these" may mean more than his kids or himself. When Jesus asked, "Do you love me more than these?" he meant, "Do you love me more than your dream?" To Jesus' question, Peter answered, "You know that I love you." It was true that Peter loved Jesus. Once he said, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will" (Mt 26:33). On another occasion he said, "I will lay down my life for you" (Jn 13:37). But Peter, who had loved his Master with his human loyalty, denied him three times at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Human loyalty has a great limitation. Peter answered, "You know that I love you." Peter was sure that he loved Jesus, even though he denied him three times and still he did not give up his dream of an earthly messianic kingdom. Peter loved Jesus. But he had no factual evidence to show that he loved Jesus.

When Jesus visited him and cooked breakfast for him and said to him, "Come and have breakfast," Peter realized that the grace of Jesus is greater than the ocean. When Jesus gave him bread and fish, he emptied his dish again and again. At this time, Peter could associate Jesus' question, "Do you love me?" with his words in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

We have to think about why Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" three times consecutively until Peter was hurt. Proverbs 1:7 helps us understand Jesus' question to Peter. It says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." Here the word "fear" has a spiritual meaning. The fear of God is the same as the respect and love for God. If we do not love God we have no God in our hearts. If we do not love God we are godless. If we are godless we become the children of the devil. So it is very important to examine our hearts to see whether or not we love Jesus. How can we love Jesus? 1 John 4:19 says, "We love because he first loved us." When we realize that Jesus loved us first, like Paul, we can love Jesus. Paul said in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

In the past, Peter did not know what kind of person he was. He always thought that he loved Jesus more than John and James. His loyalty to Jesus is matchless. He did not know that he was a self-righteous man and a selfish man. But when Jesus restored a love relationship with him by visiting him and cooking breakfast, Peter began to realize how terrible a sinner he was. Later, he confessed that he wounded and crucified Jesus because of his sins. He said in 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we

might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." This is a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, but Peter was applying it to himself.

Fifth, Jesus wants Peter to feed God's sheep (15-17). When we study this part very carefully, we learn that after asking, "Do you love me?" each time, Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." The first time Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs" (15). Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep" (16). The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" (17). After asking, "Do you love me?" each time Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" or "Feed my lambs." There is no other account of Jesus pressing anyone so hard in this way. Anyway Jesus was very serious about feeding sheep. Each time he asked, "Do you love me?" he also commanded, "Feed my lambs," or "Take care of my sheep." Jesus commanded Peter each time to feed sheep. We can say that we love Jesus when we feed his precious sheep. Up until now, Peter had been Jesus' sheep. Jesus bore all his weaknesses. Now Peter was not supposed to remain as Jesus' permanent sheep. Peter had to be a shepherd like Jesus. This event reminds us of John 10:11. It says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Sixth, Jesus reinstates Peter (15-17). Jesus helped Peter to assume the position as chief shepherd of God's flock of sheep. Why was it so important to reinstate him? When we read the gospels, at the beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus healed the sick, preached the gospel to many. At the same time, Jesus raised spiritual leaders for the future generations. Once Jesus took his disciples on a retreat to a solitary place where they could eat and rest, and where he could give them instruction how to be good disciples. But many people from all the towns came to the place where Jesus and his disciples were. A retreat was impossible. But Jesus had compassion on them and said, "I have compassion on them." Again, "They are sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6:34). Jesus saw that all the problems of the world came because people are like sheep without shepherds.

As we know well, through one shepherd like Jesus, we can have a living hope, eternal salvation and the kingdom of God as our inheritance. In this mass technological society, it is hard to think one person is very important. But Biblically speaking, one man is very important. One person Peter's change changed the Satan worshipers to God-fearing people. One person Paul's change changed the whole world. Jesus knew that sheep are sheep. They do not know more than abundant herbage. They do not know there is tomorrow. They need shepherds like Jesus. This is the reason why Jesus reinstated Peter as the top disciple and shepherd of God's flock.

Seventh, God's glorious mission (18-25). Look at verse 18. "I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

In the past, Peter had lived according to his sinful feeling or in his own dream world. He said that he loved Jesus and he was loyal to Jesus. He was known as the top among the twelve disciples. But in reality, he was an unchanged man of selfish ambition. So he could not understand Jesus' shepherd heart. He had never fed one of God's sheep. Rather he was burdened by God's sheep and offended his fellow coworkers with his aggressive character. But verse 18 implies he would lose many of his human freedoms, even the freedom of dressing himself. From now on, he could not wear gym shorts as he wanted. He could not go wherever he wanted. From now on, he must eat and drink for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of his flock of sheep (1Co 10:31). In short, in the future he cannot live a selfish life. He must live a life of mission. What a sacrifice Peter had to make to live a life of mission! Without sacrificing one's selfish freedom, no one can be a good shepherd whom Jesus can use.

Look at verse 19. "Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!'" In this verse, the word "death" means "whole life as a man of mission." The meaning of verse 18 is that Peter would live a holy life of mission all his lifetime and thus glorify God through his martyrdom. He lives no more to fulfill his dream. But he must live a life of mission according to God's instructions and guidance. To live a life of mission is not easy. So Jesus said in the last part of verse 19, "Follow me!" What was Peter's response? Peter was willing to live a life of mission. But probably he thought, "Why only me?" So he turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved, John, and said, "Lord, what about him?" Peter wanted to live a life of mission; not by himself, but together with John. What did Jesus say? Look at verse 22. "Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.'" The life of mission is a personal matter. John's life of mission comes from God personally. Peter's life of mission comes from God personally. The disciples were good sheep to Jesus. But they were not familiar with the life of mission. When Jesus said that the life of mission is glorious, they were burdened, assuming that they would die as martyrs. Also, a groundless rumor spread that only John would not die but would live forever. But what Jesus said was, "Peter, you are you, and John is John. Each must have his own life of mission" (Gn 1:28).

When we study the epilogue of John's gospel, we learn that true happiness comes when a man loves Jesus more than anything else. In this passage, let's remember, "Do you love me?" "Feed my sheep."