

# Peter's Restoration

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## John 21: 1-14 (Living Bible)

Later Jesus appeared again to the disciples beside the Lake of Galilee. This is how it happened:

A group of us were there—Simon Peter, Thomas, “The Twin,” Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, my brother James and I [John] and two other disciples.

Simon Peter said, “I’m going fishing.”

“We’ll come too,” we all said. We did, but caught nothing all night. At dawn we saw a man standing on the beach but couldn’t see who he was.

He called, “Any fish, lads?”

“No,” we replied.

Then he said, “Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you’ll get plenty of them!” So we did, and couldn’t draw in the net because of the weight of the fish, there were so many!

Then I [John] said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” At that, Simon Peter put on his tunic (for he was stripped to the waist) and jumped into the water and swam ashore.

The rest of us stayed in the boat and pulled the loaded net to the beach, about 300 feet away. When we got there, we saw that a fire was kindled and fish were frying over it, and there was bread.

“Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,” Jesus said. So Simon Peter went out and dragged the net ashore. By his count there were 153 large fish; and yet the net hadn’t torn.

“Now come and have some breakfast!” Jesus said; and none of us dared ask him if he really was the Lord, for we were quite sure of it. Then Jesus went around serving us the bread and fish.

This was the third time Jesus had appeared to us since his return from the dead.

Before the crucifixion, the basic needs of the disciples appear to have been completely met by the generosity of others: food, lodging and some clothing. It is probable that the scandal of the crucifixion cut off these resources, giving the disciples cause to need to support themselves; to bring comfort and stability in a turbulent time the only way they knew how – in this case, fishing – at the place where they first encountered the Messiah. Jesus himself told the women at the tomb to tell His brothers to go to Galilee where they would see Him, so in a time of uncertainty, they relied on what they knew. During this unprecedented time of testing and uncertainty, where the threat of Coronavirus has turned many of our lives upside-down, we must rely on what we know to be true.

### 1) God is always “Godding”

John 5:17 (NLT) quotes Jesus as saying “my Father is always working, and so am I”. We feel afraid of the future. We worry about the decisions we need to make. We can become negative when things aren’t working out the way we wanted or expected them to but when we stay closely connected to God, we begin to want the things He wants. Peace and worry are mutually exclusive. Worry is like a ‘no-confidence’ vote in God, even if not intentionally, it’s effectively saying: ‘I don’t believe God can or will handle this.’ God never changes, and nothing ever spins out of His control. Romans 8:27-28 reminds us that “the Father who knows all hearts knows, of course, what the Spirit is saying as he pleads for us in harmony with God’s own will. And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans.” (TLB) When we renew our mind with God’s Word, He’ll show us His will and strengthen us to get through whatever we’re facing.

### 2) Joy is a choice

When we’re down, we can ask God to fill us up with His joy and reflect on His truth found in the Bible: “Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NLT). Sometimes we say that we’ll feel happier when something good happens but joy isn’t dependent on circumstances. Paul was in prison when he wrote: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4 NIV). His situation didn’t dictate whether he was joyful, his focus on Jesus did. Joy goes beyond happiness; it’s a deep knowledge that we’ve been saved and that God has got better things to come.

### 3) God promises an eternal inheritance

“The little troubles we suffer now for a short time are making us ready for the great things God is going to give us forever. We do not look at the things that can be seen. We look at the things that cannot be seen. The things that can be seen will come to an end. But the things that cannot be seen will last forever.” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NLV). After a significant event, things are bound to change and almost definitely look different from how they did before but God’s plan for our life shouldn’t have to change to accommodate! The truth is, without change there is no growth. When we have the right attitude, every experience – positive and negative – becomes an opportunity for progress, equipping us with the ability to see all of life in the light of the glory to be revealed when Christ returns. Let’s stop concentrating on what we can see around us, start seeing God at work in what’s happening and look to the vision He’s given us.

Whether their motives were good or flawed, the men fished all night without success. Fishermen would be quite used to disappointments but it must have seemed that the familiarity of the Lake had suddenly changed without explanation. The fact that Jesus showed up at their place of work meant that He was interested in every aspect of his disciples’ lives, not just their spiritual qualities. It is not made clear why they didn’t recognise Him (maybe the time of day or the weather or his physical appearance) despite his somewhat rhetorical, colloquial greeting (*paidion* = “lads”), which would have been very unusual for an uninvested bystander. Even stranger than maybe is why His instruction was followed? Night time was definitely best for fishing so there was no logical reason why fishing in the morning light would be better. There was also no reason why fishing on one side of the boat would be better than the other side. This wasn’t a direct test of their trust in Jesus because they didn’t know it was Him, so it was probably a test of their ability to find the guidance of God in small and unsuspected ways. The definition of true faith (that which is given by God, not the emotive response from man) is “divine persuasion”. This was a test of their mustard-seed-sized faith and proof that apart from Jesus they can do nothing! The huge catch that followed shows the difference between doing work without divine guidance and doing it using the principle of divine persuasion. It was not only a reminder of the initial calling of Peter and the other fishermen – “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (see Matthew 4:18-22) – but also a parable of the missionary activity that would follow, directed by Jesus and affirmed by the Holy Spirit.

“One hundred and fifty-three fish plus a wet net would probably weigh as much as three hundred pounds, or more [about 140kg]. The observation of the exact number of fish and the fact that the net did not break reflect both an eyewitness account and a fisherman’s perspective.” (Merrill C. Tenney – American professor of the New Testament)

Some ancient writers believed there were 153 different types of fish in the world and this catch represented a full harvest of the entire world. All we know for sure is the actual number, and that a fisherman would positively remember and record their largest catch.

John was first in recognising Jesus through the abundance that came from obedience to his word, but Peter was first in devotion. Richard Trench (former Anglican archbishop of Dublin) describes the scene “He looks up, recognizes Him, casts all other care aside, slips on his outer-garment, for no Oriental would appear in undress before his superior, girds it to him, and casts himself into the sea, so eager is his love for the Lord.” He wanted to reach Jesus as soon as possible; the boat couldn’t move quickly enough for Peter and pride would not allow John to be first again, like at the empty tomb. However, at this point, there is no account of Peter talking with Jesus, giving the impression that his attempt to get there first didn’t do him much good! When the disciples reached the shore, they realised that Jesus was still taking the role of a humble servant, preparing a fire and cooking them breakfast. This means that Jesus already had fish before the great catch was brought in; the disciples merely supplemented the meal, they did not instigate it. Jesus is often seen eating with His disciples after His resurrection; a picture of intimate, friendly fellowship. After inviting them to come and eat, He took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish; actions that echoed those at the feeding of the five thousand, clarifying answers to their unvoiced questions.

This report of Jesus' appearance demonstrates the perfect interlacing of love and lordship.

Thomas will have been reminded of a previous appearance of Jesus when they doubted and questioned if it was really Him. At that time, He ate fish with them to prove he was not a ghost. Thomas has often been given a bad reputation because of his doubt, but how often do we find ourselves doubting God too? We believe in the resurrection but doubt that God will answer our prayers, for example. We doubt Him because He does things that we don't understand, but we're never going to understand everything in this life and we're not supposed to. Our job is to remember that God is in control and recognise that he's always "Godding". Thomas only believed when he saw Jesus with his own eyes, but Jesus said, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29 NIV). We don't always see God working in our lives, and it can be challenging to trust in a God we can't see. By taking all our doubts to Jesus and leaving them at the cross, we allow God to transform us inwardly by a complete transformation of our minds. Then we will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to Him and is perfect. (See Romans 11:32, 12:1-2)

The charcoals will have been a stark reminder to Peter of the fire in the courtyard where he denied knowing Jesus just days before – the Greek word used in both cases for the charcoal fire (*anthrakia*) is identical and the only two times the word is used in the New Testament – so given this sensory experience, it now becomes necessary to address his denial.

### **John 21: 15-17 (NIV)**

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'

'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'

Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.'

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.'

When Jesus addresses Peter, He calls him "Simon" – his original name, rather than the meaningful name of "Peter" that he'd been given, as a reminder of where he'd come from, before his eyes were opened to Jesus being Messiah. Previously, he'd told Jesus that "even if everyone else falls to pieces on account of you, I won't. Even if I had to die with you, I would never deny you." (Matt 26 vv 33 & 35 – The Message) He'd proudly thought that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples but when it came to the crunch, he crumbled too, as Jesus predicted he would. Unfortunately, in a struggle to be a people-pleaser, Peter was not the "rock" he claimed he would be and denied Jesus three times. In a moment of knee-jerk reaction, he said something to gain the approval of those that he found himself amongst and afterwards he wept over his failure.

Let's explore this passage more by using a different interpretation, closely considering the words used in the original Greek:

After breakfast, Jesus said to Peter, "Simon Johnson, do you have an unconditional love for me, more intimate than that which you have for the other disciples and they have for me?"

"Yes, Master, you know that I am your friend."

Jesus said, "Teach the new disciples about that."

He then asked a second time, "Simon Johnson, do you really love me?"

"Yes, Master, you know I am your friend and I love You like a brother."

Jesus said, "Become the shepherd of my people."

Then he said it a third time: “Simon Johnson, are you even my friend?”

Peter was upset at the way Jesus asked the question this third time and when he realised why, he answered, “Master, you know everything there is to know. You know my heart. You must know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Care for, and disciple my followers now and forever.”

In the first two questions, Jesus uses the word *agapas* for “love”, signifying an unconditional, all-giving, unselfish love such as that of God, and Peter responds by using the word *phileo*, indicating a strong but brotherly love. He wisely chooses not to make a comparison with the other disciples in his response to Jesus’ first question. However, Jesus was also hinting at His previous teaching “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and whether Peter could put Him above everything else (family, friends, career, possessions etc) or at least confess that he would try to. The third time, Jesus then uses *phileo*. Peter is hurt both because he’s been asked a third time and because it’s in a way that makes him remember his denials at the crucifixion and causes him to come to repentance and realisation, which is reflected in his third answer. Although he still uses *phileo*, he adds a word that stresses “you *must* know [how deeply] that I love you.” He’s now not pretending that he is capable of loving Jesus as much as he made out previously and also seems to recognise that he can’t do it solely in his own strength so at least he’s being real about it.

Jesus has cut straight to the heart of the matter and addressed the elephant in the room, proving He knows us better than we know ourselves. He is first and foremost interested in our hearts. He does not initially command obedience, repentance, promises and good conduct – just simply(!) loving the Lord above all else – but once confident our hearts are right, all those other things will follow. After Peter professes his obedient love, Jesus spells out the cost of that love: a call to recommitment. Jesus forgives Peter, restores him to the position of “rock” and challenges him to set his eyes of the job ahead.

It is vitally important as Christians that we do not have unforgiveness in our lives. It prevents us, and often the person we haven’t forgiven, from moving into what Christ actually wants us/them to be doing. We can’t have life to the full if we’re being held back by chains. Here are some lyrics from the song “Forgiveness” by Matthew West:

*It’s the hardest thing to give away, it always goes to those that don’t deserve.*

*It’s the opposite of how you feel when the pain they caused is just too real.*

*It flies in the face of all your pride, it’s the whisper in your ear saying ‘Set It Free’.*

*It’ll clear the bitterness away, there is no end to what its power can do.*

*So, let it go and be amazed by what you see through eyes of grace; the prisoner that it really frees is you.*

Our natural response when we are hurting is to hurt back (hurting people hurt people) or hope the offender will suffer for what they’ve done. As a redeemed child of God, we know this is the wrong attitude. Forgiveness is always a decision not a feeling; I *can’t* forgive is not a valid statement. It’s not an easy or natural choice but requires supernatural grace (God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense). The word ‘grace’ comes from the Greek word *charis*, meaning ‘pure joy.’ The same Greek word is used by James when urging readers to “consider it *pure joy*, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” This exact grace we have been blessed with must be extended to others. Even if it is not possible to tell the offender they have been forgiven (they might have passed away, or be completely oblivious to the fact they have done anything that needs forgiveness), we must work with the Holy Spirit to pray a prayer of release that frees our mind and soul from dwelling on the situation and reposition our self to walk in God’s will. Equally, this should not be done flippantly in an attempt to make ourselves feel better – the Holy Spirit will know!

**From Peter’s experience we learn that no matter how spectacular the fall *from grace*, by acknowledging God’s control and focussing on Him rather than the current situation, through obedience leading to right choices, including joy and seeking / receiving forgiveness, restoration comes *by grace*.**