

In life, you can either try to chart your own course, or you can follow Jesus. You must decide.

The risen Jesus wants you to follow Him.

It is after breakfast, a breakfast which Jesus served His disciples.

Jesus initiates this conversation with Peter. All the others are listening.

Why does Jesus do this? Why does John record this intimate conversation for us?

It is because they want us to learn something important from it.

We are supposed to learn about the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why? Why Peter? Well, Peter had failed worse than all the others.

And Peter had boasted of His faithfulness to Jesus in front of the other disciples.

They all knew he had failed.

You might imagine his overwhelming sense of inadequacy.

John 13:36-38 It was really Peter's intention to be faithful, devoted to Jesus. **Matthew 26:33**

But Peter had denied Jesus three times. **John 18:15-18, 25-27, Luke 22:61-62**

Three times; and so Jesus asks him a question three times, each a chance to answer in place of a denial.

Jesus is restoring Peter's relationship with Himself, after Peter's failure.

It is failure due to cowardice = fear of man = loving something else (approval of men) more than Jesus.

It is a failure due to faithlessness = failure to honor Christ as is His due.

Have you ever been there? I am sure Peter never forgot this failure his whole life.

But Jesus gave him something more powerful.

When I first met Jesus, I wanted to be a world changer, I wanted to serve Christ.

My freshman year at the UofI I took Western Civ. We had a TA who hated Christians.

Every class she would say something about it.

And one student would raise his hand to defend Christians and Jesus Christ.

After the very last class period I went up to this guy and thanked him. He just looked at me.

I think this moment has served me much like the three denials served Peter.

Now there are passages that teach a principle that Peter was surely not unaware of.

Matthew 10:32-33 Is this not what Peter did? Why did Jesus not deny him?

2 Timothy 2:11-13 So, why does Jesus not deny Peter?

I think it has something to do with the grace of God and the nature of the denial.

Peter's denial was not a willful, calculated denial.

It was a denial caused by weakness that Peter wept over.

And Jesus is the Lord of second chances.

He sought Peter out to restore him, just as He does with us.

How does Jesus restore Peter?

Notice, He does not bring up the denials. I don't know why. Jesus tends not to dwell on the past.

Jesus does confront Peter three times. Jesus confronts Peter on Peter's perceived love for Jesus.

This would be my struggle if I were Peter. "Do I really love Jesus like I say I do?"

Second, Jesus confronts Peter with a command. He gives Peter another opportunity to be faithful.

I. Jesus restored Peter so that He could serve.

John 21:15-17

First the three-fold question, "Do you love Me more than these?"

We will not focus on the verbs for love used in this conversation. I think they are all used interchangeably.

Second, who are the "these?"

Some think Jesus is referring to the fish and the tackle. But this is unlikely.

It seems that there would be no question for Peter.

Peter has already left all that for Jesus. He just leapt into the water, leaving the fish, boat, and tackle.

And why single Peter out for this in any case?

No, I think Jesus is indicating the other six disciples. "Do you love Me more than these other disciples do?"

After all, it was Peter who, in the hearing of the others had said, "I will not deny you."

It was Peter who had said, "I will lay down my life for You." (Not "we" but "I")

Peter had attacked the slave in the garden with a sword.

And Peter who, spirit willing but flesh weak, followed Jesus and denied the Lord as the Lord looked on.

So, Jesus puts the question to Peter, “Do you really love Me more than these other disciples do?”

It was, actually a humbling question, bringing up all those memories for Peter and the others.

And Peter gets the answer right, mostly. Peter says, “yes.” (vs. 15) Which he doesn’t really know is true.

But he’s doing his best to answer a tremendously difficult question for him, because he’s failed to show it.

He appeals ultimately to Jesus’ knowledge of his heart.

Jesus asks him again, this time the focus is solely on Peter.

Jesus drops the comparison because it doesn’t matter and He wants all present to know this.

Peter again answers correctly, and you can sense his discomfort.

Jesus asks Peter a third time, the same question. And Peter’s “grief” now is clearly described.

This time Peter gets the answer perfectly correct. The Lord knows of Peter’s love for Him.

Peter is no longer comparing himself to anyone else.

Peter knows he loves Jesus and he knows Jesus knows how much.

It is enough. The lesson is complete. Peter loves Jesus; more or less than others is unimportant.

It is a lesson from the Lord on love, humility, human weakness, and the grace of God.

How would you answer the Lord’s question? Do you love Jesus more than these others?

Then comes, three times, the command in response to Peter’s love for Jesus, “Feed My sheep.”

It is important to realize that this is no afterthought.

It is not simply Jesus’ method of restoring and motivating Peter.

In Matthew 4 and Mark 1, Jesus said, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.”

It was always Jesus’ intention to make Peter and the others fishers of men rather than fishers of fish.

Now however the metaphor has changed. Not fishers but shepherds. The Lord wants shepherds of sheep.

See, to humbly declare your love for Jesus is not enough. Such love, if real, needs an opportunity for action.

Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will obey My commandments.”

And here is Jesus’ commandment to Peter.

And if we read the Bible, we would discover it is His command, more or less, to all of us.

Take care of His sheep. His sheep are others who know Jesus and are following Him, Christians.

We are called to “tend” them, “feed” them, “shepherd” them.

First of all, this means learning from Jesus. This is what it means to be a disciple, a lifelong learner.

We must resist temptation, lay aside sin, and devote ourselves to learning from the Bible.

Secondly, all Christians are called to participate in teaching. **Matthew 28:18-20**

Christian maturity means teaching. **1 Corinthians 3:1-2, Hebrews 5:11-14**

Do you love Jesus? Learn so that you can teach. Help teach so that others can grow.

Tending the sheep means encouraging, not tearing down, not being critical and complaining.

Tending the sheep means setting an example in leadership, love, eagerness, and service.

Tending the sheep means that you guard against false teachers and those who cause divisions.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22, 1 Peter 5:1-11, Acts 20:25-35

Do you love Jesus? How would you answer?

If you do, your love for Him will show up in your love for those He loves.

In your family, your husband or wife, your children, brothers, sisters, parents.

In the church. How will you contribute to the care of His sheep? It is time to go beyond good intentions.

Serve: In Awana, Sunday School, youth, adult classes, Bible studies.

Where are your gifts? Learn. Figure it out so that you can show to Jesus that you love Him.

II. Jesus prepared Peter for his suffering as a disciple. John 21:18-19

You would not have picked out Peter as a man of great potential.

He probably would not have gotten good grades in school, probably the kid who wouldn’t quit talking.

But it is amazing how much God can do with so little, and this ought to be great encouragement to all of us.

What was it about Peter? Well, nothing. He didn’t have it in him. And this is the point.

Peter had to learn it all, just as we must.

There are no naturally godly people. None naturally wise.

Peter had to learn it all from Jesus.

Acts 4:13 Would people in this world recognize that you have been with Jesus?

Jesus knew what Peter needed to learn, just as He knows what we need to learn.

We find these things in the Bible.

And each of us needs special preparation because of what is coming in our lives.

But you and I do not know what is coming, and so we don't know what we need to learn.

However, Jesus does.

Jesus knew what Peter needed to learn. Jesus knew what John needed. Jesus knows what you need.

This text contains one of the last lessons Jesus taught His disciples before He left them to send the Holy Spirit.

It is the final section of John's Gospel, and so certainly a lesson that John would want to stick in our minds. We can see clearly what Jesus' main point is in His teaching. He says it twice, "'Follow Me.'" (vss. 19, 22)

Do you know what Jesus is talking about in vs. 18? John tells us in vs. 19. Peter's death.

Jesus is indicating that his death will be a painful one, because of persecution.

Peter will lose his freedom, then his life, likely by crucifixion.

Now you might think that this lesson then doesn't apply to you. Not so.

We all have various kinds of suffering ahead of us. It's a good thing Jesus doesn't tell us what's coming.

Can you imagine? All I would do is to think about what is going to happen. I need the lesson.

What's the lesson? You cannot miss it, "Follow Me!"

Follow Jesus because He has been there and He knows what it's like to suffer.

Follow Jesus because He can minister to you in and through the pain.

Follow Jesus because He can keep your head straight in suffering.

Follow Jesus because He transforms suffering into blessing. **Philippians 3:10-11**

Follow Jesus because He injects purpose into suffering. **Colossians 1:24**

Follow Jesus because He will reward suffering for His sake. **1 Peter 4:13**

Follow Jesus because He always makes a beautiful end to the suffering of those who follow Him.

III. Jesus urged Peter to focus on his own discipleship. John 21:20-23

I have four kids, but I don't need them to see this uncomfortable fact of human nature. I have two brothers.

What happens when you're playing basketball with your brothers and Dad tells you to weed the garden?

What is the first thing you do? I would ask, "What about Gene?"

We are often confronted with difficult tasks, unmet expectations, painful experiences, corrections, rebukes.

We usually point to the other guy and say, "What about him? her?"

When it comes to the good things in life: Compliments, gifts, raises, blessings, praise, success, healing...

We usually point to ourselves and say, "What about me?"

Fight this. This is Jesus' point to Peter.

Don't be tempted to blame others, covet what they have, feel sorry for yourself.

C.S. Lewis, The Horse and His Boy, p. 165

Shasta wants to know why certain things happened to his friend Aravis.

Aslan tells him, "I am telling you your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own."

When the Lord is dealing with you, teaching you, you need to learn to pay attention and learn the lesson.

Don't get caught up in wondering about someone else and what they need to learn.

Jesus is not obligated to tell you where someone else stands with Him.

He is not obligated to tell you what they are learning or need to learn.

It is hard enough for you and me to see and do what God is teaching us and asking of us.

IV. Jesus did much more than we know. John 21:24-25

So, John lets us know that he was the one who witnessed all these things.

He wrote these things so we could know the one who knows us and our future, and is able to get us through.

Jesus teaches amazing truth, works miracles, changes lives, more than John could ever write.

But, and this is the point, He does it all, not us, and so we need to trust Him and follow Him.

What is the Lord currently teaching you? You ought to know. The answer ought to be first on your mind.

Do you love Jesus? What does it mean today for you to follow Jesus? How do you need to serve?