

April 23, 2023

“Jesus Reinstates Peter”
Lesson 4

John 21:15-19

Intro

Today’s passage is essentially a redemption story. A redemption story depends on an early failure which is then overcome by the main character. Redemption stories feature characters who change their attitudes, make different decisions, and perform more nobly in the end. They redeem themselves

This passage is also one of redemption. But it isn’t the story of a man who failed and then redeemed himself. Rather, it is the story of the Lord who called the man to accept redemption.

Read John 21:15-19

1. vs. 15: Jesus asks Peter a question: “Do you love me more than these?”

Some have seen this question from one of two problematic views

First, that Jesus didn’t know if Peter loved him

Jesus knows—He’s God!

Second, that Jesus wasn’t sure of Peter’s loyalty to Him

God knows our hearts better than we do—He knows Peter’s

A more accurate take on this question is the idea of redemption

Jesus is giving Peter a chance to repent of his betrayal, to reaffirm his love for Jesus

Connected with this is the idea of preparation

Think of God asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac

Abraham’s willingness to do what God asked strengthened him

Being asked this question begins a strengthening process which Peter will need

Peter had a prominent leadership role in the early church

Jesus’ questions allow Peter to move from coward to leader

“More than these” likely refers to the other disciples

Peter had said in Matt. 26:33 “Even if all fall away because of You, I will never fall away.”

The other disciples ran away, but only Peter denied knowing Him

Peter boasted that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples

Now Jesus asks him about that—“Do you love Me more than these?”

Peter can’t know others’ hearts, so he responds “You know that I love You.”

He speaks about his own heart

His experience humbled him

The Greek words translated love by the two are different—agape and phileo

Much has been written by commentators about what using these different words means

Interestingly, ancient Christian commentators who spoke fluent Greek say nothing

They don’t comment on the difference of these word choices

The two words are used interchangeably frequently, in the Bible and outside of it

It may be prudent to think of these as John choosing not to use the same word repeatedly

Finally Jesus tells Peter to “feed my lambs”

Jesus calls Himself the “Good Shepherd” in John 10

He demonstrated this healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, and other actions

Jesus is about to leave the earth and return to heaven

Who will take on the role of shepherd?

Jesus tasks Peter (and on Pentecost, all the disciples) with being shepherds

This shows that Jesus accepted the sincerity of Peter’s answer to Him

He would not give Peter this role if he didn’t trust Peter to do it

This command gives Peter an ongoing opportunity to show his love

2. vs. 16: Jesus asks the same question, and Peter gives the same reply

Jesus’ commission to Peter is the same as in vs. 15

Peter may have wondered why he was asked the same question he had just answered

3. vs. 17: Jesus asks the same question a *third* time!

Some see this action as a parallel to Peter having denied Jesus three times

If so, Jesus gives Peter an opportunity to commit himself to Jesus as many times

However, Peter doesn’t seem to see it in that light

He “was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time...”

Why he was hurt leads to speculation, since the text doesn’t clearly say why

Many commentaries suggest a possibility of why he was hurt

Peter says, “Lord you know all things”, i.e., you know my heart

The idea is that Jesus keeps asking because there may be something in Peter that needs to be confessed/addressed

From Peter’s view, if Jesus keeps asking, maybe Peter is not as loving toward Jesus as he thought he was.

Jesus stops after the third question; whatever was needed has been accomplished

4. vs. 18: Here, Jesus makes a prophecy about Peter’s future, comparing it to his past

Peter was able to care for himself and do what he wanted when he was younger

When he gets older, this will not be the case anymore

He will be controlled, unable to do what he wants or go where he wants

“Someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

Jesus is not just prophesying, but also encouraging Peter

Peter will be treated the same way as Jesus his Lord was

Peter will need to avoid the instinct of self-preservation

The early church father Clement of Rome wrote a letter in AD 90

In it, he states that Peter was martyred

Other early church traditions say that Peter was crucified in AD 64

They say he was crucified upside down, Peter feeling unworthy to die like Jesus

5. vs. 19: John now adds an editorial comment about the events which he has just recorded

John, an apostle of Jesus and friend of Peter, was there when this exchange happened

He notes that Jesus said this to show Peter what kind of death he was going to have

John says this death “would glorify God”

Until Jesus, crucifixion was intended as a public shaming of a criminal

Following Jesus, His followers saw this death glorifying the One who died

As with many other things, God flips things around from what people think they are or what they mean, to a completely opposite concept

Consider:

“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Jesus then calls Peter to “Follow me!”

Peter has been given a commission, a calling, which he carried out until his death

Application: Peter’s situation here carries a model and pattern for our lives as Christians:

- 1) Just like Peter, we also need redemption. And just like Peter, Jesus makes the first move in our redemption.
- 2) Just like Peter, our redemption results in a calling. We are called to live lives that parallel Jesus’ own, specifically being more concerned about the will of the Father and with our own plans. Each of us has specific things we are called to do for the benefit of the Kingdom.
- 3) Just like Peter, our calling comes with a knowledge of the cost. Because Jesus suffered, we too can expect the life of faith to come with suffering, as Peter’s did. It could include shame and torment as well as death.
- 4) Just like Peter, our suffering comes with a promise. If we suffer for Godly purposes, we bring glory to God—no matter how humiliating the world might think our situation is.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for redeeming each of us. Help us as we seek to follow Your will over our own, and to live lives that parallel Jesus’ to bring You glory, even if it involves our suffering. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

.