

<b>Series:</b> So All May Know	<b>Reference:</b> John 21:1-19	<b>Title:</b> Follow Me!	<b>Date:</b> 12.05.2021
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The call to follow Christ isn't easy. We're bound to fail. But God's call on our lives remains unchanged, and He offers full restoration & forgiveness which empower us to carry on when we fall short. The repentant believer's never disqualified from serving the Lord; rather, our shortcomings can encourage & equip others who may be facing similar struggles.			

### **COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES**

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Have you ever had someone repeatedly ask you the same question, even though your answer hasn't changed? "What's for dinner?" "Can I have some candy?" Although your answer didn't change, the way you respond does. We see a similar situation with Peter in John 21, when Jesus asks the same question three times in a row after the disciples returned from a failed fishing trip.

Interestingly, at least seven of the twelve disciples were probably fishermen. Maybe that's because fishermen are courageous, and Jesus needs brave people to follow Him. They're focused, not easily distracted & don't quit! They can take orders & work together.<sup>1</sup> In this story today, Peter needs to be reminded he's a fisherman, but not as he'd been in the past - he can't return to what he was, Jesus has new use for his skills.

Turn to p742 of your pew Bibles & read along with me in John 21 starting at v1, leaving your Bibles open as we march through this section by section. The events of John 21 take place at least eight days after Resurrection Sunday, based on the timeline of the Gospel accounts. In fact, John writes when Jesus appeared to them beside the lake, it was the third time He'd come to them (v. 14).

In the first two instances, the disciples had been hiding behind locked doors. Now they'd returned to their former vocation. Luke 8:3 tells us, before the crucifixion, their needs were supplied largely by charity. Possibly this support dried up after His crucifixion, so these guys go back to fishing. But their fishing trip's a failure & we find the disciples returning to shore with an empty boat when Jesus calls to throw their nets into the shallows. Recognizing Him, Peter reaches shore first leaving his nets as he'd done before to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17). One more time he turned his back on his catch to sit at Jesus' feet (vv. 7-8).

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 396.

Let's read John 21:1-19...*Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup>Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup>"I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out & got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup>Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup>He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.*

*<sup>6</sup>He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat & you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. <sup>7</sup>Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup>The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. <sup>9</sup>When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.*

Their efforts in vain, we wonder if they'd forgotten the Lord's words, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing"? (John 15:5) They toiled all night & caught nothing. Peter must've remembered what happened two years before, when Jesus called him into full-time discipleship (Luke 5:1-11) when he'd fished all night & caught nothing as well. At that time Jesus had turned his failure into success.<sup>2</sup> It was then that Jesus told him he'd be a fisher of men. This instance bookends their relationship, a reminder to Peter's purpose in Christ. He should be fishing on land, not in a boat!

Jesus called them & us to be fishers of men. A phrase Jesus didn't invent, it was used for years by Greek & Roman teachers. To be a fisher of men meant to seek to persuade & catch men with the truth. A fisherman catches living fish, but when he gets them, they die. Christian witness seeks to catch people dead in sin, which are then made alive in Christ!<sup>3</sup> Fishermen are great examples for us as we become fishers of men! Fish are plentiful, if we obey His directions, we'll bring in a large catch as well!

Perhaps Peter's impulsiveness & self-confidence were revealing themselves again. He was sincere & worked hard, with no results. Some sincerely believe they're doing God's will, but their labor's in vain. Serving without direction, they can't expect blessing in the work.<sup>4</sup> **The question is are we rowing or sailing? In a rowboat we pull with our own strength going slowly & with much effort. In a sailboat we utilize the wind cutting through the water with ease; filled with the wind of the Spirit allowing Him to blow us along to rich pockets of fish with ease!**

<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 396.

<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 397.

<sup>4</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 396.

Two years earlier when Peter was first called, Jesus told him to put out into the water & drop his nets. Peter had said, *“Master, we’ve worked hard all night & haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”* It should be our response when we see our efforts have been in vain, *“Because you say so Jesus, I’ll try again!”*

Continuing in v10...<sup>10</sup>*Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.”*<sup>11</sup>*So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat & dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.*<sup>12</sup>*Jesus said to them, “Come & have breakfast.”* None of the disciples dared ask him, *“Who are you?”* They knew it was the Lord.<sup>13</sup>*Jesus came, took the bread & gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.*<sup>14</sup>*This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

It was time for Jesus to take over, just as He did upon calling Peter into discipleship. He told them where to cast the net; they obeyed, and caught 153 fish! The difference between success & failure was the width of the boat! We’re never far from success when we permit Jesus to give the orders, and we’re usually closer than we realize.<sup>5</sup> We’re to be prayerful in sharing Jesus with others, since it could be the matter of the right word at the right time, which side of the boat we cast our net over. The Spirit can & will lead us in exactly what to say when. So, be praying about & for those you could invite to the Alpha course in January!

Three invitations stand out in John’s Gospel: come & see (John 1:39); come & drink (John 7:37); and come & dine (John 21:12). How loving of Jesus to feed Peter before He dealt with his spiritual needs. A good example for us to follow as we care for others. Caring for the physical can prepare the way for the spiritual.<sup>6</sup> Which is why we’ll be serving dinner at the Alpha meetings in January!

It continues...<sup>15</sup>*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.”*<sup>16</sup>*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.”*<sup>17</sup>*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.”*

This question would’ve been a direct reminder of Peter’s claim that he’d never abandon the Lord even if everyone else scattered in Matthew 26:33-35. To have such a joyous encounter & wonderful meal dampened by a very public reminder of a gross failing must’ve been embarrassing & convicting! But it wasn’t intended to be cruel; instead we see Jesus has a deeper purpose in asking this question.

<sup>5</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 397.

<sup>6</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 397.

One commentator writes, “Jesus asked the question twice using the word *agapas*, which speaks of an all-giving, uncaused, unselfish love. Peter answered Jesus using the word *philio*, which has in mind a reciprocal love, a friendly affection. Some translations express Peter’s answer as, ‘I’m your friend.’”<sup>7</sup> Twice Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me as deeply as you claimed to before?” And not yet seeming to be content with Peter’s promise of friendship, Jesus asks one more time: “Do you *really* love me?” (see v. 17).

The call to follow Christ isn’t easy. We’re bound to fail. When faced with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, Beth Kirchner & several other crew-mates aboard the *Africa Mercy* had to make a difficult decision about whether to continue on in their ministry or return to America. Whatever their choice, there’d be no turning back, yet there was no time to sit & ponder. They had to make a quick decision & live with it.

Beth made the heart-wrenching decision to stay on as many of her shipmates got on the last flight out of Senegal. For Kirchner & the rest choosing to stay or leave wasn’t easy. They wondered if God dwelt in the mystery & met people in their indecision.<sup>8</sup> There’ll be moments in our lives when a similar question is placed before us: Do we really love the Lord enough to risk everything, including life, career & health, or are we just friends who hide when it gets hard?

As Jesus questioned Peter about his love, He was also asking Peter to make a final decision about whether he’d move forward in his calling to be a fisher of men. The question probably meant, “Do you love Me, as you claimed, more than these other disciples love Me?” Peter had boasted of his love contrasting it with that of the others saying, “*I will lay down my life for you!*” (John 13:37) And, “*Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.*” (Matt. 26:33) This hints at a pride that Peter believed he loved the Lord more than did the other disciples.<sup>9</sup>

But Peter found he wasn’t as devoted as he’d thought! His denial of Christ was a sin of pride & cowardice which needed to be confronted & amended. Peter stood by a fire when he denied Christ & now he sits by a fire being confronted by Christ. Jesus is making him consider all their time together & calling him to task! Peter needed this resolved between he & Jesus or he may not have been able to become the man Christ wanted him to be! We can imagine how hard it was for Peter to hear those questions all in a row sitting in a circle with the other men. Peter had been so excited running to Jesus first. Not well-thought, reactive & emotional. Underneath his excitement was probably the thought, “I hope Jesus doesn’t bring up my denial! I hope we can just let that go.” But Jesus couldn’t just let it go, He’s not a purveyor of cheap grace.

<sup>7</sup> David Guzik, study guide for John 21, “The Restoration of Peter,” Blue Letter Bible, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide2017-Jhn/Jhn-21.cfm?a=1018001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Jhn/Jhn-21.cfm?a=1018001)

<sup>8</sup> Cara Meredith, “She Knew She Was Called to Serve. Then COVID-19 Came,” *Christianity Today*, November 23, 2020, [https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/december/mercy-ship-senegal-teacher-covid19-calling-ministry.html?share=dC%2fkgT50hsT5pxHr8ZVJZhl%2fIjJ&utm\\_medium=widgetsocial](https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/december/mercy-ship-senegal-teacher-covid19-calling-ministry.html?share=dC%2fkgT50hsT5pxHr8ZVJZhl%2fIjJ&utm_medium=widgetsocial)

<sup>9</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 398.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, *“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living & incarnate.”* Jesus’ love for us calls us to repentance of sin because it’s in repentance we find freedom & restoration to purpose.

Maybe you’ve denied Christ. Maybe you’ve stood by while conversations happen with the Spirit nudging you to speak up, but didn’t since it may cost friendship or promotion, or make things awkward. Peter had denied publicly so there must be public restoration...Sin should be dealt with only to the extent that it’s known. Private sins should be confessed in private, public sins in public. Since Peter had denied his Lord three times, Jesus asked him three personal questions. He also encouraged him by giving a threefold commission which restored Peter to ministry.<sup>10</sup> “Feed My lambs,” “Shepherd My sheep,” “Feed My sheep.”

*It continues...<sup>18</sup>Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself & went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you & lead you where you do not want to go.”<sup>19</sup>Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”*

Jesus knew the trials & eventual death Peter would face. He’d face failure & success in his role. Peter needed to know he was able to face those risks, disappointments & failures, continuing on in his work despite them. By asking Peter the question three times, he cemented Peter’s response in his heart & mind. In Peter’s response to Jesus, we see a man humbled because of previous failure, but we also see a man who determined to show everyone, including himself, that despite his shortcomings, his love & devotion to the Lord was still alive.

The first time Jesus spoke about His own death, Peter had opposed it (Matt. 16:21ff). Peter had even used his sword in the Garden in a futile attempt to protect Jesus. Yet Peter had boasted he’d die for Him! But when the pressure was on, Peter failed. Anyone who yields himself to serve the Lord must honestly confront these matters of failure & death. When that matter is settled in us we’re ready to live & serve boldly! Jesus’ own death is a repeated theme in John’s Gospel. He knew His hour would come. He was prepared to obey the Father’s will. We, as His followers, must yield ourselves for Him, just as He yielded Himself for us, becoming living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2) ready to be offered (2 Tim. 4:6-8) if it be God’s will.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus’ words, “Follow Me!” must’ve brought new joy to Peter. Literally, Jesus said, “Keep on following Me,” as if he’d never stopped! Immediately, Peter began to follow as

<sup>10</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 397.

<sup>11</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 399.

he'd done before his denial. For a moment *Peter had taken his eyes off Jesus*, a mistake he'd made at least two other times. After that first great catch of fish, Peter took his eyes off his Lord & looked at *himself* saying, "*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*" (Luke 5:8) When he was walking on the stormy sea with Jesus, Peter looked away from the Lord & began to look at the wind & waves - immediately he began to sink (Matt. 14:30). It's dangerous to look at the circumstances instead of at Christ. To be distracted by ourselves, circumstances, or other Christians, is to disobey & get derailed from God's will. Keep your eyes of faith on Him & on Him alone.<sup>12</sup>

The image now of Peter isn't just as fisher of men, but shepherd as well - evangelist & pastor. That which we're all called to be, sharing Jesus with those who don't know Him & discipling them along as they come into that relationship. Three admonitions are given to Peter: "Feed My lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," and "Feed My sheep." Lambs & more mature sheep need feeding & leading. There are enemies who want to destroy the flock, and shepherds stay alert & courageous (Acts 20:28–35) to protect & guide.

As believers, we'll sometimes experience hardships which make us question our worthiness to serve the Lord. But whether we stand or fall, God's call on our lives remains unchanged. As his children, we are called to be Christ's ambassadors to the world. He offers full restoration & forgiveness which empowers us to pick up & carry on each time we fall short.

The good news of the Gospel is that the repentant believer is never disqualified from serving the Lord; our shortcomings can serve to encourage & equip others who may be facing similar struggles. As others see our continued love & trust in the Lord despite difficulties, the Gospel will continue to spread.

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<sup>12</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 399.