

SERMON: BEGINNING AGAIN WITH JESUS

John 21:15-17

(15) So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?* He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, *Feed my lambs.* (16) He saith to him again the second time, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, *Feed my sheep.* (17) He saith unto him the third time, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* Peter was grieved because he said unto Him the third time, *Lovest thou me?* And he said unto him, Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, *Feed my sheep.*

Introduction

By his actions, Peter had turned in his resignation. He felt unworthy to serve any longer in the ministry of Jesus. He had failed miserably. He had denied Jesus three times and had warmed his hands at the enemy's fire. Not only had he let Jesus down; he had also let himself down. He did the very things he boastfully said he would not do. At the time he needed to be at his best, Peter was at his worst. But Jesus was not through with him yet. Jesus rejected his resignation and restored him to a life of dedicated service.

Exposition

1. A Return To The Past.

(Peter Went Fishing.)

(After Utter Failure, It Is Easy To Give Up And Return To The Past.)

2. A Fruitless Night.

(There Was More Failure.)

(There Are Times When It Seems Like Nothing Will Work.)

(Seems Like You Can't Go Forward And You Can't Go Backwards.)

3. A Surprise In The Morning.

(Jesus Finds Peter.)

(Jesus Gives Him Fishing Advice.)

(Jesus Has Breakfast With Him.)

4. A Three-Fold Question.

(Do You Love Me, More Than These?)

5. A Cautious Answer.

(Jesus' Initial Questioning Used Agape.)

(Peter Replied All Three Times With Philia.)

(Jesus' Love For Us Will Always Be Greater Than Our Love For Him.)

6. A Gracious Command.

(Feed My Lambs. Feed My Sheep.)

(Loving Jesus And Others Is A Call To Action.)

Closing Thoughts

Just as Jesus restored Peter, He can also restore us when we fall short. We must be willing to allow Jesus to facilitate the process. Sometimes the process to restoration can make us feel awkward and "down right" uncomfortable; Peter felt awkward and uncomfortable when he was questioned by Jesus, but that was part of the process. Jesus died on the cross to pave the pathway to salvation and restoration. In one sense, Jesus "rebooted" Peter. Likewise as we emerge in this post-pandemic era, He can reboot our ministries at Antioch-Lithonia. We can experience a more productive, more efficient, more spiritual new normalcy.

Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

Related Scriptures

John 21:1-17

1st Peter 4:8

1st John 1:9

Proverbs 10:12

End Notes

1. Beginning again with Jesus involves facing up to our past. (Even nations have to face up to the immoral acts of their past.) That morning, Peter was made to face up to his past in a number of ways. This was therapeutic not vindictive. We need not dwell on the past but, we must face our past and learn from it.

There was, for instance, the charcoal fire, which Jesus may have built to remind Peter of what happened when he warmed himself by a similar charcoal fire a week or so previously. There was the threefold questioning of Peter designed to help him recall his three denials of Jesus. There was the formal use of his old name Simon son of Jonas,

which in turn challenged him to remember how far he had come and yet, had recently slipped backward.

2. Beginning again also involves recommitting ourselves to Christ and His Great Commission. Peter was not simply reminded of his past failure. He was given an opportunity to obliterate this threefold failure by reaffirming his love for Jesus again. Jesus did not ask Peter, "From now on will you be faithful?" Jesus simply asked him, "Do you really love Me?"

3. The first two times in questioning Peter, Jesus used agape for the word love. Peter replied with philia, which is not as strong as agape. Perhaps, Peter was afraid to use the stronger word because if he failed again, he would have to "eat his words." The third time Jesus used the same word that Peter used-*philia*. Jesus knew that His love for us will always be greater than our love for Him. Perhaps, Jesus also knew that the restoration process is incremental. Peter would eventually get to the agape level.

4. The threefold questioning may have served a dual purpose. Jesus' threefold repetition of His question may reflect the Near Eastern custom of reiterating a matter three times before witnesses in order to convey a solemn obligation, especially with regard to contracts conferring rights or legal dispositions. By analogy, Jesus' threefold question lends itself solemnity to the occasion of his commissioning Peter to the task of "preaching the word." He was formally telling Peter, "You are in the preaching business until you die. You can't get out of it."

5. Please remember, Peter exposed himself to more "opportunities" to fail because he hung around when the other disciples ran off and left Jesus early on. Give Peter credit for hanging around when the others abandoned Jesus. Sometimes the person who hangs around the longest and does the most work gets the harshest criticism.

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