

Christ's Restoring Grace

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 21:15-25
Preached on: Sunday, October 19, 2015

I would invite you to take your Bibles and turn to John's Gospel, chapter 21. We have been in John's Gospel since August of 2013, going through it verse by verse and this morning we come to the end of that magnificent journey in chapter 21. Remember that John tells us that he has written this Gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in his name.

So this morning we come to the final part of the epilogue of John's Gospel, John 21, verses 15 through 25. Let me read this text to you.

15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." 19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" 20 Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" 21 So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" 23 Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?" 24 This is the disciple who bears witness of these things and wrote these things, and we know that his witness is true. 25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written.

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Have you ever denied Christ in your life? Have you ever cowered in fear and failed to take a stand for him? Have you ever sinned so grievously that you brought reproach upon the name of Christ and damaged your reputation? We all have in one way or another, have we not? Is it possible, therefore, for those who have denied Christ but are sincerely penitent, to be restored to useful service? Or have they committed some kind of unpardonable sin? The text that we have before us this morning answers that question. Here we have a marvelous object lesson in forgiveness, restoration and reinstatement, a passage that has been written to bring healing to a wounded soul tortured by regret.

We come this morning to the final verses of the epilogue of John's Gospel that deals with the restoration of Peter after his treacherous denial of Christ that rendered him unworthy to be an apostle and lacking the necessary credibility to instruct others in the faith and shepherd the flock of God. But here, dear friends, the Holy Spirit reveals to us Christ's restoring grace and what a magnificent restoration it is and this is a ministry to every believer because we must understand that Peter's life and ministry was representative of all of the redeemed. We see ourselves in his life. We see ourselves in his ministry. His proud spirit that fueled his inflated self-confidence and worthless self-sufficiency can be seen in each and every one of us. His knee-jerk denial of Jesus really pictures the reaction of each one of us given the right circumstance, but the provision of divine grace that he received, restoring him to fellowship and reinstating him in useful service is also a blessing available to every broken believer. We must never forget that Christ loves us with an everlasting love and it is his exceeding joy to restore us, to forgive us and use us.

Now, it's important for us to have some very fascinating background to better understand what's happening here in this text. You will recall in Luke 22, beginning in verse 33 in the upper room on the night of his betrayal, Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. But he said to Him, 'Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!' And He said, 'I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.'" You see, Jesus knew that the only thing that would really help Peter see the true condition of his heart and expose the impotence of his fleshly over-confidence would be to allow him to fail, to fall. You know, he often does this to us, doesn't he? To get our attention; to teach us that when we are admittedly weak, that is when we are strong; that Christ's strength is made perfect in our weakness; that we must learn to never trust on our own resources.

So Jesus prayed that his faith would not fail and though Peter failed miserably, his faith did not and now we see the providence of God orchestrating all of these events, this whole scenario, to accomplish this purpose in Peter's life. "I have prayed for you, that

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your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." And, beloved, what we see here in this final part of the epilogue is the fulfillment of all of this. We see Peter's turning. We see his repentance. We see his restoration which will therefore enable him to strengthen his brothers as Jesus prayed. By God's grace, Satan was unable to overwhelm Peter with torturous thoughts that somehow his sin was beyond the reach of grace; that it was too great to be forgiven; that it was too severe for him to ever be restored and reinstated into useful service for Christ. But bear in mind that just prior to this interaction with Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee after breakfast, bear in mind that Peter's heart was filled with remorse over his failure in loving Christ therefore it would appear, as we have studied, that Peter was tempted to return once again to his former way of life, the thing he was comfortable with, to be a fisher of fish more than a fisher of men. Certainly, all of the guys were unsure if the risen Christ would still provide for them and bless them and, I'm sure for Peter, he was wondering, "Will he bless such a loser like me?"

But in his great mercy and in his compassion, we see the Lord demonstrating his grace once again to help Peter and the others understand that indeed, "Apart from me, you can do nothing," and you remember that when they obeyed his command to cast the net on the right side of the boat, he blessed them abundantly and the miraculous catch of fish really symbolized the blessing of evangelism which Peter experienced by the power of the Spirit when the Spirit came upon him at Pentecost. You will remember after one sermon recorded in Acts 2, we are told that there were added that day about three thousand souls.

So when Peter realized when he was out on the boat that it was the Lord on the shore, you will recall that he jumped into the water, he swims a hundred yards to get to the shore. The text says that the others dragged the net full of fish to the shore and when they got on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it and bread and there, beloved, we see how the Lord demonstrates to them that he still cares for them. He still provides for their needs, for the needs of those who obey him. For those who serve him, he will also serve.

So Peter swam to shore and what did he see? He sees a charcoal fire. There are fish on it. There is bread on it. But I believe that Jesus created that charcoal fire for another reason. Not to just somehow bake the fish or bake the bread because he could have spoken that into existence. I believe that charcoal fire was the silent preacher intended to stir Peter's heart to remember the last time he was near a charcoal fire in the presence of his Lord, that time when he denied Jesus three times. I'm sure those glowing coals caused Peter to judge himself and isn't it true that all through Scripture we see how fire symbolizes

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judgment and glowing coals purification? So now the stage is set for this compassionate yet crushing confrontation that would bring Peter to the very end of himself.

So this brings us to our text in verse 15, "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?'" You notice he uses the name "Simon." He doesn't use the nickname that he had given him, Peter, but with his former name. He uses that since it would appear that he is about to be rebuked for being like his former self.

"Do you love me more than these?" "These" probably being a reference to the boat, the nets, the 153 fish that they had pulled up on the shore. All those things associated with the fishing life that Peter and the others would appear to be drawn back to. All of those things laying around; those things that he loved and was tempted to pursue. But would you notice that Jesus does not begin with a harsh rebuke, but rather he is going to restore him in the spirit of gentleness. By the way, we would all do well to use this same approach. This is consistent with Galatians 6, isn't it? When we see someone who is caught in a trespass, we are to restore them in the spirit of gentleness and though painful, we must help that sinning brother probe the wound that they have through self-examination by using the scalpel of the word regarding the most important spiritual issue of all and that is their love for Christ.

That's what's happening here. Without that, all that we do for him is in the flesh, not the Spirit. By the way, it's for this reason you will recall that Jesus condemned the saints in Ephesus in Revelation 2. You will recall that Jesus praised them for working hard in ministry. He praised them because they endured persecution; they exercised great discernment; they would not tolerate false teachers. They were always driven to uphold the name and the reputation of Christ but he says, "I have this against you, you have left your first love." In other words, their passion and fervor for Christ had grown cold. Their religion had become mechanical. We must all guard against this. There is such a danger of having a loveless orthodoxy where we just go through the motions of our religion but there is no soul satisfying joy within us that causes us to rejoice in our relationship with Christ and I would submit to you that the reason there is so much compromise and ineffectiveness in the church today is because too many believers have abandoned their love for Christ. Jesus didn't say that they had no love, he just said that, "You have left your love, not that you lost it." In other words, you have abandoned it. You have forsaken it. You have departed from it. You have allowed other things to take its place.

That's what was going on with Peter. By the way, in that text in Revelation 2, first love that they had left speaks of the passionate, fervent, pure love of the newly wedded bride. I would ask you: does this describe your love for Christ? Do you remember when you first

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came to Christ and your heart was overflowing with love for him? Do you remember when he was your all-consuming passion? He was the object of your heart's desire and selfless devotion? Sadly, like many marriages where couples begin to drift apart and live like roommates, well, they love each other but they just don't enjoy each other anymore. They live in separate worlds. Other interests become the priority and the honeymoon period gradually gives way to something similar to what happened at Ephesus, a departure from your first love. I pray that this is not true in your relationship with Christ.

So he says, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" Oh, how this must have crushed Peter's heart. Jesus chose the Greek word for love that is the highest expression of love, agapao. It speaks of a self-sacrificial supreme love; a love of the will that demands no reciprocation. No doubt, when Peter hears this, his mind is flooded with all of his failures; the way he betrayed Christ. Something far less than that kind of selfless, pure love.

But he also knew in his heart that he loved Christ so he says to him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." Here we see Peter choosing a different word for love, phileo, a different word that Jesus chose. One that describes fondness and affection but not that supreme love and perhaps he intended this nuanced distinction in his choice of terms to better reflect the lesser kind of love that was really indicative of his behavior and perhaps he could not bring himself to agree that he truly possessed the kind of selfless love Jesus expressed in his question. So now in his brokenness, fully aware of his empty boast of the past, he is only comfortable with expressing his love for Christ through the use of a lesser kind of love, though he wished it were not true of himself.

So what does he do? He entrusts himself to the omniscience of his Master and he says, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." It's as if he's saying, "I will let you answer this accurately. You are the one that knows all things because I really have no confidence in my own assessment of myself." I believe Jesus sees his humility and knowing that Peter did indeed love him, he said to him, "Tend my lambs." I can only imagine when Peter heard this, he was a bit shocked. I mean, Jesus' response seems to be a non sequitur. It appears to be a conclusion that does not logically follow Jesus' question. It would appear from Jesus' question that Jesus is trying to expose the fact that Peter is a failure in love; that he is therefore permanently disqualified from useful service; that God is done with him. Peter is all washed up. He is a loveless loser. That's what he's expecting not, "Tend my lambs." But, you see, Jesus sees the brokenness of Peter's heart and he knew that Peter truly loved him and he knew how Peter's flesh waged war against the manifestation of that love in his life, causing him to do things that he hated, but Peter lamented over his failure and his heart was grieved. It was contrite and you must understand, dear friends, that that is what God looks for. As he tells us in Isaiah 66, "To this one I will look, To him

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who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." That's what gets God's attention. Dear believer, know this: we never love so deeply as when we are broken over how we love so poorly. The man who boasts of his love the most is the one who loves the least.

Jesus also knew that the spark that first ignited Peter's love was of divine origin and it started a fire that can never be extinguished. He was given eternal life as a result of regenerating grace and what a comfort this should be to all of us. However weak the flame of our love for him, we can know that because of his great love for us, he is always vigilant to fan the embers of our weak love into a raging fire of jealous passion and useful service for him. The only person Jesus will not use is the one who has never been born again and has no love for him at all. He wants Peter and the others and all of us to know that, "Although you have forsaken me, I will never forsake you." Aren't you thankful, folks, for that reality? I'm reminded of what Paul said in Philippians 1:6, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

But Jesus also wants Peter and all of us to understand that, as he said, "No servant can serve," in other words, be a slave, "to two masters." He has warned them about this before, Luke 16:13. Jesus says, "For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." So basically he's saying to Peter, "Peter, what's it going to be? Do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love You." So he says to him, "Tend my lambs." Tend my lambs, indicating that all whom the Father had given him were indeed his precious possession. And won't you also notice here there is a shift from evangelism that was symbolized by the God-ordained, God-empowered catch of fish, to pastoring: to feeding, leading, comforting, protecting, discipling and so forth the sheep. You see, the apostles would not only need to be evangelists but also fulfill the role of the pastor/teacher as Paul describes in Ephesians 4:11 and following and certainly that is true today as well with those of us who are pastor/teachers, and all of us are to be evangelists in one way or another.

So notice he says, "Tend my lambs." May I point out he does not say, "your lambs." You see there is no hint of Jesus giving Peter the rights of governance or authority over the church and the other apostles as the Roman Catholics assert. Jesus is not establishing the primacy of Peter as the first pontiff. As a footnote, you will recall that Paul told the Ephesian elders that they were to guard and shepherd the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers, and we read even with Peter, Peter pictured himself as a "fellow elder," not as the pope, not as the head of the church. You see, all shepherds must

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give an account to the Chief Shepherd when he appears, the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the head of the church. We are the sheep of his pastures.

So he says, "Tend my lambs." Now, the fact that he used the word "lamb," I don't want to make too much of this but it may be he wants to indicate the need to really shepherd, care for immature believers, those that are weak in the faith as a lamb would be. Those that are the most vulnerable to danger and deception and false shepherds. Many times, dangers that they could not even see because they're young in the faith.

But how these words must have caused Peter's heart to skip a beat because I think he was expecting something else, don't you? "Really? Tend your lambs?" I would imagine he is thinking to himself, "Surely he's not suggesting, given my failure of love, given my vaunted excessive boast that proved to be nothing more than hot air? Surely he's not going to still use me?" But it was this very contrition that Jesus was looking for, the kind of humility that God blesses and uses. You see, those God uses the most are those who are convinced that they deserve the least.

However, Jesus knew that he needed to probe further into Peter's heart. You see, because Jesus loved Peter so much, he was jealous over him and so he challenges Peter once more in verse 16, "He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?'" Once again, he uses the verb that expresses the highest form of love. "Peter said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.'" And for a second time, Peter appeals to Jesus' omniscience to measure the depth of his love and, once more, Peter uses the lesser verb to describe his fondness and his affection for the Lord, but he is still suspicious and rightfully so of his own spirituality, a lesson we all need to learn. We all need to be suspicious of our own spirituality. He simply could not bring himself to say that he loved the Lord supremely.

Then as if to say to Peter, "Yes, Peter, I know that you love me," Jesus says this to him, "Shepherd My Sheep." What a picture of undeserved grace. Despite Peter's failure, Jesus sees into his heart and he sees the brokenness and the humility of his heart, the longing of his heart, the desire of his heart, and he recommissions him to service. What a great lesson for all of us. Oh, dear child of God, never forget this: it is his love for us, not our love for him, that has forever sealed the bond of grace. Think of all the ways just this last week your love for self and love for the world has called into question your professed love for Christ. Think of all the commands you have broken. Think of all the opportunities you have squandered to take a stand for Christ. Think of how little time you have spent in sweet communion with him. How you have had no desire to feed upon his word and how little you cared to put his glory on display in your life and how often you

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have winked at your own sin this last week, but you were hyper-vigilant to spot out the sin of your brother and gossip about it. The list could go on and on, couldn't it?

And, dear friends, when we take an honest inventory of our life, there is good reason for us to suspect that the Lord would ask us the same question, "Do you love me?" And yet he loves us still. That's the amazing thing about his love and because he loves us, he tests us. He will very often bring us into valleys of great difficulties to reveal the true condition of our heart, places we don't want to be so that he can humble us. Not only so that we may love him more, but so that we can experience more of his love for us.

Do you realize this is precisely the reason why the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, Romans 8:26? That there is some kind of inner Trinitarian communication going on that we cannot even fathom? Paul says he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. "For this reason, we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." And what is his purpose? "To conform us into the likeness of Christ and glorify Him forever." You see, what's happening here is Peter is experiencing the reality of God working all of these things together right there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And, oh, what a blessed truth it is. May I repeat it again: it is his love for us, not our love for him, that has forever sealed the bond of grace and this is the great lesson that Peter must learn.

So he says to him, "Shepherd My sheep." The verb "shepherd" is a synonym for the previous verb "tend" that Jesus used. Both of them really communicating the full range of pastoral responsibilities that are clearly delineated in the pastoral epistles in the New Testament. And perhaps the use of the figure "sheep" rather than "lambs" is intended to convey that sheep are not as weak and feeble as lambs. I know that lambs require, for example, about a 50-60 day period before they can be weaned from their mother, but the mature sheep must depend upon the shepherd to protect them and nourish them, bringing them into pastures that can sustain them so that they, along with the lambs that they are feeding, will not perish.

As I thought about this, I am reminded of how many times I hear from people in phone calls and emails virtually every week, Christian people that are spiritually malnourished. They are confused. They are hurting, sometimes they're even deceived. Sometimes they're frightened. They are starving for the glory and the greatness of God that they can only experience through the great truths of the word of God; feeding on the word of God and being in fellowship with God's people. And what a tragic thing to see their lambs, their children, wasting away with spiritual malnourishment.

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So Jesus is very concerned about his under-shepherds. He wants to make sure they are not wolves in sheep's clothing, in other words, they're not dressed in the garb of a shepherd, but in truth, they are true shepherds. The false shepherd, the wolf in the sheep clothing, was one that would pretend to be a true shepherd but they were nothing more than a wolf that would use the sheep to their own end.

"Shepherd My sheep." In other words, "Care for my sheep, Peter, the way I care for them." And the real test to distinguish between a wolf and a shepherd, between a true Christian and a hypocrite, is their love for Christ and that will always be manifested by their faithfulness and obedience to him because, you see, our love for Christ will be the driving force that motivates the Christian to service and to obedience. And if I can say this very practically: if you have little desire to know Christ, then you have very little awareness of his love for you and consequently you will love Christ very little and have no desire to serve him. You see, we must remember that as we have read earlier, we love him because he first loved us and it's for this reason that Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us," in other words, Christ's love for us motivates us to obey him, to serve him, and service is the ultimate expression of worship.

So as we come back to this scene, we see that Christ is going to challenge him a third time. Bear in mind that Peter denied Christ three times so Jesus will challenge him three times. Furthermore, it's important for us to understand that whenever sin is public, confession and repentance and restoration must also be public. This was so important for other six apostles to witness. Verse 17, "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?'" It's interesting that this time Jesus used Peter's word for love, phileo, as if to say, "Peter, I know you want to love me supremely. I know that you want to love me completely with selfless sacrificial devotion, but at times your life even calls into question whether or not you are even fond of me." My, how I see myself here, don't you?

The text doesn't tell us this but I would imagine that by this third time Peter's eyes are filling with tears. They are probably beginning to run down his cheeks. He is probably at this point looking around at his fellow disciples, looking around at all of his fishing gear. His heart is racing. And with the last ounce of self-confidence and bravado drained from his soul, he probably begins to shake his head and he says to him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." "You know that I love you imperfectly and I hate that. You know that I am ashamed of all of my hollow boasts, my foolish dependence upon myself rather than you. My self-serving pledges of loyalty that disappear like a morning mist with the rise of the sun rendering me nothing more than a coward but, Lord, you know that I love you. Oh, would that I love you more!" Well, seeing his genuine

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contrition and knowing this was the desire of his heart, Jesus restores him and reinstates him and says to him, "Tend My sheep." Oh, the blessing of Christ restoring grace.

Can I speak to pastors for a moment? I know we have a number that are a part of our church through the internet. Pastors, we need to hear this. I'm reminded of what A. W. Pink said many years ago regarding this text, quote, "If you love me, here is the way to manifest it," referring to, "Tend My sheep." He says, "It is only those who truly love Christ that are fitted to minister to his flock. The work is so laborious, the appreciation is often so small, the response to discouraging, the criticism so harsh, the attacks of Satan so fierce, that only the love of Christ, his for us and ours for him, can constrain to such work. Hirelings will feed the goats, but only those who love Christ can feed his sheep." Fellow pastors and elders and all of you who serve Christ, unless we love Christ, we will never love his sheep.

Now, not all of us show our love through shepherding but we have all been given different gifts to function in the body of Christ, this amazing spiritual organism that responds to Christ who is the head. And it will be our love for Christ that will animate that service, that will cause us to persevere even if it costs us our life, and this is what Jesus goes on to predict for Peter.

Notice in verse 18, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished," in other words, you used to be able to do whatever you wanted to do, "but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go. Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God." This, of course, was a reference to crucifixion. "And when He had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me!'" "This is what's going to happen but you follow me!" By the time John's Gospel was written some 50 years after Christ's ministry, Peter had already been martyred for his faith so when the saints first read this, this has already occurred, but what a testimony to all of the saints who first read this and to all of us today, to know that Peter loved Christ and by the power of the grace and the Spirit that came upon him at Pentecost, he followed him to the end. According to ancient documents and tradition that we can read, we learn that Peter was first forced to watch his wife be crucified and it is said that he kept calling her by name and repeating, "Remember the Lord. Remember the Lord. Remember the Lord," until the Lord took her home and then he requested to be crucified upside down because he did not feel he was worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord.

Folks, I ask you: how could a man serve Christ for three decades knowing that this would be his fate? And the answer is this: he knew how much Christ loved him. You see, his awareness of Christ's love for him sustained his love for Christ. Beloved, unless you

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grasp this truth, your Christian life will always be less than what it could be: less powerful, less fulfilling, less enjoyable, less fruitful. And you will be vulnerable to Satan. You will be ruled by your flesh rather than the Spirit, and you will compromise and you will not follow Jesus.

Evidently as we look at the text, Jesus began to walk away from the others with Peter when he said, "Follow Me!" so Peter is walking with him now, walking down the shore, I'm sure, walking away from the breakfast, probably in silence. Then in verse 20, we see that, "Peter turns around and he sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, 'Lord, who is the one who betrays You?'" In other words, John. He sees his beloved brother John walking behind them. "So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, 'Lord, and what about this man?'" Obviously, Peter is concerned about his dear brother in Christ, wondering if he would suffer the same fate. But in verse 22, "Jesus said to him, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!' Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?'" Evidently the Lord's hypothetical response to Peter concerning John was misunderstood or misrepresented and it was turned into some kind of rumor that John now wants to debunk and thus protect the credibility of his witness and protect the Lord from being charged with making some false prediction, but Jesus is basically saying to Peter, as I see it, "Peter, you are so easily distracted. It is so easy for you to take your eye off of me and concern yourself with matters that are, frankly, none of your business. What happens to John is really none of your business. Peter, listen to me, you follow me!"

What a picture, by the way, of the power of the flesh that can operate in us even in the context of deep contrition and divine restoration. Isn't it amazing? Have you ever been on your knees before the Lord, you are pouring out your heart to him and in all honesty and sincerity you're saying, you're feeling, you're doing the right things and then in the midst of that you feel proud over your spirituality? I mean, you just can't escape the flesh, can you?

"You follow Me!" Practically this means we have to deny ourselves. Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." I hope this is the attitude of your heart. By the way, this is so foreign to the Gospel message today. In fact, it is even abhorrent in most circles, because the Gospel that is preached today is not a Gospel of self-denial, it's a Gospel of self-fulfillment. "Come to Jesus and he will make you more successful. He'll make you, I don't know, hit more home runs and make more money. He desperately wants you on his team, but he's powerless to get you to sign up. It's all up to you." Folks, that is not the Gospel. Salvation is all of

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Christ's Restoring Grace

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 21:15-25
Preached on: Sunday, October 19, 2015

grace. John MacArthur says, quote, "The Gospel calls sinners to submit fully to Jesus Christ; to find their lives by losing them; to gain their lives by abandoning them; to live life to the fullest by emptying themselves."

Well, John closes his Gospel with a statement that really vouches for the veracity of all that he has recorded under the inspiration of the Spirit, but it also speaks of the infinite glories of Christ Jesus, the Son of God. Verse 24, "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written."

Oh, dear friend, I pray that you have bowed the knee to Jesus; that you have confessed him as Savior, because if you haven't, you will one day bow before him against your will and you will confess him as Lord but not as Savior and he will then sentence you to the solitary confinement of an eternal hell. I plead with you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved today.

But for those of you that know and love Christ, won't you learn three great essentials that emerge from this text, essentials pertaining to Christian living, truths that Peter and the others learned so well? They are simply this: we must love the Lord supremely; we must sacrifice ourselves completely; and we must follow Christ closely. Folks, as persecution continues to mount even in our country, certainly all around the world, you're going to discover how profoundly important these essentials really are. And if you're in desperate need for restoration today, know this: that Jesus is right here in this worship center every bit as much as he was on the shore of Galilee. Won't you take advantage of it and in the sincerity of your heart, confess your sin and ask him to help you to love him supremely, to sacrifice yourself completely and follow him closely.

And I close with this thought that came to my mind this morning early as I was meditating on these great truths,

"No mind can count the stars above,
Or grasp the depth of space,
Yet greater still God's matchless love,
Revealed in saving grace."

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Let's pray together.

Father, once again we find ourselves lost in the wonder of your love and the hope that is ours in Christ. I pray that by the power of your Spirit you will speak to every heart in those ways that are specific to their needs, especially those that do not know you as Savior. Draw them unto yourself by your grace. And for those that are in need of restoration, Lord, may they find comfort in these great truths. May Christ have preeminence in all things in our lives. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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