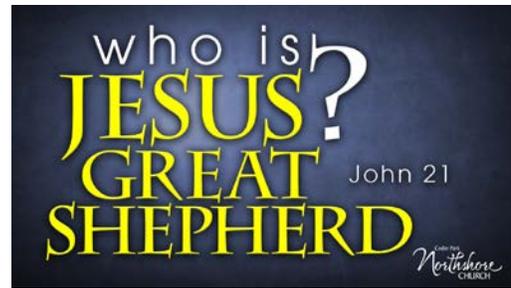


We started this series in the Gospel of John back in August, answering life's most important question: Who is Jesus? And today we find ourselves in the final chapter, John 21, *wrapping up* the series.



The end of John 20 seems like it could have been the end of the story... but there was this last, vitally important episode that John needed us to read and understand in order for us to have the complete picture.

John 20 ends by saying:

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

³¹ But these are written that you may believe ^x that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. ¹

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30,31



This is the purpose of the whole Gospel of John, that we who read it would **believe**... that we would believe that Jesus is “the Son of God, and that by believing” we would have life (for this life and for eternity) in His name. That is, of course, the reason we have been walking through the Gospel of John chapter-by-chapter, so we would believe and we, too, would have life.

But before we *wrap things up* with the Gospel of John, there is chapter 21.

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. ^b It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

John 21:1-3



Seven Disciples of Jesus, including John and Peter, were home fishing. And they weren’t catching anything. For me, that is sometimes the best fishing...

¹ The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 20:30–31). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

because I just like being on a boat with friends. The **catching** is fun, but the *baiting and cleaning* and such is just gross. And I don't really care to eat the kind of fish I know how to catch. But these guys were professionals; if they were out on the boat, they meant to be catching fish. It was how they earned their living and how they fed themselves and their families.

I've heard some condemn these guys for going back to their *old lives*. These were the same shores from which Jesus had called them... telling them that they would no longer be mere *fishermen*, but **fishers of men**. It was here on these waters that Jesus walked; Peter walked on this water too, at least for a few steps. And here they were, back to their old lives.

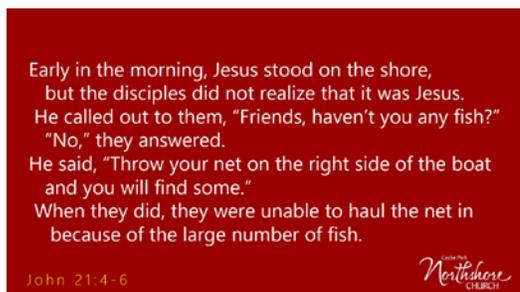
I wouldn't make too much of that. First, they weren't on anyone's payroll as Apostles (at least not yet). This was how they ate and made a living; it wasn't their *old lives*, it was simply their **lives**. Second, Jesus didn't condemn them. In fact, it was Jesus who told them to go on to Galilee, and as we read on, we see that Jesus helped.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.



Does anybody have experience fishing with a net like this? My closest experience to this sort of thing is I have watched *Deadliest Catch* with Laurie. While it is clear that there is a great deal of science and precision in determining where to drop the nets (or the crab pots)... I can't imagine that is anywhere near that precise. While one would need to be in the right area, the difference between dropping them on one side of the boat or the other is not a real difference. This was a miracle... a sort of *signature* miracle in which Jesus miraculously provides, whether it is fish or loaves of bread.



⁷ 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. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. ²

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.
The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish,
for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.
When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it,
and some bread.
Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.”
So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore.
It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.
Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”
None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.
Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.
This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples
after he was raised from the dead.

John 21:7-14

NEARSHORE
CHURCH

Here is Jesus, once dead but now risen, in His Resurrected Body suited for eternity (which apparently looked a bit different since Jesus wasn't always immediately recognizable) making *breakfast* for His friends (when Jon and Carey make breakfast for us guys once a month, they are in great company).

Here is Jesus, Risen King of Kings, preparing a fire and breakfast and inviting His friends to add their part and join Him.

Here is Jesus, the One who taught His followers to serve one another by washing their feet, serving His friends again.

Here is Jesus, once again handing His friends bread, just like He had done days before when He taught them the Gospel using bread and wine.

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” ³

What kind of a question was that?
Seriously... what was Jesus asking Peter?
Was he asking if he loved Jesus more than
his **work**... his boats and fish?

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.”
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.”
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.”

John 21:15-17

NEARSHORE
CHURCH

² The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 21:1–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 21:15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Was he asking if Peter loved Jesus more than Peter loved his friends and coworkers?

It appears that Jesus was asking Peter about the **depth** and **strength** of Peter's love for Jesus... and if that **intensity** of love was more than the other's loved Jesus. Doesn't that seem strange?

It might not seem so strange if we remember what Peter said, and how Peter behaved on Thursday night, Maundy Thursday night... just before the Crucifixion of Jesus on Friday.

It is recorded in all four Gospels; the way that it is stated in Matthew might best help us:

³¹ Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

“ ‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’^k

³² But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

³³ Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

³⁴ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

³⁵ But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”⁴

“Even if **all** fall away, **I** never will! I'll die with you Jesus! I will never disown you Jesus!” cried Peter just days before.

And now Jesus asks, “Peter, do you love me more than these?”

Then Jesus told them,
“This very night you will all fall away on account of me,
for it is written:
“I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”
But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”
Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”
“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered,
“this very night, before the rooster crows,
you will disown me three times.”
But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you,
I will never disown you.”
Matthew 26:31-35a

Northshore
CHURCH

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.”
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.”
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.”

John 21:15-17

Northshore
CHURCH

⁴ The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 26:31-35). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Old Peter knew the answer to that question, for certain. But *new Peter*, the Peter who denied Jesus and saw Him unjustly convicted and executed. Peter who witnessed the miracle of Resurrection. Peter who received the Holy Spirit as Jesus breathed it on Peter and his friends. This Peter who was truly understanding the Gospel... I think this Peter's answer was different, an answer out of a humble heart.

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

¹⁶ 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.”

¹⁷ 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.” ⁵

Three times Jesus asked the question. Some commentators make a *big deal* out of the different words for love that appear in the Greek texts (*agape* and *phileo*). Those are interesting studies and sermons, but I think too much might be made of all that, especially considering the way that John wrote. (If you want to argue with me, catch up with me later.)

I think the plain and obvious meaning behind the three questions and answers is more meaningful.

Peter had blown it that Thursday night, he *shot off his mouth* publicly. A *public sin* like that needed to be resolved publicly. This is a good rule by which to live. If we blow it privately, we can (should) resolve it privately. But when we sin publicly, we must resolve it publicly. Jesus was working with Peter in this public setting to resolve Peter's sin and restore Peter publicly. The three questions, and Peter's declaration of love for the Lord, matched the three times that Peter denied Jesus.

“Yes, Lord, I love You,” Peter professed. Not more than anyone else, not with brash and overdone statements of heroics... just “I love You... the best I can.” And so should we. Let new Peter be our example.

⁵ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Jn 21:15–17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

And how did Jesus respond each time? Jesus commissioned Peter to care for His sheep, to take on the role of shepherd to which Jesus had called Peter.

The three questions flashed back to how Peter denied Jesus three times, and now this **shepherd** image would cause other flashbacks to what Jesus said.

I don't know how many of you noticed, but we skipped John 10 in our series... because I knew I'd want to go back to it in association with where we are today in John 21. John 10 is dominated with the picture of Jesus as the Good (or Great) Shepherd.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.⁶

I am the good shepherd.
The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
The hired hand is not the shepherd
and does not own the sheep.
So when he sees the wolf coming,
he abandons the sheep and runs away.
Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.
The man runs away because he is a hired hand
and cares nothing for the sheep.

John 10:11-13

Northshore
CHURCH

Peter knew that Jesus called him to be more than a *hired hand*... one who runs away, abandoning the sheep and allowing them to be attacked and scattered. Yet... that is precisely how Peter behaved, like a mere hired hand. Nevertheless, Jesus restored Peter.

Peter boldly claimed that he would lay down his life for Jesus... but this time only the Great Shepherd would lay down his life, just as He said.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.¹⁸ No one takes it

“I am the good shepherd;
I know my sheep and my sheep know me—
just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—
and I lay down my life for the sheep.
I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.
I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice,
and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.
The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—
only to take it up again.
No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.
I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.
This command I received from my Father.”

John 10:14-18

Northshore
CHURCH

⁶ The New International Version. (2011). (Jn 10:11–13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”⁷

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, our Great Shepherd.

In other passages, Jesus talks about how the Good Shepherd goes to great lengths to go after lost sheep. He told a story about a Shepherd who had 100 sheep, but when one wandered off, he left the 99 to find the one.

What do you think?
If a man owns a hundred sheep,
and one of them wanders away,
will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills
and go to look for the one that wandered off?
And if he finds it, truly I tell you,
he is happier about that one sheep
than about the ninety-nine
that did not wander off.

Matthew 18:11-13

Northshore
CHURCH

This is a high standard for Peter... a high standard for any of us who work for the Lord.

As it turns out, I lost a few sheep this week. They’ve been wandering around the edge for a while now and I’ve made some effort to get them back in the midst of the flock. But this week they determined that this wasn’t the flock for them... and off they went. They wanted me to go chasing after them beyond what I felt was permissible for the good of the flock; they wanted things their way... rather than the way we really feel that the Lord is leading this congregation. So off they went.

I’m certain that I amuse the Lord. I scheduled this passage months ago, and, of course, just when I’m faced with these passages, in spite of my efforts, I lost some sheep this very week.

When I was ordained, the bit of ceremony went something like this:

- Preach the Word, and an official handed me my Bible.
- Be filled with the Spirit, and an official put a stole over my shoulders, and

⁷ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Jn 10:14–18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

- Be a shepherd of God's flock, and an official handed me a shepherd's staff.

I take this work of shepherd seriously, as I'm convinced the Lord takes it seriously. And when sheep wander off... that feels like failure.

To the elders among you,
I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings
who also will share in the glory to be revealed:
Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care,
watching over them—not because you must,
but because you are willing, as God wants you to be;
not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;
not lording it over those entrusted to you,
but being examples to the flock.
And when the Chief Shepherd appears,
you will receive the crown of glory
that will never fade away.

1 Peter 1:1-4

Northshore
CHURCH

Here's the thing: Jesus uses failures all the time. Failures like me (and you), and failures like Peter. That is why it is important to pay careful attention to what Jesus said when He was restoring Peter that day. He said: Feed **my** lambs. Take care of **my** sheep. Feed **my** sheep. Jesus made it clear to Peter, and to us all, that the sheep are **His**... and whatever work we do (as vital as it is), ultimately the sheep are Jesus' sheep.

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."
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."
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."

John 21:15-17

Northshore
CHURCH

So while I will do all I can to care for and increase God's flock, and I will go after those who wander off... in the end they are (we are) Jesus' sheep. And, as it goes with my lost sheep this week, they'll find another shepherd (at least another under-shepherd); they haven't lost their faith in Jesus, they just lost confidence in this shepherd.

When Jesus calls us to His work (and He calls us **all** to His work)... He calls us to work **with** Him. *Old Peter* might have thought in terms of the spectacular and heroic things He would do for God... but *this Peter* knew that anything that would be accomplished for Jesus would be **with** Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit... working with Jesus in spite of faults and weakness.

Do you ever feel hopeless regarding your faith?

Do you doubt God's willingness to forgive you over and over again?

Do you wonder how, or if, God could ever use you?

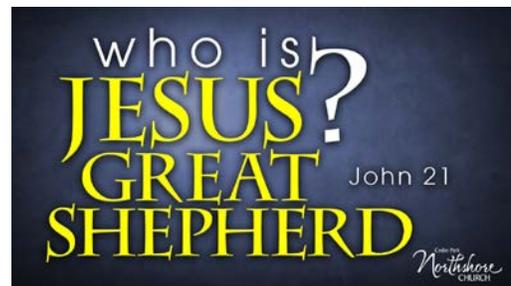
Peter might easily have felt that way. He had risen to a position of leadership among the Disciples. But when he felt the heat... Peter denied Jesus... three times.

So when Jesus engaged Peter in a conversation on the shore, Peter might have felt that he was already disqualified from further service for the Lord.

After all, as we would say, three strikes and you're out.

But Jesus reconnected with Peter and called him to genuine love and the continuation of His work through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It turns out that Peter did die for Jesus (Jesus told him so on the shore that day). Church history tells us that Peter and all of the other Disciples, except John, were martyred. But these were not those who scattered on that Thursday night, these were those filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, vessels of God's work in and through them.



What about us today? I think it is important to know that we are all called to be both **sheep** and **shepherds**.

As **sheep** today, we know that the Great Shepherd knows us, loves us, and has laid down His life for us. That when we believe, we find forgiveness of sin and power to live this life and live with Him for all eternity. We are His; we can be restored to Him. We simply must believe. Jesus is Our Great Shepherd.

As **shepherds** today, we are all called to work with Him. But not with our big words or heroic promises. In our strength we will fail. Rather, we are called to work **with** Him, serving His sheep, serving the world He loves.

Lynne has a song. It provides a great opportunity for us to take a few moments and soak this in... knowing that we are the sheep of Jesus, and

that He has work for us too, work to be accomplished not merely **for** Him but **with** Him.