

For Fallen Followers John 21:18-19

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Read John 21:15-19

B. Set the Scene

1. This comes immediately after what we looked at last week.
2. Following the resurrection, Peter grew impatient just sitting around & decided to go fishing. 6 of the disciples joined him.
 - a. But after a long night they'd caught nothing.
 - b. At dawn Jesus called to them from the shore & told them to cast their net once more. Immediately it was filled with big, fat fish.
 - c. As they came ashore, they found Him cooking breakfast.
3. After eating, Jesus took care of some important business.
4. Try to picture the scene.
 - a. They're sitting on a beach made of small pebbles.
 - 1) This is one of the sites we visit when we tour Israel.
 - 2) Called Tabgha, it's a shallow cove, with a shore covered with a wide, flat beach made of black pebbles & shells the size of your little fingernail.
 - b. There they are, sitting round a fire, content now that their stomachs are full of fish & bread.
 - c. As they sit there, staring at the fire, they take occasional glances at Jesus, Who's rising from the dead still blows their minds.
 - d. Suddenly Peter's memory is thrown back to a few weeks before when he was standing at a fire just like this.
 - 1) It was in the courtyard of the high priest & the trial of Jesus.
 - 2) When challenged as being one of Jesus' followers, Peter had *vehemently* denied it.
 - 3) 3 times, Peter had done *the one thing* a disciple would *never*, ever do – deny *being a disciple* of his rabbi!
 - e. Remember that at that time, being a disciple of a notable rabbi was THE supreme aspiration of almost every Jew.
 - 1) Boys dreamed of growing up to be, *not* a F22 fighter pilot, or Major League Pitcher; NFL quarterback, or Rock star. He dreamed of being a disciple.
 - 2) And like these *modern professions*, seeing that dream come to pass was something only a *tiny number* ever realized.
 - 3) Young men would **PLEAD** with a rabbi to take them as a disciple.
 - 4) The day he said, "Okay, you can follow me," was *the* greatest day in a disciple's life.
 - 5) One day, a little over 3 years before, as Peter was cleaning his nets after another long night of unproductive fishing, Jesus had said to him, "Follow Me."
 - 6) This was a dream come true, so Peter immediately dropped what he was doing and left all to embark on the life of being a disciple of a popular & powerful new rabbi named Jesus of Nazareth.
 - 7) But then, 3 years later, in the courtyard of the high priest, as Jesus was

- being railroaded by a shame trial, Peter had done the *unthinkable*.
- 8) Standing at a fire much like this one on the shore of Galilee, he'd *denied* his rabbi; *denied* being His disciple.
- f. It's difficult for us to relate to just how serious & unexpected Peter's failure was.
 - 1) This might help; It's the bottom of the 9th inning in Game 7 of the World Series.
 - 2) *You're* on the mound, ready to deliver THE last pitch of the game.
 - 3) Your team is up by 1 run, but the bases are loaded, there are 2 outs & the count is 3&2.
 - 4) As you look at the catcher flashing you signs, you wave each off, pause, look at the ball in your hand, hold it out level, drop it on the ground, walk off the field, & out of the stadium.
 - 5) That's **THE END** of your career as a major league pitcher.
 - 6) How many guys get to stand in that place, in that supreme moment in Major League Baseball? Only a select few.
 - 7) And you just threw it all away. The pressure got to you & you caved.
 - 8) What would make it even worse is to discover that IF YOU HAD thrown that last pitch, it would have been a strike; Game over, You win!
 - g. Now you have something of an idea of what a complete fool & failure Peter felt like.
 - h. As he sat on the shore that morning, he saw his denial against the reality of the resurrection.
 - i. His regret for not hanging in there & staying faithful was an oppressive weight that filled him with dread.
5. It's clear from the way John describes this whole scene that he intends us to see it *against* the backdrop of Peter's denial in the high priest's courtyard.
 - a. More than that, Jesus *set it up* that way.
 - b. In v. 9, we're told that when the disciples came ashore, they found a "fire of coals" burning.
 - 1) It wasn't just a generic, run of the mill campfire made of twigs & wood.
 - 2) John uses a very specific word – it was a *coal fire*.
 - 3) There's only 1 other time this word is used in the Bible, & I'll bet you can now guess where.
 - 4) John 18:18; it's the word used for the fire Peter stood at warming himself in that courtyard.
 - c. A coal fire smells much *different* than a wood fire.
 - 1) Wood fire is smoky, while burning coal has a distinctive scent.
 - 2) People learned a long time ago that our sense of smell is tied to 2 things; memory & emotion.
 - 3) This is why the perfume industry makes billions every year.
 - 4) Scientists have discovered that in the brain, smell is connected to those centers of the brain responsible for memory & emotion.
 - d. Jesus had some unfinished business to take care of with Peter, so He built a *special fire*, so as Peter sat there, he would see & smell, & be taken back in his memory to the point of his failure.

- e. Then as we read in vs. 15-17, just as Peter had denied Jesus 3 times, Jesus gives him the chance to affirm his devotion the *same number of times* – then renews His call on Peter’s life.
- 6. In a couple weeks, Jeff is going to go into a lot more depth on vs. 15-17.
- 7. This morning, I want to focus on vs. 18-19 . . .

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 18-19

18 Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” **19 This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”**

1. While Peter’s denial of Jesus a few weeks before might cause him to think his discipleship was now forfeit, Jesus tells Peter he *still* belongs to Him.
2. Before Jesus came along & invited the fisherman to be His disciple, Peter had lived a self-directed life, doing *what* he wanted, *how* he wanted, *when* he wanted.
3. But his relationship with Jesus changed all that.
 - a. The problem is, Peter didn’t quite get that yet.
 - b. Up till this moment, Peter wasn’t sure if he was still a disciple or not.
 - c. He figured more than likely, he wasn’t. He’d denied & renounced Jesus, so certainly Jesus would do the same with him.
 - d. Where had Peter been just a couple hours before this? Sitting in a boat on a lake in Galilee, fishing, instead of waiting patiently in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit.
 - e. Jesus tells him, “Pete, you can’t just do your own thing any more. You belong to Me. I call the shots now.”
4. Instead of a self-directed life, Peter would from now on live a Christ-centered life.
5. And that life would ultimately lead to his martyrdom.

6. Now, that might seem like a harsh thing for Jesus to say, almost like He’s punishing Peter for his past failures.
7. But it’s the *exact opposite*. Jesus is giving Peter the very thing he lacked and needed so desperately – hope!
8. You see, Peter didn’t want the promise of an *easy life* as he followed Christ, he didn’t need or look for guarantees of safety.
9. He just needed to know *he’d make it*, that no matter *what came* against him, he’d never deny the Lord again.
10. Jesus tells him, “Pete, the days will come when they will lay hold of you as they did Me. They’ll stretch out your hands on a cross as they did Mine. You *will die* a martyr’s death. But that death will not be your defeat; it will be your victory, for it’ll be your steadfast faith in Me that will bring you there!”
11. Peter’s confidence was *shattered* by his denial of Christ.
 - a. He doesn’t in any way *trust himself* to remain faithful now.

- b. He's convinced he's a failure.
 - c. At the Last Supper when Jesus foretold his denial, Peter had scoffed at the thought!
 - d. Courage was his strength. And because he found his strength *in himself* instead of dependence on God, it became the point of his failure.
12. Those who are disappointed with themselves only prove they were depending on themselves.
 13. Peter's problem was that his disappointment had robbed him of *all* hope.
 14. So Jesus says, "You're going to make it Pete. In fact, you'll die a martyr's death. When it gets *toughest*, you *won't* bail on Me."
 15. At the Last Supper, when Peter declared his unswerving loyalty, Jesus told him he'd *fall* before the dawn of the next day.
 16. Now, when Peter *doubts* his ability to be loyal, Jesus tells him he'll pass the ultimate test of it.
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17. There's one last detail Jesus needs to take care of with Peter to make sure he knows he's fully restored to his position as a disciple.
 18. So just as he'd *begun* his relationship with the Lord 3 years before with the invitation, "Follow Me," Jesus now makes it explicit & renews the call to discipleship with the same words.

III. CONCLUSION

A. For Fallen Followers

1. It's reported by some of the Early Church Fathers that years after this, when Peter showed up somewhere to preach, hecklers would often join the crowd & crow like roosters, mocking him for his denial of Jesus.
 2. Peter bore the stigma of his failure to the end of his days.
 - a. But only among those critics & skeptics who unlike Peter,
 - b. Have never known the goodness of God's forgiveness & the completeness of His restoration.
 3. When the hecklers crowed, Peter only grew more bold & confident because it reminded him of that fire on that beach one morning with Jesus.
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4. There are some here today who've walked Peter's path;
 - a. People who followed Jesus for a time, but denied Him & fell away.
 - b. When the pressure came, they bailed & walked away.
 5. Peter teaches us how God deals with failures.
 - a. He doesn't blow up & cut them loose.
 - b. He doesn't call them lousy, ungrateful losers & write them off.
 - c. As we saw in our study last Sunday, in v.5, He patiently goes to where they're goofing off, stands nearby & calls out, "Child, things aren't really working out as you planned, are they?"
 - d. Then He says, "Why don't you listen to Me & try it my way."
 - e. When we do, sure enough, it works; & our hearts are drawn *back* to Him.
 - f. Then He takes us right back to the very point of our failure, shows us where & how we got off track, & once more renews the invitation to follow Him, to be His very own.
 6. If that's you, take heart & hope in Peter's example.

7. If you know someone who isn't here today but who's walking Peter's path, you might consider giving them a copy of this CD.