**PRAY**

In the concluding verses of John’s gospel we read of the public reconciliation between Peter and Jesus

Remember the disciples have been fishing and are now eating breakfast with Jesus on the shore.

The text suggests that this was a very relaxed occasion, yet for Peter especially, there may have been the proverbial ‘elephant in the room’, in terms of him denying Jesus three times during His trial before the chief priest.

Despite the familiarity of the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, Peter may have felt uneasy that he had yet to be confronted by Jesus about the incident. They have certainly met since the resurrection – **Luke 24:34** & **1 Corinthians 15:5** make that clear.

Scripture is quiet about the subjects discussed at that meeting, but this matter is clearly something that Jesus sees important to resolve, as does John to record. It was important for Jesus to restore Peter in the presence of the other disciples.

There are similarities between the denial account of John 18 and this restoration three chapters later.

The denial involved three, simple yet ever more probing questions around a fire of judgement.

The restoration also included three, simple yet probing questions around a fire, that in this case, could be said to be refining Peter.

John tells us in **v15** that they had finished eating, when Jesus spoke directly to Peter, saying ‘**Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?**’

Note that Jesus uses the name Simon, not Peter, which means ‘rock’ – Jesus introduces the conversation with a reminder that he had not stood as a rock in faithfulness to Jesus.

Jesus starts to ask questions of Simon Peter – that are relevant to every one of us today, whether or not you profess a faith in Jesus or not, because they are a measure of how you value your relationship with God.

First Jesus asks, **do you love Me more than these**.

Jesus asks Peter to compare his love for Jesus with his love for the other disciples. **Matthew 26:33** records that Peter claimed to love Jesus more than the other disciples did – and now Jesus is wanting to know if that is still the case.

Jesus asks us the same question – **do you love Me more than these?** Jesus is constantly, through the Holy Spirit, asking us if He is at the centre – if God is the priority in our lives.

To not have God at the centre, at all times and in all circumstances, is sin.

Sin is the reason that Jesus came into this world – and it cost Him His life by dying on the cross.

None of us are perfect as Jesus was and God knows that, but He has given us that simple formula for restoring that intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father – and that is to follow Jesus, closely.

Peter replies, **yes Lord, You know that I love You**.

Peter’s response is saying ‘…that his heart is open to Jesus and that Jesus therefore knows that he loves Him with the best love of which he, a sinful human being, is capable.’ (Boice)

Despite Peter’s response, Jesus twice more asks Peter if he loves Him.

When Peter replies in the affirmative, Jesus first replies **feed My lambs**, then **tend my sheep**.

Both of Jesus’ replies were instructions how Peter should act towards God’s people - the idea was that Peter could demonstrate his claimed love for Jesus by feeding Jesus’ **lambs** and by tending Jesus’ **sheep**.

That doesn’t stop with Peter, that command remain for us. Note that they were not Peter’s sheep, they were Jesus’ sheep.

Both feeding and tending have practical and spiritual elements.

Feeding can mean physically supplying food, but also it can mean bringing people to a place where they hear the Word of God.

Tending as used here means to ‘be a shepherd’. The implication is that offering the bread is not sufficient – we are all required to take care that the sheep, to ensure ‘they are properly collected, attended, governed and guided’.

That clearly extends beyond Peter and those disciples who had just had breakfast with Jesus – the command is to every single one of their ‘successors in the Christian ministry’. (Clarke)

By instructing Peter to **feed my sheep** in **v17**, Jesus completes the restoration of Peter.

He restored Peter in the presence of the other disciples by making him see his failure, then by challenging Peter to focus (and remain focussed) on the work ahead.

‘Jesus asks each one of us, not for obedience primarily, not for repentance, not for vows, not for conduct, but for a heart; and that being given, all the rest will follow.’ (Maclaren)

In **v18-19** Jesus shares what He knows with Peter about his future. He starts by saying **very truly I tell you.** Other translations have **most assuredly**, but they both mean the same – Peter is about to be told something that he needs to remember.

Jesus reminds Peter of his past – when he had less responsibility and could do as he pleased.

But in contrast, Peter is told that when he gets older, **you will stretch out your hands**… to **lead you where you do not want to go**.

Jesus was speaking about the death that awaited Peter – having stretched out hands as he is crucified on a cross. But Jesus assures Peter that in his **death he would glorify God**.

Knowing the future might enable us to change it to our benefit – by altering what we do, or don’t do.

Knowing the date or the manner of your own death possibly years before it happens may possibly be a debilitating piece of knowledge. Some things God keeps from us for our own good.

God wants us to have faith that He is constantly guiding and protecting us.

In Peter’s case, having the future revealed to him may have been a relief and given him the strength to persevere for God.

In the weeks before Jesus crucifixion, Peter denied Jesus three times to save himself from the risk of also going to the cross.

Now, Jesus assures Peter that he would one day face the cross again and on that occasion he would accept it – seeing it as an honour to die faithful to his Messiah and Lord.

It is claimed, ‘…about thirty-four years after this, Peter was crucified; and that he deemed it so glorious a thing to die for Christ that he begged to be crucified with his head downwards, not considering himself worthy to die in the same posture in which his Lord did.’ (Clarke)

There is a promise here that the believer in Jesus can glorify God in death.

For someone who has the knowledge of God and the assurance that their Heavenly Father is waiting for them – calling them home – is a great witness to the world. It is in those moments that we can truly say as Paul did **“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” 1 Corinthians 15:55.**

Jesus’ last recorded words to Peter were **follow Me**.

**Matthew 4:18-19** records that years before Jesus had called Peter in a similar way. Now Peter was once again challenged to **follow** his Messiah, Teacher and Lord.

We too are instructed to follow, though it is sad that many do not even start. It is eternally sad that some who do initially follow do not continue to do so and that is actually what Jesus said when he said follow me.

In the original Greek, that command is a present imperative, which literally means ‘keep on following me.’

In **v20-23** there is an exchange of conversation between Peter and Jesus over the future of John.

Jesus didn’t reveal John’s future – His response is to throw the question back that it is for the Lord to decide what happens to us as individuals.

There is an important principle here.

Peter’s first response to the personal challenge from Jesus was to deflect it by wondering what Jesus wanted to do regarding someone else.

Peter no doubt represents most all of us. We find it easy to deflect any personal challenge from Jesus by wondering and even worrying about what other disciples are doing or what Jesus may require from them.

We each have our own unique gifts and God has given us each a unique ministry. As one commentator put it, ‘Paul might be the pioneer of Christ, Peter might be the shepherd of Christ, but John was the witness of Christ.’ (Barclay)

In that case, Paul, Peter and John each had unique roles to further the kingdom, which could not have been done by anyone else. The same is true today for every one of us who professes a faith in God. We have become His servants and should be about His business.

Spurgeon made a comment about the sentiment of this verse: ‘I have come to the conclusion that, instead of trying to set all my Master’s servants right at once, my first and most important work is to follow my Lord; and I think, my brother, that it will be wise for you to come to the same conclusion.’ (Spurgeon)

The conclusion to the Gospel of John is one of those great verses that confirm we don’t know everything, but we know sufficient and in some cases the Lord has been graceful to allow us an insight into His great work.

John explains that he is the unnamed disciple referred to in several previous places, so his testimony can be accepted as he was an eye-witness to everything that he has recorded.

But he also acknowledges the truth that it would be impossible for him or anyone else to write the entirety of the truth, the life and the teachings of Jesus.

It may be an annoyance to some, but to believers we should take it as a comfort that there is so much more to Jesus than we can ever imagine or know in this earthly life.

It is true that Jesus’ work continues today – through the Holy Spirit and those like us, who have put their faith for salvation in Jesus of Nazareth.

Peter was restored by His Saviour on that occasion by the Sea of Galilee, but it wasn’t to sit back and do nothing – it was an instruction to do God’s work and that has not changed over the centuries.

Having Jesus as your Saviour brings a responsibility to do God’s work – as a matter of praise, worship and gratitude.

If you don’t have faith, speak - to repent and ask Jesus into your life – to be restored.

If you have faith but don’t know what God wants for and from your life – pray, study, enquire.

Jesus is waiting to call you to follow Him.

**PRAYER / OFFER**

**READINGS**

**JOHN 21:15-25**

**15When 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.” 16Again 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.”**

**17The 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. 18Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”**

**19Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” 20Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) 21When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”**

**22Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” 23Because of this, the rumour spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”**

**24This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. 25Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.**