

120. God's will and restoration

April 29, 2018

J. Stuart Holden, a 19th century British preacher tells of an old Scottish mansion close to where he had his little summer home in Highland of Scotland. The walls of one room were filled with sketches made by distinguished artists. The practice began after a pitcher of soda water was accidentally spilled on a freshly decorated wall and left an ugly stain. At the time, a noted artist, Lord Landseer, was a guest in the house. One day when the family went out to the field, he stayed behind. With a few masterful strokes of a piece of charcoal, that ugly spot became the outline of a beautiful waterfall, bordered by trees and wildlife. He turned that disfigured wall into one of his most successful depictions of Highland life. A master's touch!

By God's sovereign grace, He can bring good out of our failures, and even out of our sins. But before the restoration, there must a sincere repentance from the sinner, willingness to follow the Lord's will. Only then, God's restoration starts.

A. WITHOUT GOD'S WILL

John 21:1-3 After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.

Allow me to give you the setting about what we are going to learn this morning. After His resurrection, Jesus showed Himself to Mary Magdalene at the grave site, then to His disciples a couple more times in the room where they were hiding. Then the Lord told them to go to Galilee which was located about 70 miles north of Jerusalem.

Matthew 28:10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go [and] tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

What Jesus gave them was a clear assignment: "Go to Galilee and wait for Me." As usual, God didn't tell them how long they had to wait. Don't you just hate waiting? We love when our prayers come back with "Yes" from God; though it is disappointing, but we can deal with His "No"; but "Wait" is something we don't like to hear.

In v3, we see an article 'the' before the word 'boat' in English. In Greek, it is 'ha', a particular boat in Galilee. How often do you allow someone to get into your car and drive off to do his own errand? You don't, especially when you use that car for your living. That's what we call "grand theft auto." The same goes here. Peter and his buddies just didn't walk into someone else's boat and went fishing. They got into Peter's boat. In other words, they went back to their old job.

For the first time in three years they had to think about their immediate need for food and how to make a living. Before the Lord Jesus took care of them. Peter and other disciples decided on their own that the Lord was not going to provide for them anymore, thus they ignored what they were told to do – "wait for Him." It means that they started their post-Jesus'-resurrection-life on their own without prayer, without seeking the will of God. What was the result of their own effort without God? They worked all night without a single fish. This was not a good thing for any fisherman.

Making a living is not wrong as a fisherman unless that is not what God called Peter to do. According to Matthew 4, the Lord Jesus called His disciples to be fishers of men.

If I may, I will show a progression of a person with self-reliance:
Self-Reliance > Disobedience > Failure > Loss of intimate fellowship with God
That is bad and ugly.

B. WITH GOD'S WILL

John 21:4-6 But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

When you have a bad fishing day, the last thing you want to hear is, "How is the fishing coming along? Did you catch anything?" To make the matter worse, this guy on the shore was calling the grown men as boys.

Now Jesus was telling them to move the net to the other side of the boat. Was that really going to matter? It sounded a little illogical. But the technique wasn't important. What was important was Who told them to do what. So they followed the instruction of this annoying Guy and cast the net on the right side of the boat. Wouldn't you know, they found a boat load of fish – Yes, a pun intended – all waiting for them to be caught.

Folks, this is what the whole Christian life really boils down to. Our walk with Christ has constant choices – without God's will which comes from without faith in Him or with God's will which only comes from faith in Him. When we are self-reliant or without God's will or without faith in Him, we become disobedient to His commands that are in our Bible. We become prayerless and Bibleless. Yes, I made up that word.

Before we can find restoration from God, before we can find forgiveness of Him, and we have to admit our failure – without any excuses or without blaming others. Just honest confession as we take responsibility for our own actions. That is where healing and restoration start. Failure often can be the doorway to real success.

C. THE INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SAVIOR

John 21:7-14 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. 9 Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught." 11 Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"—knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. 14 This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

Don't you just love Peter? You have to love this guy. Though he often did stick his foot in his mouth, he loved Jesus without a doubt. Because of that, he just jumped into the cold morning water to get to Jesus. If I know anything about Jesus, He must have had a smile on his lips because it was so Peter, a big burly guy splashing water and swimming toward the Lord as fast as his arms and legs could move.

Get this, folks, a breakfast with Jesus on the shore! I don't think that anyone can top it. Breakfast menu? Fish and chips. The disciple became obedient to the Lord, became successful in fishing and now they were having an intimate fellowship with Him.

Please notice how Jesus told them to bring the fish they just caught. God can do everything and anything without our help, but He chooses to include us by using us and working through us. This is an excellent example of the combination of Divine will and human effort.

This time I'd like to show you a progression of a person with complete dependence on God:

Complete dependence on God > Obedience > Success in God > Intimate fellowship with God

Now that is perfect and beautiful, don't you think?

D. PETER'S PUBLIC RESTORATION

John 21:15-17 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, 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, "Feed My sheep."

Since Peter had denied the Lord publicly, it was important that there be a public restoration for him. Because Peter had denied the Lord three times, Jesus asked him three personal questions and followed with three commissions to restore him to his ministry.

The key issue is Peter's love for the Lord Jesus and it should be a key issue to all of us as well. In v15, when Jesus asked Peter, "*do you love Me more than these?*" This question by Jesus brings out the heart and motive of Peter to himself. Jesus didn't want him to go from one moment of impulse to next as he used to do. He wanted him to be steady in his love and commitment to Jesus. The base of his love had to be clearly known to Peter himself. Peter should not have any competing love with his love for Jesus in his heart. That is what Jesus was asking him about.

The same goes for all of us. We say that Jesus is on His throne in our hearts, but we often try to push Him out of the throne so that we can sit on it. We often do the things that please ourselves more than pleasing our Lord. That kind of competition with the Lord must go.

When Jesus asked Peter if Peter loved Him. The Lord used the Greek word "agape" which means "unconditional love." In response, Peter carefully chose other Greek word "phileo" which means "brotherly love" instead of "agape", because he could

no longer boast about his devoted love for Jesus as he did before. His three denials of Jesus were still fresh in the minds of his fellow disciples and most importantly to himself and the Lord. It is always a wise thing not to boast of your love for God, rather boast of His love for you.

Don't tell me how much you love Him; how much you have done and sacrificed for Him; how wonderful of a servant you are. But tell me how much He has done and sacrificed for you; how much He loves you; all that He has worked out in your life.

How can we tell if a person loves the Lord?

- A person who loves the Lord will long for personal communion with God. – *Psalm 42:1*
- A person who loves the Lord will love the things He loves and hate the things He hates. – *Romans 12:9*
- A person who loves the Lord will long for the return of Jesus. – *Revelation 22:20*
- A person who loves the Lord will keep His commandments. – *John 14:15*

And Jesus is still asking that question to all of us, "Do you love Me?" I wonder what our true answer would be.

I ask you guys to underline Jesus' three commissions to Peter. They contain fine distinctions:

- 1) **Feed My lambs.** – v15
- 2) **Tend My sheep.** – v16
- 3) **Feed My sheep.** – v17

The first and third imply a shepherd only taking the sheep to pasture where they are fed; but the second implies the total guardianship a shepherd exercises. This three-fold commission does not give Peter the sole responsibility for the oversight of the entire Christ's followers as the Catholic theology insists. This challenge to Peter demanded a total renewal of his loyalty and reaffirmed his responsibilities.

Both the lambs and the more mature sheep need feeding and leading, and that is the task of the spiritual shepherd. It is an awesome responsibility to be a shepherd of God's flock. There are enemies that want to destroy the flock, and the shepherd must be alert and courageous, because, by nature, sheep are ignorant and defenseless, and they need the protection and guidance of the shepherd.

Another thing to notice is the possession of this flock. The lambs and sheep belong to Jesus, not undershepherds, like Peter or any of the pastors. Boy, do we forget that. It is very easy to get into a competition of "Who-has-more-people-in-his-church". The only things pastors get out of that is either empty pride or depression.

E. FOLLOW ME

John 21:18-19 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."

To Peter, this is such a sweet affirmation of his love for Jesus. He previously declared that he would die for Him, but only to bail out by denying Jesus three times. Now Jesus was telling him that he would follow through. To Peter, it was an honor to die for Jesus.

You may ask me how I know that Jesus was talking about Peter's death. V19 answers that. In the third volume of Eusebius' "Ecclesiastical History", the first-century historian noted that Peter was martyred around A.D. 64. First, he saw his wife crucified before his very eyes. He shouted to her, "Remember the Lord," while she was on her cross. Then, with a willing heart, he submitted himself to the cross. But feeling unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord, he asked that he be crucified upside down instead. Peter followed the Lord all the way without any hesitation. A master's touch!

Are we willing to follow our Lord Jesus even to our death? It is very important to think about it carefully. Don't be so quick to say, "Yes," because willingness to die for our Lord Jesus only comes after willingness to live for Him daily now.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) God's plan for you only fits you, not someone else, nor does other's fit you.

2) We can succeed only as we permit the Lord to transform us.

Do you need to be restored because you've fallen away from the Lord? If so, now is the time for you to come back to the Lord. Don't listen to what satan says. He is lying. Jesus loves you very much, so come back to Him. He will restore you today.