

74. Restoration and commitment

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As many of you already know I used to be a lay pastor of a prison ministry for a long time prior to becoming the pastor of this church. Pastor Al also used to go out to the State Prison to teach the inmates where I ministered regularly and had several worship concerts with his worship team for them. Yes, you can say that we've been in and out of prison together.

I've learned a lot about the prison culture, their mentality, and the typical process that brought them to be criminals so that I could almost write a book about them. Another thing I've learned was that on average over 85% of the released inmates come back to do more time in prison for various not-so-good reasons.

However, when the born-again Christian inmates who were deeply committed to the Lord were released, they plugged themselves into local Bible-teaching churches, kept themselves accountable with other faithful Christians, they never, ever returned to prison. Though they struggle like the rest of us, they live victorious Christian living because of the Lord Jesus in them.

It means that two things worked together for them – their commitment to the Lord Jesus and His restoration for them.

This morning we are about to say farewell to our dearly loved Book, the Gospel according to John, after 74 studies since August 19, 2010. I am not leaving, but John is. I'm like the poor, you always have me with you. As the last study of this Book, we are going to learn a special lesson from the Lord Jesus about restoration and commitment.

A. 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."

Peter and the Lord Jesus had already met privately and no doubt taken care of Peter's sins.

Luke 24:33-34 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

But since Peter had denied the Lord publicly, it was important that there be a public restoration for him.

I strongly believe that sin should be dealt with only to the extent that it is known. Private sins should be confessed in private, public sins in public. However, some of pastors' and priests' sins must be dealt with publicly because they stand before the public instead of sweeping under the rug like some do.

Since 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?" what did our Lord mean by it? Was He asking, "Do you love Me more than all these disciples?" since Peter proclaimed that his love for Jesus was more devoted than the others and he was willing to die for Him; or was He asking, "Do you love Me more than your fishing business?" since Peter didn't wait for the Lord and went back to his old occupation – fishing?

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 for 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.

I asked you to underline all the word "love" mentioned in these verses. Many of you have heard three different Greek definitions of love. But actually there are four:

- 1) **Agape:** It means 'unconditional love' in modern day Greek. Agapao means "I love you unconditionally." In Ancient Greek, it often refers to a general affection or deeper sense of "true love" rather than the physical attraction suggested by "eros".
- 2) **Phileo:** It means affectionate brotherly virtuous love in modern Greek. It includes loyalty to friends, family, and community, and requires virtue, equality and familiarity.
- 3) **Storge:** It means "affection" in ancient and modern Greek. It is natural affection, like that felt by parents for their children. Rarely used in ancient works, and then almost exclusively as relationships within the family.
- 4) **Eros:** It means passionate physical love, with sensual desire and longing. This word was never mentioned in the entire Bible. It is the Hollywood idea of love. It often can be interchanged with 'lust'. However, if eros is limited within the limit of marriage, it is good and permitted by the Lord.

When Jesus asked Peter if Peter loved Him, the Lord used the word "agape". In response, Peter carefully chose the word "phileo" 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. Instead, 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 As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God.

A person who loves the Lord will love the things He loves and hate the things He hates.

Romans 12:9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

A person who loves the Lord will long for the return of Jesus.

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

A person who loves the Lord will keep His commandments.

John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

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

I also 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 only taking the sheep to pasture where they are fed; the second implies the total guardianship a shepherd exercises. This threefold commission does not give Peter the sole responsibility for the oversight of Christ's followers. 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.

Please note the possession of this flock. The lambs and sheep belong to Jesus, not undershepherds, like Peter or any of 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.

So, many of you are thinking, "OK, I get it. This study is for you, preacher. I don't have to listen to this." Not so fast, homies. This is for all of us, not just pastors.

Listen, the first characteristic of a committed Christian should be his or her love for Jesus. That is the reason Jesus asked Peter whether he truly loved the Lord or not. The love for our God is the greatest, the highest, the pinnacle of all motives, not legalism, not "have to".

When a Christian truly loves Jesus, service to Him comes naturally. He or she wants to do something good for his or her Lord. If husband or wife love their spouse deeply, it is a natural thing for them to do something good for their spouse.

You may say, "I love Jesus," but if you are not serving the Lord and His bride, the church, you have to ask yourself if you truly are loving Him. If you've been coming up with all the excuses why you cannot serve the Lord and serve in the church, it is time to examine your heart seriously for Him.

B. 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."

Jesus' comments went from how-to-live-for-God to how-to-die-for-God in a few seconds. I can imagine that if the Lord came and announced to us, "Now that you've committed your life to Me, you're going to die by being crucified," many of us would be wrecks and have heart attacks and die before we ever get to the cross. We'd be looking around every corner for the guy with wood or never step into Ace Hardware or Loew's lumber yard.

But to Peter, this is such a sweet affirmation for his love for Jesus. Remember he previously declared that he would die for Him, then he bailed 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. 61. 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.

Are we willing to follow our Lord Jesus even to our death? It is very important to think about. Don't be so quick to say, "Yes," unless your life can back it up by serving Him now.

C. WHAT IS THAT TO YOU?

John 21:20-25 Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" 21 Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." 23 Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" 24 This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. 25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

Let's face it, folks. We know what Peter was doing here. He was comparing his future with John's future. That is how the fashion world makes a living. But in the spiritual world, it can be extremely hazardous for spiritual health.

We need to mind our own spiritual business. What other Christians were commanded to do by the Lord does not require any self-appointed intermediate supervisor. They don't report to you or me. I am responsible for what I am told to do by the Lord and I report to Him and the same goes for you individually. There always are spiritual busy bodies who make other people's spiritual business as theirs. Here is the command from the Lord to you if you are a spiritual busy body, *"What is that to you? You follow Me."*

To be distracted by ourselves, our circumstances, or by other Christians, is to disobey the Lord and possibly get detoured out of the will of God. Keep your eyes of faith on Him and on Him alone.

This does not mean that we ignore others, because we do have the responsibility of caring for one another. Rather, it means that we must not permit our curiosity about others to distract us from following the Lord. God has His plan for us; He also has plans for our Christian friends and associates. How He works in their lives is His business. Our business is to follow Him as He leads us.

Later by the power of the Holy Spirit, this lagged band of Galilee fishermen turned the world right side up.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Everything we do should be motivated by our love for Jesus, not by obligation, nor impulse.**
- 2) God's plan for you only fits you, not someone else, nor does other's fit you.**
- 3) 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 and come back to Him. He will restore you today.