

A Miracle of Grace – Getting to Know God_29

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“In Serving the Lord”

John 20:30-31 – “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (ESV)

In chapter one of this gospel, John summarizes for us the **preincarnate activity** of the Lord. Then here in this 21st chapter John emphasizes the **post-resurrection ministry** of the Lord as He directs those who believe in Him for their spiritual growth and service in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, had been smitten and the sheep were scattered. But now the Lord had risen from the dead and the disciples were back home in Galilee where everyone knew them, just hanging out together. But what did their future hold, what were they going to do?

The Word of God provides boundaries and guidelines for His people, so when we live within the boundaries set by God’s Word, His blessing flows to us and His Word makes us productive for His kingdom. However, when we try to live without the guidance and restrictions of God’s Word, we cast off restraint and simply do what the natural mind conceives.

Prov. 29:18 – “When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is joyful.” (NLT)

It’s living by God’s Law-word that provides the blessing and our resultant joy. And we see that very clearly in this chapter of John’s gospel.

I. The Disciples Laboring Without the Blessing = Defeat

John 21:1-3 – “Later, Jesus appeared again to the disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. This is how it happened. Several of the disciples were there—Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples. Simon Peter said, “I’m going fishing.” “We’ll come, too,” they all said. So they went out in the boat, but they caught nothing all night.” (NLT)

The names of Simon Peter and Thomas are listed first and second by John and I believe for a very obvious reason. It is really important for us to realize that the body of Christ is contains doubters, deniers, and a wide variety of just plain sinners who are being saved.

Christ’s body is made up of individuals who have struggled in the process of coming into a solid faith in Christ. Not super saints, but just ordinary people with faults and failings.

In the beginning, Peter had left all to follow Jesus; but now, even after the amazing resurrection of Jesus, Peter was still without a clear sense of mission and didn’t know what to do.

Jesus had promised to make them fishers of men, but so far they couldn’t get a handle on that challenge. So, Peter turned back to his old life of fishing the Sea of Galilee.

I think it’s more than coincidence that Jesus stayed away, just long enough for the disciples to start doing their own thing. Jesus allowed them to return to their old way of living, in order to experience life without God’s blessing and success.

Do you see how much God loves us – He loves us enough to let us fail. When we're not fulfilling God's divine purpose for our lives, we can become bored, discouraged, dissatisfied with our jobs, and can even end up failing at all we attempt to do.

And the Lord let's this happen, so we will quit trusting in ourselves and instead, step boldly into His will. Peter was a leader, but without the Lord's direction, he led the other disciples in the wrong direction. Thankfully, the Lord was watching and was on top of the whole thing.

Paul writes about a similar experience he had as the Lord worked in his life to teach him the lesson of ceasing to trust in his own wisdom and abilities.

2 Cor. 1:8-9 – “We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.” (NLT)

Jesus previously told the disciples, “Without Me you can do nothing.” That is a Truth we all must learn at some time in our growth as believers, and the sooner the better. Too many of us as Christians enter into activities that merely waste time, money, and energy accomplishing nothing for the kingdom of God.

It's better to wait on the Lord to receive His directions; and once we receive His instructions, His blessing will rest on our obedience. That's so much better than busily running around, without accomplishing God's will.

II. The Disciples Labor in Obeying the Lord's Word = God's Blessing

John 21:4-17 – “At dawn Jesus was standing on the beach, but the disciples couldn't see who he was. He called out, ‘Fellows, have you caught any fish?’ ‘No,’ they replied. Then he said, ‘Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you'll get some!’ So they did, and they couldn't haul in the net because there were so many fish in it. Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It's the Lord!’ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work), jumped into the water, and headed to shore. The others stayed with the boat and pulled the loaded net to the shore, for they were only about a hundred yards from shore. When they got there, they found breakfast waiting for them—fish cooking over a charcoal fire, and some bread. ‘Bring some of the fish you've just caught,’ Jesus said. So Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore. There were 153 large fish, and yet the net hadn't torn. ‘Now come and have some breakfast!’ Jesus said. None of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord. Then Jesus served them the bread and the fish. This was the third time Jesus had appeared to his disciples since he had been raised from the dead. **After breakfast** Jesus asked Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ Peter replied, ‘you know I love you.’ ‘Then feed my lambs,’ Jesus told him. Jesus repeated the question: ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ Peter said, ‘you know I love you.’ ‘Then take care of my sheep,’ Jesus said. A third time he asked him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, ‘Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Then feed my sheep.’” (NLT)

All eleven disciples were instructed by the angel to go to Galilee and there they would see the Lord. But apparently, either the seven disciples who went fishing with Peter were waiting for the others to arrive or simply, the others just didn't like to fish. Whatever the reason, some of the disciples missed this encounter with the Lord.

We can be doing the very thing we think is best, but all the while, it fails to be what the Lord intends for us. Peter and the other disciples made a decision based on human reason – it was the reasonable thing to do, but here’s the point, it wasn’t based on the Word of the Lord.

When Jesus called them to follow Him, it was to make them fishers of men. So, when we aren’t led by God’s Word, we settle for doing the reasonable thing, which doesn’t necessarily have God’s blessing.

But here’s the good news, God loves us enough to call to us and encourage us to evaluate our activity and the productivity of our efforts. “Have you caught any fish?”

It’s the same technique God used in calling to Adam in the garden. “Adam, where are you?” God knew where Adam was hiding, but He wanted Adam to acknowledge his sinful condition.

Rev. 3:17 – “You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” (NLT)

Once he knew that it was the Lord on the shore, Peter jumped out of the boat and headed for shore. Now, not everyone is as impetuous as Peter, but I’ve come to realize that God uses a Peter, along with all of the rest of us, to accomplish His glorious will.

So, it’s not appropriate for us to prejudge other people who act a little fanatical and they seem a little strange in their aggressive approach to pursuing the Lord and His will for their lives. God has ways of reigning in the Peter’s in His Church.

Bottom line is – “Without the blessing of the Lord, you and I can do nothing that has any eternal significance.” Without God’s direction they labored all night without success, but with God’s direction, with His living Word burning in our hearts, just a few minutes of obedience produces a fabulous return.

This miracle in [chapter 21](#) stands alone because it is the only recorded miracle wrought by Christ after His resurrection. It is performed in Galilee where His first miracle (turning water into wine) was also wrought. At the first miracle they failed in the provision of wine and at this last miracle they failed in the provision of fish.

Oh, how we need the supernatural blessing of God’s provision in our lives. And that provision comes as we obey His commands: “Fill the waterpots” and “Cast the net.”

Once the fish were gathered, the Lord invited them to “come and dine” with Him. The fact that the Lord had already prepared fish and bread for them says that the Lord desires our intimate fellowship.

Rev. 3:20 – “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.” (NLT)

Now, because Peter had publicly denied the Lord three times, Jesus gave him an opportunity to restore his heart and mind by making a public confession of his love and commitment.

Interestingly, it was **after** breakfast that Jesus dealt with Peter’s sins. The Lord doesn’t exclude us from fellowship with Him because we have things to deal with. He loves us and He’s the only one who can make us whole again.

The issue in question was Peter's level of love for the Lord. If a person really loves the Lord, how committed and devoted should he be? Previously, Peter had boasted of a greater love for the Lord by stating his willingness to suffer prison and even die with the Lord.

So, the Lord asked Peter if he still loved Him more than "these". Peter's response was a humble acknowledgement of love for the Lord, rather than a boast of love.

Once Jesus got that affirmation of love from Peter, He commissioned Peter to spend the rest of his life shepherding or feeding and taking care of the Lord's sheep; which is the extended aspect of being a fisher of men.

Once people have placed their faith in Jesus as their Savior, they need to be cared for and taught the Word of God. And the only acceptable motivation for caring for God's flock is love for the Lord and love for His sheep.

III. A Renewed Dedication = Following the Lord

John 21:18-25 – "I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go. Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, 'Follow me.' Peter turned around and saw behind them the disciple Jesus loved—the one who had leaned over to Jesus during supper and asked, 'Lord, who will betray you?' Peter asked Jesus, 'What about him, Lord?' Jesus replied, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me.' So the rumor spread among the community of believers that this disciple wouldn't die. But that isn't what Jesus said at all. He only said, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?' This disciple is the one who testifies to these events and has recorded them here. And we know that his account of these things is accurate. Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written." (NLT)

There is a vast difference between the initial step of placing your faith in Jesus as your Savior and the choice to follow Jesus as a disciple in order to learn of His character and nature and become conformed into His image.

When Peter sinned in denying the Lord, he didn't lose his salvation; but he did withdraw from his discipleship in following the Lord. So, for this reason, Jesus repeated his call to Peter, to "Follow Me!"

When you recall that Peter tried to keep Jesus from going to the cross, the command to "Follow Me" takes on a much greater depth.

To follow Christ does not mean a physical or wooden cross for everyone, but it does mean a death to self for everyone. Jesus prophesied that Peter would someday die on a cross, which helps us understand that the Lord knows the length and the extent of our service in this life.

Death to self is the call we all must embrace, if we're going to continue on as a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Matt. 16:21-26 – "From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised

from the dead. But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. ‘Heaven forbid, Lord,’ he said. ‘This will never happen to you!’ Jesus turned to Peter and said, ‘Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.’ Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?’” (NLT)

Having been freshly challenged by the Lord concerning the degree of his love for the Lord, Peter is grieved that the Lord asks him the third time if he really loves Him.

To deny self in order to be Christ’s disciple means that **first**, we must **renounce any sin**. That means we must specifically repent of the sins that so easily trip us up; then we must determine to live a holy life in agreement with God’s Word.

Second, we must renounce anything that’s outside of God’s will for our lives. The things that are not contrary to the Bible’s moral code, but yet they are outside of God’s will for your life.

As soon as Peter affirms his intent to follow the Lord, he makes the mistake that many of us make, we work to distract the attention away from ourselves by pointing to other people and wondering what God’s will is for their life.

Peter asked, “Lord, what about John?” If we’re evaluating every other person’s life, as to whether or not that person is fulfilling God’s will, we will fail to keep our eyes on Jesus and in that way we can potentially miss God’s will for our own life.

Heb. 12:1-2 – “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. **We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus**, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.” (NLT)

Once again, we see the Lord lovingly rebuking Peter for being concerned with things outside the realm of his responsibility. Peter was responsible to simply keep his eyes on Jesus and follow the Lord in the calling Jesus gave him.

John concludes this gospel with the reminder that Jesus said and did more than could possibly be written down; in fact, the world wouldn’t be able to contain all the books that could be written if we tried to proclaim the wonder and majesty of His glory.

I see the limitation of Scripture as God’s grace in not giving us too much to read and try to comprehend, but just enough to enable to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and that believing in Him we might have eternal life.