

First Baptist Church
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The Way of Jesus: John 21
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Hello church! I miss you!

For those of you who don't know me, I am Dan DeRushia, and I am the pastor of Worship and Music at First Baptist Church. Today I have the privilege of opening God's Word with all of you and diving into the final chapter of the Gospel of John. John chapter 21.

We have come to the end of a walk through the Gospel of John that has taken us eight months to complete. If I try, I can almost remember what life was like eight months ago. It seems like two lifetimes have passed! I know that when Pastor Jared, Pastor Scott, and I began discussing this chapter-by-chapter journey through the Gospel of John, we certainly never could have imagined how much could change in all of our lives over the course of eight months!

Now, before we bring this series to a close, it seems appropriate given all that is happening in our world and our homes, to reflect on a couple of things that I personally am particularly grateful for, and I think we can all be grateful for.

First, I am grateful that God is in control, and He knows the end from the beginning. Even though none of us would ever claim that we can know the future, many times I think we live as though we do. We so often live as though we have access to some sort of crystal ball when in reality, none of us even have access to certainty about what will happen tomorrow, let alone a week, a month, or six months from now.

Last fall, I sent those of you in our church database an email telling you all that we were blessed and excited to share that we would be adding two kids to our family through adoption, and that we were hoping that we would be able to have them home before Christmas.

Christmas came and went, and we did not receive the clearance to travel we were hoping for. Then, we spent the next three months sitting on pins and needles waiting for word that we could go to the Philippines to pick up our kids.

I remember a conversation I had with Erick and Charisse Schlueter on Wednesday, March 4, at our final night of the 30-Day Kindness Challenge marriage class that they participated in. Andrea and I were sharing with them the reality that we could find out any hour that we could go to the Philippines, and we might then leave the next day. Erick said, "You know, none of us know what next week holds, you guys are just more acutely aware of that right now." We went home that night, and the next morning we got the phone call that gave us permission to travel to the Philippines, and we were on a plane the following morning.

God knows the end from the beginning. God knew that we would be leaving on Friday, March 6, even when we were praying for the kids to be home by Christmas. He also knew that we would not be in the Philippines as long as we thought. Our trip was supposed to be 7 days long, and abruptly was shortened when it became apparent that we needed to expedite our departure to get home before COVID-19 started locking things down domestically and internationally. It was a whirlwind trip, but we made it home by God's provision and grace, before lockdowns began in the Philippines and in the U.S.

The point I am trying to make is that we felt very unsure of what the next hour would hold let alone the next day or week; and yet, moment by moment during our travel God kept reminding us in big ways and small ways that we were uncertain, but He was not. He was in control. **He is in control.**

My hope is that while tomorrow is uncertain to us, we can take peace in knowing that tomorrow is not uncertain to God. We have no idea what is going to happen with COVID-19, and that is hard. We hear stories that produce fear in us, and that is understandable. Perhaps we feel frustration or discouragement as we sit helplessly waiting for the people in charge to tell us it is safe to go back to work, or school or church. We feel this way because we are so used to feeling in control, and we have been very strongly reminded in the past six weeks of the reality of our lack of control. So, while we are being reminded of our lack of control, lets

seek the presence and comfort and peace of the One who is in control, and who does know all the answers we wish we had. I am grateful that God is in control, and He knows the end from the beginning.

I am also grateful for the power of story. God is writing a story in all of our lives. He uses our stories to impact other people, and to glorify Himself.

Four plus years ago I sang a song in church called “My Story” by Big Daddy Weave which has become sort of a theme song for Andrea and me. We had been invited to go visit the Children’s Shelter of Cebu with Dennis and Sharon Eicher and when Dennis heard me sing this song, he asked me to sing it for the people at CSC. We traveled to CSC in July of 2016 and I sang My Story several times while we were there. I sang it enough times that Paul Healy, the founder and retiring Field Director of CSC, began jokingly calling me Big Daddy Weave.

Following our trip to CSC, as God was working out His plan for the story He was writing in our family, whenever we heard the song My Story it reminded us that God is in control and He is the one writing our story. God used that song in a powerful way in our lives over the past several years to remind us that if we are following Him, our story is His story and He is in control.

I’m not going to sing the whole song because many of you have probably heard it, or you can look it up and hear Big Daddy Weave sing it later, but the first verse and chorus go like this:

If I told you my story
You would hear Hope that wouldn't let go
And if I told you my story
You would hear Love that never gave up
And if I told you my story
You would hear Life, but it wasn't mine

If I should speak then let it be
Of the grace that is greater than all my sin
Of when justice was served and where mercy wins

Of the kindness of Jesus that draws me in
Oh to tell you my story is to tell of Him

This is my story, this is my song, praising my savior all the day long.

Now, whenever I hear that song, God whispers to my heart, “I am writing this story. Use it to glorify me.” That can be the reality of all of our lives. We all have a story to share with the world for the purpose of glorifying God. My story has different chapters than yours, but if we will let Him, our different stories can have the same author.

I am so glad that God gave us stories. I can't think of a more powerful force in the world, than the power of stories of God's goodness, faithfulness, mercy, love, and provision. The stories of God bringing families together. The stories of love in action. God stories are always powerful. As we seek God in His word together this morning, I encourage you to think about your story in light of what we are reading. I encourage you to think of your story in light of what God may be doing. Let's be reminded that every life surrendered to God is a chapter in the great story that He is writing. I am grateful for the power of story and that God is the master Storyteller.

Now as we begin to take a closer look at the end of John's gospel, we come to the end of the story John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and we see one last interaction between Jesus and several of His disciples.

Please turn in your bibles to John chapter 21. Let's pray.

(Prayer)

Let's read all of John 21 together:

Jesus and the Miraculous Catch of Fish

21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.^[a] It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus^[b]),

Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.^[c] ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus Reinstates Peter

¹⁵ When 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.”

¹⁶ Again 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.”

¹⁷ The 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. ¹⁸ Very 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.” ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” ²⁰ Peter 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?”) ²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?” ²² Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” ²³ Because of this, the rumor 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?” ²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. ²⁵ Jesus 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.

John gets started in this closing chapter with another story about fishing. If you are like me, you read it and remember the other fishing stories in the gospels; the calling of other disciples right off of their fishing boats; the other miraculous catch of fish; the other times when Jesus used fish or fishing as a powerful teaching tool for His disciples.

Today, I am going to focus specifically on the interactions between Jesus and Peter in this story. Peter is on the boat along with John, James, Thomas and Nathanael and two others. They go out fishing and are skunked. Then, when they are on their way back to the shore, a person they don't recognize yet appears on the shoreline and shouts to them “Friends, haven't you any fish?” “Nope”, they reply. “Try the other side of the boat once” He says.

At this point, even though they are tired, there must have been a little bit of curiosity because they do what he says and as a result, they load their nets. John immediately recognizes the stranger as Jesus because of the miraculous catch. Peter on the other hand, is the first to act. He grabs his jacket and jumps in the water. He isn't wasting any time getting to Jesus. They are still 100 yards offshore, so he had a little ways to swim but he didn't care.

Peter arrives on shore to find Jesus by a fire cooking some fish for breakfast. As soon as the boat arrives, Jesus asks them to bring some fresh fish to add to the fire and Peter springs into action once again and climbs back onto the boat he had just dove off of and hauls the loaded net onto shore. Notice, Jesus said, bring some fish, not the whole net full. But, Peter is doing a little over achieving here.

When I see how Peter is interacting with Jesus during this first part of the story, it reminds me a lot of a child who knows they did something wrong, and is trying to do enough right things that the wrong thing they did gets overlooked.

Then we see Peter, the other disciples, and Jesus gather for breakfast around a fire. Only days before, Peter was gathered around another fire warming himself while Jesus was tried and sentenced to death. Do you recall what happened around that fire?

John 18:15-18, 25-27

Peter's First Denial

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, ¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

¹⁷ "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter. He replied, "I am not."

¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

Peter's Second and Third Denials

²⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?"

He denied it, saying, "I am not."

²⁶ One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

Very little time had passed between this denial of Jesus around a fire, and this breakfast with the resurrected Jesus around a different fire. It is no wonder that Peter is running around trying to overachieve to prove to Jesus that he is committed to Him. Only days before Peter explicitly denied Him three times. Jesus did not say anything to Peter about his denial, but the reality of that painful act must have been in the forefront of Peter's mind. So, when breakfast was finished and the disciples were sitting together around the fire, Jesus looks at Peter, and in front of those gathered asks: Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?

The last time that John records Jesus using this name to address Peter was when Jesus gave him the new name Peter in John 1:42. Every other time in John's gospel Peter is referred to as either Peter or Simon Peter, but here, Jesus returns to his given name, the name that came before Peter's original calling. In this question, Jesus is also pointing back to a moment during the last supper which is recorded in Matthew 26:31-35.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

³¹ Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

"I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'^[a]

³² But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

³³ Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."

³⁴ "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

³⁵ But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

Less than a week before this breakfast with Jesus, at another meal with the disciples, Peter boldly declared that even if all fall away, he never will. But when the rubber met the road, he did in fact fall away, just as Jesus predicted he would. So, now, around the fire, in front of those Peter claimed superiority to, Jesus asks him: "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

All of the weight of the previous week comes flooding back into Peter's mind and heart. Everything he has been so busy trying to distract from is suddenly laid out for all to see. He answers "Yes." Except, the yes that Peter gives is a "yes" to a slightly different question. You see, something that gets lost in translation here are the multiple words in the original Greek for the English word love.

Jesus asks Peter, do you love (agape) me? Agape is a pure, self-sacrificing, unconditional love. Peter responds in the only way he honestly can. He affirms his love for Jesus, but he does so using the word philia. Philia is the word which refers to the love between friends. It is a beautiful and powerful love, but it is less than agape.

Peter does love Jesus with a strong and powerful love, but he knows now beyond a doubt after the week he has just come out of that he cannot affirm his love as agape love, his denial of Jesus just days before, made that impossible. The beautiful thing here though is that even as Peter offers a lesser love back to Jesus, Jesus accepts that love from Peter and offers Him a calling in return. "Feed my lambs." Jesus does not withhold a calling from Peter because he is incapable of offering Jesus agape love.

I am so glad because if the only way to be called by God was to first be able to unconditionally and self-sacrificially love Him perfectly, none of us would ever be called. But that's not how this works. Jesus accepts from Peter the lesser love that he can offer and gives Peter a calling in return.

The story continues:

A second time, Jesus asks Peter: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" (Again using agape love.) A second time Peter affirms his love for Jesus as philia love. A second time, Jesus confirms Peter's calling to "take care of my sheep".

Finally, in what I believe is a perfect picture of God meeting us where we are, days after Peter denied Him three times, Jesus gives Peter a third opportunity to affirm his love. Three denials, three affirmations. Only this time, rather than asking Peter if he agape loves Him, a love that Jesus and Peter both know that Peter is not capable of right now, Jesus asks: “Simon son of John, do you philia love me?” Jesus meets Peter where he is. Following this third question, Peter is defeated and hurt. His denial is fresh, and so being asked for the third time if he loves Jesus is painful. Perhaps even more painful because Jesus changed His language to accept Peter’s lesser love.

Peter affirms that yes, he does in fact philia love Jesus, but this time, his words come with more of a bite from the sting of the interaction. In the midst of Peter’s pain however, the calling from Jesus remains the same: “Feed my sheep.” But this time, it doesn’t end there. Jesus goes on to reveal to Peter that his philia love for Jesus will in fact lead Peter to lay down his wants and his desires, and ultimately his very life. Jesus, meeting Peter in the reality of his lesser love, fully reconciles their relationship. Jesus takes the lesser offering that Peter brings, which is nonetheless the best Peter has to offer, and says, “I’ll take it, and this love you have for me will lead you to sacrifice, suffer and die for me. You will glorify me in your love for me because it is the best you have to bring. I accept this offering of love. Follow me!”

So, Peter and Jesus have come full circle. From Peter’s call out of a life of fishing for fish into a life of fishing for people, to Peter denying Jesus three times, to Peter affirming his love three times, and finally to Jesus reaffirming Peter’s call. “Follow me.” What a powerful picture of reconciliation done right. Jesus didn’t sweep the wrongdoing under the rug, rather He provided opportunity for meaningful restoration. Rather than expecting more from Peter than Peter was capable of giving, Jesus met Peter where He was, and said, “this is where you are, follow me from here and I will be glorified in you and through you!”

After this challenging interaction with Jesus, Peter understandably seems to be feeling a little bit under the microscope. So, he does what any of us may do when we feel like we have been on the hot seat for too long. He tries to divert the attention to someone else. And the nearest candidate is John who is walking close

to Peter and Jesus during this interaction. Jesus tells Peter that his love for Jesus will cost him his freedom and his life, and then says “Follow me.” To which Peter replies, “What about him? What about John?”

I love Jesus’ response to Peter. I imagine that Jesus calmly and peacefully replies, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” In other words, Jesus is saying if you truly want to follow me then keep your eyes on me, not on what is going on all around you. Keep your eyes locked on me.

I have been singing the song “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” a lot lately, to myself, my kids, and many of you as we have joined together online to worship. I love that song because it reminds me that as long as my eyes are fixed on Jesus, the world around me with all of its fears, frustrations, concerns, and comparisons, remains remarkably peripheral. However, whenever I take my gaze off of Jesus and focus on the surrounding challenges, I feel myself beginning to sink.

In this case, Jesus is reminding Peter and all of us that if we look at others or at circumstances and start comparing ourselves, our sacrifice, our calling, we are no longer capable of following Jesus. Only when we lock our sight on Him can we truly follow Him. The reason for this is that He doesn’t give us a complete road map. Like I mentioned at the beginning, many of us have realized over the past few weeks that life can very easily change dramatically from what we had planned in a very short period of time. Instead, He says “Follow me without worrying about what I am calling others to. If you do, I will bring you all together as one. I have plans for you, for all of you, but I may not reveal those plans more than one small step at a time. If you are busy looking at your friend’s steps, you may miss the next step I have for you to take. So, don’t worry about them. Watch me and follow me.”

This is not to say that following Jesus is a solo endeavor. Quite the opposite.

2 Corinthians 13:11 says,

“Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11 says,

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

Hebrews 13:11 says,

“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”

Jesus said in **John 13:34**,

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, you must love one another.”

All of these one anothers require another person. They cannot be done in isolation. Jesus is not saying just ignore those around you and focus solely on following Him. Rather, what He is saying is that following Him requires our full attention and commitment, and if we are distracted by comparison, we will miss the next thing He has for us. So, rather than comparing ourselves to those around us, we keep our focus on Jesus, and follow Him in love for those around us.

Earlier in this message I talked about being grateful that God gives power to our story. I believe that with all my heart. God is telling a story through all of us individually and collectively. He is actively calling us to share the story He is telling. This is a story of reconciliation, of healing, of miracles, of restoration. It is a story of Hope. It’s a story of love.

One of my favorite authors, Donald Miller, talks about the story of love this way:

“Love is not a game any of us can win, it’s just a story we can live and enjoy. It’s a noble ambition, then, to add a chapter to the story of love, and to make our chapter a good one.

We don’t think much about how our love stories will affect the world, but they do. Children learn what’s worth living for and what’s worth dying for by the stories they watch us live.”

That is what John was getting at throughout this whole gospel isn’t it? Jesus loves us enough to die for us. He restores us. He calls us. Our story is to follow Him. May

our children watch us live that story. May our children and the hurting, watching world see in our story the love, redemption, and ultimately, the glory of Jesus.

Let's pray.

We are going to end our time together this morning by singing the song "Power of the Cross" and then taking communion together. As Eve leads us, reflect on the reality that our story was marked by darkness, blindness, sin, shame, and bondage. But, because of Christ's sacrifice we are now free from all of that. We are children of God. That is our new story!

When this song is finished, we are going to partake in communion together. All you will need to join in taking communion is enough bread or crackers for everyone who is going to participate, and something to drink – juice or water. If you don't already have that you can get it now.

As a reminder, at First Baptist we practice an open communion which means that anyone who has placed their faith in Jesus is invited to participate.

Power of the Cross by Shelly E. Johnson

Once in darkness now in light

Once blind now you see

Once a sinner now a saint

Once bound now free

That's the power of the cross

See the chains fall

Once a stranger now a child

Empty now filled

Once condemned now reconciled

Broken now healed

That's the power of the cross

See the chains fall

*Once a prodigal now home
Once lost now found
Once an enemy now a friend
Once poor now crowned*

*That's the power of the cross
See the chains fall*

We are now going to participate in communion together. Wherever you are, I invite you all to take a piece of bread.

On the evening Jesus was betrayed, He was with His disciples in the upper room. He took the bread and He broke it and gave thanks saying this is my body which is broken for you. Whenever you eat this bread remember me. Remember the story I am writing. Remember the love I have for you.

Let's eat the bread together.

After the meal was finished, Jesus passed the cup saying this is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink remember that I am writing a new story in your life. Remember that I sacrificed everything to write that story. Remember that I love you enough to pour out my blood for you.

Let's drink together.

May God bless you and keep you in the day and week ahead. I love you and I miss you! I hope to see you soon!