

The Secrets of Revival

John 21

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. ⁴ 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. ⁷ 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.

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁸ 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."

²⁰ 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.

On a Line of love – where would you place yourself? Where would you want to place yourself? This miracle is how one disciple moved his love from pretty lukewarm to fiery and intense.

God wants to restore His discouraged servants. He ever seeks to revive us and restore us. This incident is here to show us how the Lord got Peter from the discouraged man he was at the end of the Gospel to the man in the book of Acts.

The Gospel of John climaxes in chapter 20. Thomas' confession is really the high point, where he exclaims, 'My Lord and my God!' This is what John wrote for – that people would exclaim the same thing about Jesus. But chapter 21 is there for a reason. Some even felt John added it to his Gospel a few years later as a kind of extra clarification. Firstly, to clear up a myth which had apparently developed – saying that the apostle John would not die, and secondly, to explain what happened to Peter.

When we read Matthew, Mark or Luke, we read of Peter denying Jesus, weeping bitterly, and then finding out Christ has risen. But then we open the book of Acts and suddenly Peter is the leader. He is leading in prayer; he is guiding the disciple to choose a replacement for Judas.

It seems we are dealing with a different man. There is no hint in the other Gospels that the impulsive, rash and, in the end, cowardly Peter would become the natural leader of the others. The Peter of the book of Acts is so different from the Peter of the Gospels, that when a Chinese girl was reading the New Testament for the first time, she asked her teachers, 'Is this the same Peter?'

What happened to Peter? John 21 is the answer. And by God's providence, it has been arranged to fall exactly behind Acts 1. John 21 is the account of Peter's revival and restoration by a loving Lord Jesus. It gives us the pattern for our revival and restoration too.

The disciples are in Galilee. He told them to do that. Jesus told them to wait for him in Galilee. *'And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.'* (**Mat 28:7**).

Try to imagine what is in Peter's heart. The One he denied three times, the One he refused to acknowledge, has turned out to be God in the flesh – the Victor over all. Can he have denied this one? Oh, the sense of failure must be overwhelming. That night, Peter went out and wept bitterly; now he probably just feels regret all the time. How he had boasted about if the other disciples would forsake him – he would die for Jesus. *Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be." Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." But he spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all said likewise* (**Mar 14:29-31**).

And a damsel sitting around a fire had made him curse and swear and disown Jesus. He is crushed under the weight of his failure – the weight of his sin. Worse, the disciples he was meant to lead know of his failure. They all know how their leader had denied Christ. He must feel forever disqualified from ministry. He must feel Christ will never again walk so closely with him. Judas betrayed him for money; he betrayed him for self-protection. Seeing Jesus alive is all at once a joy and an agony for him.

Perhaps that's you – crushed under the weight of your repetitive failures. Certain that Christ has given up on you, so weary of promises you make and do not keep – hurting that you can never please Christ the way you want to.

And so, Peter announces, 'I'm going fishing'. Perhaps we should not read too much into this – but it looks like Peter is saying, 'I'm going to go back to what I used to do. I was a better fisherman than apostle. Let me return to familiar waters.'

If you think back, you will remember that Jesus called Peter and Andrew and James and John back in John 1, but in Luke 5 they seemed to have gone back to fishing, or never really have

forsaken fishing for Christ. And you might recall the miracle Jesus did to cause them to commit fully to Christ.

Luke 5:1-8

So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

So what do you think is going on in this miracle? Jesus is deliberately recreating the scene of Peter's first real full surrender to Him. He is using the circumstances to bring Peter's mind back to when he first realized that fishing was not going to be his life. Jesus was God in the flesh and deserved his whole life.

So, in exactly the same way, Jesus asks them, 'Children, you don't have any food do you?' At this point, they do not realise it is Jesus. Jesus tells them to cast down their nets, and again, just like in Luke 5, after a whole night of no success, the net is full of fish and they are unable to even lift the net up. When John sees this, his memory is triggered. He knows this is too much déjà vu to be coincidence. He says – 'It is the Lord.' When Peter hears that, with typical impulsive love, he puts his overcoat over his fishing clothes and dives in to swim to shore.

Here's the first

1. You Need to Be Reminded.

Peter needed to be reminded of that spiritual highpoint, where he saw Christ as holy and glorious, and gave himself totally to Jesus. He needed to be reminded of when fishing seemed to fade into insignificance and all he wanted was to serve the Lord.

He was no longer there. He was perhaps thinking of returning to his old life. He felt he had failed as an apostle of Jesus, and much more as the leader of the apostles. But Jesus wants him to think back to those times of revival, of illumination. He wants Peter to think back and see how far he has fallen.

Jesus did this with the church at Ephesus. He told them that, in spite of all their labour and discernment and rigorous living, they had left their first love. And then He says this, 'Remember from where you have fallen.'

Revival starts when we remember where we were in the spring season of our love for the Lord. It starts by remembering when the Bible seemed like the sweetest food on earth. You couldn't get enough of it. Remember when praying was a time you longed for. Remember when you were with God's people whenever they met; you came early and left late. Remember when you wanted to serve, somehow, in the smallest way, but any way; when the hymns would choke you up because they seemed too true. Remember when you couldn't help telling people about Christ - it was something bursting out of you. Remember all the

commitments you made, the promises you made to the Lord. Remember how you devoured Christian books, and even the world's TV and movies seemed distasteful to you.

If you are still there, well, thank the Lord for that. But if you are not, the first way Christ restores you is by reminding you. It seems painful. Rather let me forget about how zealous I once was, rather let me not think about how much I desired Him back then, because it only makes my current state seem worse. It only reminds me of how cold I am right now.

That's the idea. That's what Christ wants. You can't heal a man who doesn't think he's sick. You can't revive a man who thinks he is spiritually healthy. God has to remind you, like He did Peter – you've come a long way away from the fervent heart you had back then.

The reminder might not even be a reminder of where you have been, but a reminder of where you should have been, or where you aimed to be by now.

Without the reminder we begin to feel that where we are is fine. As surely as momentum slows down in the physical universe, spiritual zeal tends to wind down in our souls. And the result – something we call complacency - to be comfortable where you are, basically satisfied to keep your commitment where it is, not get into any grave sins, keep some of the spiritual disciplines, but otherwise – just keep on plodding along. Now, I believe in steady, spiritual growth. I don't believe you need to recommit your entire life to the Lord every Sunday. But I do believe the bent of our hearts is to lose zeal, lose commitment. Apart from continual reminders, continual reinforcement, we begin to think that where we are, is just where we need to be.

So don't underestimate how much reminding you need. If you think you don't need repetition and reminding, you don't understand what the Bible says about the human heart. You don't know how much self-deception lies inside you, and if you doubt that, it just proves the point. If you have come to understand the true sinfulness of the human heart you will cry out for every reminder you can get about the heart, about where you ought to be, where you should be by God's grace.

So the disciples arrive, dragging the fish, and Jesus has a charcoal fire ready for them with some food already there. Don't miss the fact that Jesus does not ask them to come and meet His needs. He is there serving them, meeting their needs. Jesus is ever the supplier, the Saviour.

The disciples know it is Jesus, and yet He must have been different enough for them to have had doubts.

Jesus undertakes this simple act of love to show them He loves them still, and will always meet their needs. Having done that, He turns to Peter.

He asks him a question. He addresses him by his full name – Simon son of Jonah. Jesus is not merely having a private conversation with Peter. He is calling Peter by a formal title, addressing him formally in front of the other disciples. And in front of the others – what does He ask Peter? 'Do you love me more than these?'

Jesus may have meant more than he loved the other disciples or He may have meant more than the other disciples loved Jesus. Either way, it reminds us of when Peter said, 'Though these forsake you, I will never forsake you.' Peter replies – 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'

Again, Jesus, formally publicly asks, ‘Simon son of Jonah – do you love me?’ Peter says, ‘Yes, Lord, you know I love you.’

A third time, Jesus says, ‘Peter do you love me?’ Peter is grieved. Why is he grieved? What would three questions remind Peter of? It would remind him of his three denials. But do you see what the Lord is letting Peter do? He is letting Peter undo His three denials. He denied Jesus three times publicly, and now Jesus, graciously, lets him retract those denials and publicly affirm his love for Jesus. In front of the disciples whose respect he had possibly lost, he turns his denials into worship.

In other words, he is repenting. He is turning from his sin of denial and turning to the obedience of confession.

Did you ever think what a merciful, kind thing it is that God allows for this thing called repentance? Repentance is retracting your sin. It is where you have already crossed a line, done the damage, offended God – but because of His sacrifice on Calvary, He lets you retract it. He lets you come to Him and say, ‘I was wrong for doing that. I was out of line. I shouldn’t have done that.’ Or, ‘I should have done what I failed to do.’ Repentance is where you get to undo what you did. Now Peter could not erase the consequences of denying Jesus, but he could erase the guilt that was dogging him, and get back on the path of loving Christ as he once had.

So the second part of revival is simply

2. You Need to Repent

It is blessedly simple. Admit your lack of love, your lukewarmness, your failure to pursue Him has been wrong. Retract it. Undo your deeds of slothfulness by turning back to Him.

This is the second thing which Jesus told the church at Ephesus. ‘*Remember from where thou art fallen, and repent.*’

Remember, and once you see it, repent of being where you are now.

No one who is happy with their current spiritual state ever repents of it. And no revival comes without repentance. Every revival recorded in Scripture – in Nehemiah, in Jonah, in Jehoshaphat’s day, in Hezekiah’s day, was preceded by the people of God weeping and mourning and fasting over having fallen short of God’s requirements, of having failed to love Him, of having loved idols instead. A real, throbbing experience of the Spirit of God showing you Jesus Christ in His glory does not come to the self-satisfied, self-righteous Christian. It comes to those who agree with God. Those who say, ‘No excuses, I have sinned against the Lord. I am not where I need to be, and I have failed to seek it like I should have.’

You remember God’s age old call to His people:

2 Chronicles 7:14 *If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

When Peter affirmed his love for the Lord, he was repenting. And Jesus was not arguing with him, nor was he unhappy with Peter’s replies. Though different Greek words are used here for love, it is probably more of a stylistic thing, and not that Jesus wanted Peter to love Him a

certain way, and Peter refused. No – Jesus was happy with Peter’s repentance, and wanted to give him the full opportunity to repent of his fall.

But there is a third thing which makes up true revival.

3. You Must Recommit.

When Peter answers affirmatively to each ‘Do you love Me?’ Jesus gives Peter a task. He says, ‘Feed my lambs.’ Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. In other words, simply repenting is not enough to clinch real revival. There must also be obedience. ‘Peter, do the things I told you to do in the first place - disciple my people; lead them; teach them; don’t withdraw into yourself; step out and start serving.’

Some people get it backwards. They think revival is going to sweep over them on a given day, and at that point they will commit to the local church, join it and become a member. In fact, Jesus says, ‘Peter if you do love me, then love My people. Serve them. Take care of them.’ Put simply, revival will not happen until you obey God’s command to love His people.

In fact, God will never revive the heart of someone He knows has no intention of obeying Him. When He spoke to Israel, He said, ‘Clean up your act and we will reason together.’

Isaiah 1:16-19 *"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, ¹⁷ Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. ¹⁸ " Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land;*

Start obeying - all you know you are to obey. Live by the Scriptures as you understand them. Tozer said to live by the Scriptures as you understand them is simple, but revolutionary.

Again, to the church at Ephesus, Jesus said, ‘Remember from where you have fallen, repent, and do the first works. Start doing the very things you stopped doing. Start in the Word again. Start fellowshiping more than you do now. Start praying regularly.’

It’s significant that the obedience Jesus expected of Peter, to show his love for Jesus, involved other Christians.

There is no such thing as a personal revival of affections for Christ which does not spill over onto other people. God never manifests Himself to you for your private entertainment. He does so in order that your joy becomes the joy of others. Christians who distance themselves from other Christians stand apart from where God will revive them. It is like a plant expecting to be rained on while staying indoors. You want revival? Then love God’s people. Recommit to give yourself heart and soul to loving His Body.

If Jesus says, ‘Do you love me?’, and you say, ‘Yes Lord, but not your Body,’ then that is an imaginary love.

Perhaps in Peter’s mind there was the thought that dogs the back of our minds. ‘How do I know I won’t deny Him again? How do I know I won’t fail again? So I remember, repent and recommit – but what if I fall again?’

To that unspoken thought, Jesus says to Peter in verse 18: ¹⁸*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*

That sounds odd on the surface, but verse 19 explains verse 18. Jesus was talking about Peter's death. He says, 'Peter when you were young, you were strong willed and stubborn. You did it your way and did it for yourself. But when you are old, you will be taken and killed for my sake.' Now, on the surface, that doesn't sound like an encouraging thing to say. But think. What had Peter done the last time he was in danger? He denied Jesus. Now Jesus says, 'You won't deny me. You will die for me as a martyr. Your faith will not fail.'

And to us He says, 'I will finish the work which I have begun in you. I am able to keep you from falling and present you faultless before my throne. I am the author and finisher of your faith. Of those the Father has given me, I will lose none.'

And so He can say to Him again, as on that day when they first caught those fishes, 'Follow me. Where I go, come. Don't improvise. Obey. Follow me to the death. Forsake all and follow me.'

Sometimes when we are drawing near to the Lord, we are tempted to look over our shoulder at others. This is what Peter did. After the Lord has restored him and told him about his future, Peter looks at John and says, what about him, Lord?

Now in truth, why should it matter at all to Peter what happens to John except a kind of curiosity which seeks to divert attention off the work God is doing in your heart. So the lord has to rebuke him gently and say, 'If I want him to live until my return, what is that to you?' And again, He repeats, 'You follow Me.'

Don't be distracted by others. For we must each carry our own load.

The Peter at the end of John 21 is now the Peter you meet in Acts 1. He is revived, restored and renewed. But to get him there, the Lord had to gently hurt him, by reminding him from where he'd fallen, allowing him to repent and then recommit to loving Christ and His people in tangible ways.

That's the call to you today.