

All In: #15 “Back Together”
Dr. Matthew Cassidy – John 21

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I want you to listen especially close today because we are going to be looking at a passage of Scripture, John 21, that is very special.

This is actually a rather controversial chapter. There are people who regularly look at the Bible and wonder if every chapter is in there for a purpose, or something has been left out. Some say that John 21 is not supposed to be in the Bible because it is no way to end the story of Jesus; it is anticlimactic; it ends on a bad note. I don't understand why a person would come to that conclusion, especially if you understand this passage itself.

John 21 is the story of Christmas itself. It is why Jesus came here. It is the story of making things new again. When I was looking at the passage over and over again, just listening to it, trying to make it part of my way of thinking – this is going to sound odd but a rhyme came to my mind from pre-school days – Humpty Dumpty.

Humpty Dumpty sat on wall
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
All the kings' horses and all the kings' men
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

I don't want to spend too much time on Humpty Dumpty but I don't know how the kings' horses could have helped anyway. The kings' men could not put Humpty Dumpty back together again either.

The bigger question that is leading to what we will be talking about today is – Why was Humpty Dumpty on a wall anyway because he is an egg person? I would say that the reason he was up there was that he was displaying his lack of awareness to his own frailty. He underestimated the frailty of his anatomy. So he is up there on this wall, just swinging his legs, thinking – *What could happen to me? After all, I am made of what?* He was made of an eggshell. But he thought he was made of titanium or something else. But he ends up on the ground and all the kings' horses and all the kings' men cannot put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Peter's Story

It is the story of Peter; Peter is Humpty Dumpty because he thought he was something that he was not. He fell and all the kings' men could not put him back together. They could not do a thing for him.

If you look at the life of Peter, and that is what John 21 is about, and we have to have some context for it. Peter understood there were two destinations of every human soul. You have an accumulation of choices.

[“The High Cost of Regret”, 8-28-2011, page 7] From the beginning of the series fourteen weeks ago: One choice leads to a choice that is full of regret. We saw that was called Despair. People who make choices and then make another choice after that, after a while those choices accumulate and then they end up in a life not worth living and at the sunset of their life, there is not much they can do about it. They live with nothing and bring that nothing to the throne of God.

Other people make choices, understanding that their life is precious to them. So they make choices – and no matter how hard the choices, because the hard ones are usually the right ones – because they know that they will be sitting in this final destination someday. That life is called Ego Integrity.

I am just telling you that Peter understood that. Peter understood that he needed to start making choices that led to a great life, a life of integrity, a life of joy so that he could present that life to his King, Jesus the Christ, and say: *This is what I did with what You gave me.*

It started three years before the story of John 21. Peter was fishing with his friends, James and John; maybe they had a fishing company together. Well, it wasn't fishing; attempted fishing would be the right term because they did not catch a thing. They had been fishing all night long and had not caught a single thing. That in itself is a pretty hard thing to do unless Someone is controlling that. Then a solo silhouette is seen on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee and this person says: *Hey, you guys need to fish deeper.* I guess you get to a certain place in fishing where you are so desperate you will do anything. So they throw the nets deep and the catch is so overwhelming, it swamps two boats. When these two boats are brought in and overflowing with the fish, it is Jesus who taught them, the one commanding the fish in the first place. He was commanding the fish to stay away and then He was commanding them to get in the net. On that day, it changed their lives because their names were changed and so were their destinies. Simon the Son of John was to be re-named Peter, like a rock. While their nets were full of fish, Jesus said: *Is this what you guys want to do? Because I can make you fishers of men.* The Scriptures say: And they left their nets. The biggest catch of their career and they left their nets because Peter wanted something more in life. He wanted to be a fisher of men. He wanted to be a follower of Jesus.

As the years went on, he came to understand who Jesus was and then in quite literally a frightening place in Israel [Caesarea Philippi: a place of cult worship where people would throw their children in as a form of sacrifice to these pagan gods], Jesus stands there to defy the pagan gods who are worshipped there. Jesus says: *Well, who do you think that I am?* Peter answers the question. He says: *I don't know what anybody else says about You, but I know enough to know that You are the one that the God of the universe promised He would send to make things right. You are Him. You are that thing, that promise that God whispered into Abraham's ear 2000 years ago.* Jesus says: *You did not come to that on your own, Peter, and I am going to build a church on that, and the gates of hell, right here, will not prevail against that.* Peter said that.

In the last week of the life of Christ, they are in the Upper Room, having this extremely tender, intimate moment called the Lord's Table. Things are going well until Jesus changes the mood and starts talking about His soon death. That is when Peter makes this declarative statement. *I will never leave You nor forsake You, until death do us part.* Jesus could not shut Peter up fast enough. Jesus to Peter: *You are a fragile little egg on a wall and now you swing your feet with arrogance. You are not going to get through this night.* Peter didn't know what that was about. Just hours later at a house that literally overlooks the Upper Room of arrogance where Peter had made this previous declaration – and the echo of the bravado that Peter had just experienced, he is standing around a charcoal campfire, outside of Caiphas' house, while Jesus is being led through a silly kangaroo court. Peter is in this courtyard and not once or twice but three times, he denies ever knowing Jesus. Upon that third declaration, a rooster crows, announcing to all of creation that Humpty Dumpty has had a great fall. He has fallen off the wall. All the kings' horses and all the kings' men could never put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

This is where we pick up this story where Peter wakes up every morning and pledges allegiance to his gloom and he is living in this state of a constant memory of what he did not do. It is almost like a sports player when they talk before the game and they keep talking up how big their victory will be. It just makes their loss so much worse. That is what everybody remembers. That is what they are remembering about him, Peter.

We are Humpty Dumpty

The point is that we are all Humpty Dumpty. We are all as fragile as little eggs. Some of us know that and others don't. We make these choices and we say these things like Peter and it ends a career or it ends a marriage or it ends a relationship with friends or family members. And we can't seem to find a way to get put back together again.

That is why Jesus came here. That is what Christmas is all about – to put us back together, to put our souls back together, to make our souls well, to make them whole. But also Jesus came here to put us back together with Christ, to restore a relationship that was lost from the Garden of Eden, since the day we were born, the day we first sinned – wherever you want to start counting. But the purpose of the Nativity is because the kings’ men could not help us. The blood of bulls and goats cannot pay the price for what we owe God. So God had to send His only Son to put us back together. He had to send the King to do that. That is what this story in John 21 is all about. He is sending us the only one who can make us well.

John 21:1-8 Back to Fishing

In John 21, in the first three verses, I want you to start to see. My prayer is that you can grasp what is happening here because it is supposed to be happening to us. I want you to see the extent that Jesus goes to in order to make sure Peter understands what is happening *to* him and that he remembers it for all time what happened on that beach, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is a life-changing moment for Peter. If he does not get this right, he will not ever be put back together.

The passage starts with Peter in this place of ambiguity. James and John are with him and so is Thomas -- his business partners. He says: *Hey, let’s go fishing. I am going fishing. Anybody want to come?* So they go fishing. Why not? They are in this place of ambiguity but you need to understand that this is the day the universe changes. What has happened here is the men have been following Jesus for more than three years and they had certain expectations. They were expecting a king like David who would come in and route the Romans and put Israel back where it was supposed to be – not just socially but economically and relationally. Yes, they saw Jesus die and, yes, they saw that Jesus was raised again. They have seen Him twice at this point. But listen, that is still not what they signed on for. Even in Jesus’ appearances, they are still spooked because He shows up, says a few things, and then leaves – but there is still no kingdom to come. Peter is initiating something that is a default, a Plan B. It is all he has left. I am going to go fishing. If he stays at that fishing, would we be here today? This is it. What is going to happen with this man and these men? They will go back to fishing. So Jesus interrupts this moment and puts a stop to it in verse 4:

John 21:4 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, [in a negative way and fishermen love this] “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.

Jesus is standing on the beach. Again, they just see this silhouette. He says to them: *You are fishing from the wrong side of the boat.* – I don’t know anything about fishing but I know that the fish are not left or right handed. That is for sure.

So John says: *This is really funny. This reminds me of the time Hey, wait a minute. That is Jesus!* So, when John says, “That is Jesus!” Peter grabs his coat and then jumps in the water and swims in about 100 yards because he wants to see Jesus. He just wants to see Him again. When they walk up on the shore and Peter is introduced again to the resurrected Christ, Jesus has so much more for Peter.

John 21:9 Jesus Replacing Peter’s Memories

Now we slow the whole story line down. No one is swimming and racing and running any more.

John 21:9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

The reason verse 9 is so important is because again, look at the extent to which Jesus is providing an opportunity to put Peter back together.

John is efficient if nothing in his writing about the life of Jesus Christ. This word “charcoal fire” is only used two times in his writings – no, it is only used two times in the entire New Testament. The first time “charcoal fire” was used is when Peter was standing in Caiphas’ courtyard and in his final and third denial there he is over that campfire. Here “charcoal campfire” is used again. If you know anything about sensory perceptions and their ability to trigger memories, you will know that the nose triggers the most vivid memories in our lives. So Jesus has worked things out; maybe the wind changed direction and Peter walks right into the smoke from the charcoal fire and there is this rush back to when a rooster crowed. Jesus is trying to get Peter to have a new memory to the similar smell. He doesn’t want Peter to remember the Last Supper; He wants Peter to remember the Last Breakfast. We are going to get this right this time. From now on, every time you cook over an open fire, I want you to remember what happens right here and right now. Jesus is not going to dance around this issue. He is going to do more than show affection to the person. He is going to put words to Peter and the words will make him whole again and the words will make him right with God again because that is what Jesus does. That is why He came and that is why He left.

John 21:15-17 Peter's Challenge to Career Choice

In verses 15 -17 look at what happens as the story continues:

John 21:15-17 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”

Again, just in this simple first sentence that Jesus is speaking to Peter, what does He call him? He does not call him Peter. Jesus is rewinding the tape of their story together and He says: I am going to call you Simon, for I nicknamed you Peter. I am going to call you Simon, son of John. – Let's start over and rewrite this thing. Let's rewrite your story together.

“Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”

What is He talking about? *Love me more than these*. What are the ‘these’? Sometimes people will say it is the other disciples. But I would probably not think that is the case because whenever the disciples got in this competitive way of thinking – who loves Jesus more or who does Jesus love more – it is condemned by Jesus. He does not like the love contests going on. It is one of the last things they did in the Upper Room was – who is going to be sitting on Jesus' right and left; who are Your favorites. So I don't think Jesus is saying to Peter – do you love Me more than the other guys. I think Jesus is saying to Peter – do you love Me more than these – the fish. It is a fishing story; it is told by fishermen. They count the fish; there are 153 fish and they don't just say there are 153 fish, they say there are 153 *big* fish because they are fishermen telling a story. Jesus is asking Peter the same question that He asked Peter the last time they had a catch like this. *Peter, do you love Me more than these fish? Are you going back to being just a fisher of fish? Because I told you I would make you a fisher of men. So I think it is time that you make a decision about your career and what you think I can do with someone like you.* That is what the story is about.

Application: Are We on Target

What about you? Did you go back to fishing? If you have followed Christ for any amount of time, if you are *All In* with your relationship with God, you probably know that He is disappointing. You have certain expectations and you have prayer requests and they don't get answered and you wonder why. Sometimes there are tantrums and sometimes there is a decision in there somewhere like – *Fine, if it is going to be that way, I will just go back to fishing.* – One of the difficulties with serving God is that He is in charge of the universe. He does not consult you or me. He does not care if we are in or out. He *will* be getting His will done.

The real question is whether we will be there as part of His will. Sometimes we have ambitions and even desires like wanting to be married or healthy or prosperous or whatever it might be. Those are not bad things. But when the God of the universe isn't serving us in a manner we expect, somewhere we say: *Fine, I'll throttle back and just go back to fishing. I'll hedge my bet and play it safe.* – Do you know what I mean? In your soul, if Jesus were to walk around in there and get to the very back, is there a sign which reads 'Gone Fishing'?

John 21:15-17 Peter's Restoration

That was literally the case here. In this case, Peter is Humpty Dumpty and he has had a great fall and all the kings' horses and all the kings' men (the other disciples) could not put him back together again. So Jesus is going to make this man well within himself and in his relationship with the Christ. Jesus is going to ask Peter three times – not because Jesus needs to say it three times but because Peter needs to hear it three times. Peter needs to hear it three times. The question which has been penetrating and the doubt that is inside of his soul for these many days: Peter do you love Me?

Jesus asks Peter for the **shame** of it. Look at verse 15.

John 21:15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love Me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he (Peter) said, "you know that I love You."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Jesus is going to ask Peter again for all the **guilt** he had been carrying around.

John 21:16 Again Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love Me?"

"Yes," Lord, you know that I love You."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

Still not enough – one more time for **regret**. Christ needs Peter to write two letters [I and II Peter] on how to endure persecution. I think it is funny that the guy who denies Jesus in front of so many people, and is known for that, is now going to write two letters on how to endure persecution. So Jesus asks Peter again for regret.

John 21:17 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."

There was no rooster crowing this time but the angels were. The angels love to see people put back together again. Isn't that why Jesus came – to make our souls whole and then to make them right with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Here is what is fun. Not only does Jesus ask Peter three times, because of Peter's three denials, so Jesus restores him three times. Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me?

John 21:18-19 Jesus' Last Gift to Peter

Now He gives the Christmas gift beyond anyone's expectation and imagination. Who could think of such gifts that Jesus would bring? Look at verses 18 and 19. *I am going to do this for you, Peter.*

John 21:18 I tell you the truth, 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!”

Just like Jesus said to Peter with the last big boat of fish, Jesus is asking him with the second biggest catch of his life. Now Jesus says: Now you follow Me.

Here is the last bit of fun I am going to give you, Peter. I am going to give you a second chance at this. Now your shell is really cracked and ugly. It is just held together with glue. It does not have the symmetry it used to have but now you understand that you are just a jar of clay.

There will be a day sometime in the future and you just remember this is from Me. You will be surrounded by Roman guards and they will say to you: *Simon, son of John, do you know Jesus? Aren't you one of His followers?* And you will get to say: *My name is Peter and I do know Jesus because He knew me. If I could ask you this one favor because my death is my last gift to God to glorify Him. Could you beat me, not to death though, and if it won't be too inconvenient for you, could you crucify me upside down because I do not deserve to see the sun go down on my life in the same position as my King.* So the Romans honored his request. He gave glory to God in his death – just like Jesus said.

Application

That is what it looks like to be put back together again. That is why Jesus came here. That is why there is a manger and a little baby inside so that we can appreciate that.

But Jesus came to invade the planet, to invade lives on the planet – not the people on top of the wall who don't know any better yet – but the people who have smashed their lives on the bottom of the

wall. All the kings' men can't put them together. So God sent His Son, the King himself, to make us right and to make us new. – *Behold! I make all things new again.*

It is a great story. It is not just Peter's story. I hope you get that it is not just Peter's story. It is written and placed there for you and for me to hear because we need to be restored.

The first application is pretty obvious. We need to be put back together again. There is a campfire with your name on it. If Jesus were here today, there would be no limit to the extent that He would go to recreate your life and your regrets and your remorse so as to smell those things again, to hear those things again; not so that you would skirt around the issue but so that Jesus could face it head on. I don't know how many times He would have to ask you: Do you love Me?

I just know that Jesus asked Peter three times and the third time obviously it was getting to the brink of too much because Peter denied Him three times. But listen to the passage. There is nothing Jesus won't do or say to get you right. Do you love Me? Do you love Me?

An attribute of God is that He does not wear down but He can wear you down.

Would you receive this story as yours, your campfire, your fishing expedition, your restoration – to be made whole, built back again, and to be restored to God through the power of Jesus Christ, His death and His resurrection. That is enough.

The second application is maybe like this: To restore someone else – to help put someone else back together again. The reason Jesus came was to restore things, to make things new. The reason He left was because He would have to build a lot of campfires, wouldn't He? So He said: *It is better that I leave that My Spirit could be brought here so that you could be Me in other people's lives.* So now, it is sometimes for you and I to build the campfires for other people, for a family member or a brother or sister, an ex-wife or ex-husband, an employer or employee. But couldn't we replicate what Jesus did, to speak right to the subject, to pick someone off the ground and say: I can represent the King here. I can help restore you. I will say the words that Jesus would say because that is what the Spirit does. He uses us to be His mouth and His hands, to do the hugs, because that is why He came and that is why He left. He left so that His Spirit would come and we would do that for other people. That is what this story is all about. There is *so much* power in grace and that is what Peter experienced here.

Matt's Restoration

A few years ago, things were not very good around here at Grace Covenant Church. It was my fault. I had become ill and because of that I lost the compass of my life and I could not see things and I could not do anything. If anything I did, I woke up and pledged allegiance to the gloom. As things

continued to unravel, I knew enough to know that I had to do something. The elders pray on Tuesday mornings and so I went to that meeting and just said: *Guys, there is so much wrong around here, so much unkept and a void of leadership and it is my fault.* – They were being nice and explaining this or that. I said: No, no, it is all my fault. Everywhere you look and you see despair or chaos, it has my fingerprint on it. I would understand if you guys would gently just walk me out the door and leave me. I understand that because that is what it means to be responsible.

Instead of doing that, the guys got up from the table and came around my chair and they just prayed for me. They said: *Yeah, you didn't do what you were supposed to do when you were supposed to do it but – go feed His sheep. We are going to trust you to lead. You will lead a different way with your cracks and glue and a loss of symmetry.* There is so much power in grace; grace transforms. Grace transforms – the grace of God and the grace we give to other people from God.

So, today, go to a campfire that has been built for you and stay there until you get it right. He is just wanting you to get up. No more sulking. No more pouting. Get up; just get up. All He has to work with are broken eggs. He can't use the guys still up on the wall. So go to a campfire or build a campfire for someone else. Teach your children that grace transforms -- teach your friends – teach your co-workers – teach someone by building a campfire and let them smell what it means to be rebuilt. Tell them about the love of Jesus Christ, about how He came and He died and then He rose again. Tell them how it looks in your life on their life.

That is why we are here. John 21 for everyone.

Let's pray to that end. Let's ask God's Spirit to help us to know what to do with this.

Dear heavenly Father,

We are grateful for this story of Peter's reconciliation and more importantly how it applies to our own lives right here and now. So, God, I am asking you – What campfire are we to attend? Are we to attend our own? Are we to remember not our denials and disobedience and rebellions but we are to remember restorations and remaking and being born again, again? Then help us, God, remember that.

Lord, I know your Spirit is putting heavy thoughts on people's minds today about building a campfire for someone else, that they are to stoke that charcoal and make it something for someone else to sit in on. Lord, I ask they have the courage and the words and the gentleness and the feelings necessary to make another human being well. That they would speak your words for You.

God, let us be a church that makes campfires and attends campfires – that we don't exalt in anything but You. Let us be that humble church that desires to glorify You in life and even in death. In Jesus' name. Amen