

# #3: Grace Restores

## Series: Peter's Progress

### John 21

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- June 27, 2021

Well, hey, good morning, Grace. How do you like the campus view now? We tore down the ugly building on campus that blocked the most beautiful view we had of that oak tree and the worship center. We have enough space now because we are using a classroom across the street that we just converted, so that is the last building that came with the property. We're done. Anyway, I'm happy about it.

### Overview of John Chapter 21

If you'll turn in your Bibles to John chapter 21, I want you to go there and look at this fabulous piece of literature. In our study of Peter's progress, it is significant in Peter's life. It is a defining moment for him—maybe the single most effectively defining moment in his life.

Chapter 21 of John is the last chapter of all four gospels. And some authors/Bible critics will say that it may not even be supposed to be there, it was added later, it doesn't seem like it's climatic in how to end the gospel story.

Have you read this chapter? Because it is the power of grace. It is the power of restoration. We say here at Grace that grace transforms. This chapter shows that grace restores. In addition to forgiveness, it's restoration made well.

I can't wait to get into it. The story itself—even Peter's life reminds me of that old nursery rhyme “Humpty Dumpty.”

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;  
All the king's horses and all the king's men  
Couldn't put Humpty together again.*

In that rhyme—first of all, I don't know how much help horses could be anyway, do I don't know why they wrote that—but yeah, all the king's men can't put him back together again. You can't unscramble an egg. But the question, the puzzling part for me, is why is an egg person

on a wall? He has greatly exaggerated his strength. He's made from an eggshell, the definition of fragile. And he's up there on a high wall just swinging his legs. And the reason is because he's proud—he's reckless. And he's going to end up getting shattered. It's like the verse, "Pride comes before the fall." There's that literal expression.

I only say that because this is the life of Peter. He is Humpty Dumpty. He had a great fall and he cannot be put back together again. And this chapter is the story of what happened after a great fall. It will be done and told and lived out in a way that is a defining moment, sure, but it needs to be memorable for Peter. Because what happens in this story is, though the King's men can't do much, the King can. And the King comes and He restores Peter and He puts him back together again. That's what chapter 21 is all about.

### Defining Moments in Peter's Story

Now how do you get to the last chapter? Let me do kind of a quick summary of Peter's life, some other defining moments that get us to chapter 21 so you can understand the bigger context.

Three or so years before chapter 21, the beginning of Peter's life with Jesus Christ begins with Andrew his brother, Peter, James, and John. They own a fishing company together and they've been fishing all night, but not really fishing; attempting to fish. They catch nothing. And then Jesus, after teaching, says, *Hey, you guys go out again, but just lower your nets deeper.* And the men just roll their eyes and comply. And the fish are like, *Last one in the net is a rotten egg.* They realize the maker of the fish is the one making all this happen. Jesus made the fish and Jesus is telling them to go in there. And it swamps the boats. They drag the boats, the nets are starting to tear.

And that fishing, the greatest fishing experience ever, is not the defining moment, but rather, the conversation that happens after that is. Because Jesus talks to Peter and He says—listen carefully—"Simon, son of John. I'm going to call you Peter, the rock, now, but Simon son of John, I'm going to make you a fisher of men. You follow me and I'll make you a fisher of men." *I'm going to change your whole life. I'm going to give you a new name, I'm going to give you a new vision/mission/ purpose in life.* A dream is born in this first experience with Jesus. He has a cause and it's bigger than the fish. And so, it says, "And they left their nets and followed Jesus."

After a few years of following Jesus and being exposed to miracles and His teachings, there's a pop quiz. And it happens at a place called Caesarea Philippi. It's in the northern part of Israel. But what's critical to understanding the whereabouts of this is that it's the home of what is called "the gates of hell." It's this grotesque looking cave coming out of this rock wall. And it's an occult center where they do idol worship and sacrifice children. It's a scary place to be. And so, Jesus takes His men there and says, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answer a few things, and then He looks at Peter and says, "Yeah, but who do you say that I am?" And Peter says, "You're Him. You're the promise. You're the Messiah." *You're the Son of Man, the Son of God. You are the fulfillment of all those things whispered into the ears of Abraham two thousand years ago. You're the King.*

And with that confession, Jesus responds by saying, "Yeah, that is the foundation of the Church. And the Church is going into the gates of hell to conquer, and the gates of hell will not prevail against the army of the Church."

Yeah, that's a defining moment.

Years later, depending on when that event took place, but certainly the last week of ministry together with Jesus, He hosts a Passover meal. It's usually a festive event. And it is that night, but Jesus changes the feel of it by saying this. He says, "My end, my destiny, is to come and then to be taken, and then to be killed."

And Peter jumps in and crows, *Over my dead body. That's never going to happen! I mean, to death do us part.*

And Jesus must have thought, *Just stop talking, Peter. You're just a little egg man. Your frailty is blind. You can't see how fragile you are. And you're up on this wall just swinging your legs.* And He says, "The devil wants to sift you."

Just a few hours after that, Peter is in the courtyard of Caiaphas the priest. Now, you need to know that down here in the Upper Room where they had that communion--the Lord's table, the Passover meal—they've gone down and come back up, and Caiaphas' palace is up here. From this courtyard you can see the room of bravado. And he's in that courtyard and there's a campfire, a cold fire that's burning, and he's standing around it. And that's when Peter, not once, not twice, but three time denies even knowing Jesus Christ. And now the rooster crows. And the rooster is announcing to the world that Peter has had a great fall. And all the King's horses and all the King's men are not going to be able to put him back together again.

And from that point on Peter just woke up and started his day by pledging allegiance to his shame. He was never going to be the same.

### **You and I Are Like Humpty Dumpty, Like Peter**

Now the reason that this is important to us, this storyline, is because you and I are Peter. We're Humpty. We're like this. We sit on walls and fall off walls. It's what we do best. We brag about things that we think are actually weaknesses, and we find ourselves in divorces or sometimes getting fired or wrecking friendships or in moral failures. And all the King's men can't put us back together again. Somewhere in this we have to learn how to live with the shame and the regret.

And that's why when Peter comes to Jesus in this storyline, He's going to do more than transform him. Grace transforms—forgiveness. But grace restores. Peter has to be made right with Peter. Peter has to be able to look at himself in the mirror and not wince. And so, Jesus is going to come in and He's going to make Peter's soul right with Peter, and then He's going to make his soul right with God. And I want to watch and listen and look at the circumstances that Jesus arranges so that Peter can see all of the fullness of this event taking place in his life. It's a life-changing moment, it's a defining moment. But Jesus is trying to make this a memorable moment, this restoration. This is why Jesus came—"For God so loved the world that He sent His only" King into the world filled with broken people that can't be fixed. Not just to give them forgiveness, but also restoration. Because all the King's men can't put us back together. Moses and his law—not enough. David and his crown—still not enough. Because the blood of bulls and sheep and goats cannot cure the illness that we have. And so, God sent His Son, the King, to bleed and die for us.

And this story is a love story. It's interesting that John writes this story. John loves Peter. John and Peter grew up together, they're in this business relationship together. All four gospel writers include Peter's denial of Jesus Christ; only John records this. I think John wants Peter to read his book, his biography of Jesus, and he wants him to remember how it ended.

### **Back to the Fishing Boats**

It ended like this. We're in chapter 21. Now the men have gone back to fishing. They've lost their mission, they've lost their calling. They're not fishers of men, they're back to being

fishers of fish. And they're just going to stay that way. If they stay that way, you and I won't be in church. I mean, the consequences of this into the future is significant, eternal.

And I can understand why they would go back to fishing. Their storyline looks like this: from their perspective, God's plan was that He would send the Messiah, the King, the conquering king. And there would be a social, economic, and political overthrow of whoever was in charge of Israel—in this case, the Romans. And they would live the great old days, but even better still—forever, maybe.

And so, the men who were following had a lot of selfish ambition in them. And that was the reason that they followed Him—that and other reasons as well—but they were hoping to be on the cabinet of the King. And then when God's will wasn't their will and Jesus ends up on a cross and dies, those hopes and dreams died. And then when Jesus was resurrected, they went back and got those same dreams. They didn't change their dreams. They're thinking, *Now we've got a resurrected king. What are you going to do to Him? You killed Him. He got better. So, let's go—economic, political, social revolution—let's take this thing on.*

And in this part of the story Jesus has appeared about two times publicly and one time privately to Peter. But each of those times Jesus keeps talking about a spiritual kingdom and this is not the time for this big political overthrow.

So that part of their dream, what they thought was God's will, was just their will they were trying to inflict on God, like He would answer to that. And it's not working. And so, they're going back to what they know and what they can control, what they're pretty good at. But you look at their soul where it says what their vision is, what their mission in life is, and it just says, "Gone fishing."

## **John 21:4-6**

**Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. <sup>6</sup> He said, “Thrown 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.**

And what’s great in this story is that they’re not all that good. They’re having another day where they’re catching nothing. So, that’s where we pick it up in verse 4. “Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’” It’s a negative, right?

*It looks like you don’t have any fish.*

*No, we don’t.*

“ ‘Well, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.’ And they did. And they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.”

I don’t know much about fishing, but it just seems like whether it’s the right side or the left side of the boat, it doesn’t matter. It’s obviously a miracle. And John thinks, *Wait a minute. This reminds me of the time ... oh, no, he realizes ... That’s the Lord! That’s the Lord. He does this. That’s how He fishes.*

And Peter thinks, *Yeah, I get it now.* He puts on his jacket and swims a hundred yards to be with Jesus because he’s Peter.

## **Jesus and Peter Beside the Campfire**

At this point, the movement of the story is slowing down. Now it’s going to focus on another miracle. It’s just Peter and Jesus. This is when it gets great. It’s so powerful for memory, and it’s a defining moment.

## **John 21:9**

**When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.**

It starts with, “When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.” It doesn’t sound like much, but there are **three details** in the first part of the story that John is going to include so that we understand all that is happening in the life of Peter and all that Jesus is doing to make sure that happens. A charcoal fire—that’s the literal translation. Burning coals, a charcoal fire, is only used two times in the Bible, two times in the New Testament, the same author—John. He’s the only one to use this phrase.

The first time he uses this phrase is when Peter is in the courtyard of Caiaphas and he’s in front of a charcoal fire. And that’s when he denies for a third time. The smell of a charcoal fire is the smell of failure. It smells like cowardice. It smells like regret. And now Jesus has started this charcoal fire, and He knows that the strongest sense we have for remembering—the most vivid memories come when we smell something. And Jesus is thinking, *We cannot leave that charcoal smell with those memories.*

And so, He starts this charcoal fire, and He’s going to make sure that there’s not going to be a rooster crowing this time. He’s going to bring peace to Peter’s mind. And He’s trying to start a whole new memory. And it’s going to start right here, right now. This is restoration. It starts with a charcoal fire, because the King has come. He loves Peter and He’s going to put him back together again, because He’s the only one who can. The glue He’ll use to heal this little egg man is going to be grace, because grace can restore. And He’s going to get Peter back on mission, the one he had before.

## **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?”**

So, here we go, verse 15: “When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”

Those are the other two little details that bring this into a place of magic. “Simon son of John”—He’s not calling him Peter; He’s calling Him the exact same phrase that Jesus used in the first big fish catch. *Simon son of John, I’m going to wrap this up. We’re going to start all over again, we’re going to do it again, we’re going to get it right this time.* “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

Now it’s easy when you read that to be thinking, *who are “these”*? “Do you love me more than these?”—the other disciples. I would say that’s very unlikely, because Jesus had no tolerance for petty, competitive discipleship. He was never engaging in *Who loves me more?* So, in light of that, He’s saying, “Do you love me more than these?” And “these” are the fish. I mean, these are fishermen. This is the second biggest catch of their career. As a matter of fact—they are fishermen—they number them. There are 153 of them. And they’re fishermen and they want you to know that they are very big fish. They can’t leave it alone—there were 153 big fish.

And Jesus is asking the question that He asked three years ago: *What do you want to do with your life? What do you love more? This is the second biggest catch of your life; do you want to stay with the nets and stay with the fish, or do you want to follow me and leave that behind? If you follow me, I’ll make you fishers of men. If you follow me, I’ll give you a vision. I’ll give you a purpose. I’ll give you a reason to live. Or you can love this.* He’s playing it all back again.

### Application

It’s interesting that what’s happening in Peter’s life—and I think it happens in every life of a disciple—you come to know Christ and hopefully you learn early on that every believer is a minister and you get involved in some kind of ministry in your neighborhood or your workplace or literally in ministry or someplace where you’re volunteering. And you’re seeing the vision that God has provided good works for you to do in Jesus Christ before the beginning of time. And you’re seeing life that way—prayer, care, share. It’s awesome.

And then something happens where your vision or your hopes for life are not happening. What God has for you and what you have for you are different and now it’s jamming up your enjoyment of following the Lord. In other words, you’re disappointed with God. And sometimes it’s because you didn’t get married or you didn’t get promoted or you’re not healthy. *I’ll follow and do the big plan as long as I’m healthy and all my kids are healthy.*



Sometimes it's just not being noticed enough. *Look at all the mission stuff I'm doing! Look at all the service I'm doing! No one says, "Attaboy!"* So somewhere in there you say, *You know what? I'm just going to go back to fishing. I'm just going to go back to what I know, what I like, it's easy and safe. I'm on my sole purpose in life—gone fishing.* It's easy to do.

And Peter in his context, who had a great fall—sure. It's looking in the mirror every morning—that's what is tearing him up. So, why not just go back to fishing where he can't hurt anyone anymore?

### **Jesus Asks Three Times, "Do You Love Me?"**

And so, Jesus has to come in and restore Peter to himself and He has to restore Peter to God. And that's what is going to happen right here. We hear "grace transforms"—I'm usually referring to salvation. Grace restores. So, Jesus is going to ask Peter three times, "Do you love me?" And he asks him three times, not because Jesus needs to know, not because Jesus wants to hear it, but because Peter needs to hear it three times. He needs to hear himself say it back to Jesus three times. Jesus is making a memory. He's turning this into a defining moment and wants Peter to be fully restored. He denied me three times, he's going to have to tell me three times that he loves me.

#### **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 said, "You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."**

So, the first one's for shame. "When they finished eating the fish, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Then Jesus said, 'Well, then feed my lambs.'" Feed my lambs—a new vision. He'll be a fisher of men, sure, but now He's using a different metaphor. Now he'll be a shepherd of sheep. Peter will write two epistles. In those epistles he will teach us how to be good shepherds. *I'm getting you back in the game, Peter. I'm going to help you be a shepherd.*

### **John 21:16**

**Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”**

The second question is for guilt. “So again, Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you truly love me?’ He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ ‘Take care of my sheep.’” *Be a shepherd.*

### **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.”**

The third time is for regret. He’s putting him back together. “The third time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’” Now Peter’s hurt—restoration can hurt. “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.’”

No rooster cried out this time ... but angels did. They cried. Peter’s whole.

I love how Jesus seeks out Peter and speaks to Peter’s restoration language--whatever it’s going to take for him to hear and remember and make sure it’s complete. He did the same thing with Thomas. He seeks Thomas out in his confusion, he’s lost his center of gravity, and He comes after Thomas and says in a restorative event, “Put your hands in my palms.” *If that’s what it’s going to take, I’ll do that.* He’s doing that all over.

And now, Peter’s completely restored. He’s back, with all these cracks. And the cracks are held together with the glue of grace, so he’s better and stronger than he used to be. Now he walks with a limp. But you know the saying, right? *Never follow a man without a limp.* Now Peter will lead with a limp and he’s safe.

## Jesus' Last Gift

It doesn't end here. Now it gets sweet. Because the Lord Jesus Christ is about to give him a gift that Peter wouldn't know to ask for. It's a statement about the depth of the care that you and I have for our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives him this gift.

### John 21:18-19

**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. <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, "Follow me!"**

It says in verses 18 and 19, "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." That sounds confusing. But the next sentence tells us what it means. "Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, 'Follow me!'"

That phrase "stretching out your hands" was a phrase that was used in other classic Greek literature that they might have known about. But certainly, we do. And then Jesus explains that "stretching out your hands" means being crucified. Jesus is giving Peter the gift of another try. You know Peter would love another shot at, I don't know, walking on water. But that was just a stunt, okay? This is for the stronger Peter, not the younger and the prouder Peter that failed the test of persecution. The bur that's under the soul of Peter, the thing that nags him, is *Will I cower again? Is there a rooster in my future storyline? I don't know if I can live with this a second time.*

And so, Jesus says, as the sovereign ruler of all created things, *I'm going to give you another at-bat. Someday someone's going to ask you, "Wait a minute—don't you know Jesus? Are you one of His followers?" and you'll say, "Know Him? He loves me, and I love Him because He first loved me. I'd follow Him to go anywhere, do anything. And I am not Simon; I am Peter. I'm the Rock—it's the name He gave me. He gave me a vision to go with it."*

Peter is going to write two books of the Bible. And the books have a primary theme of how to endure persecution. It is written by a man who denied Christ three times, once when a girl asked him. And now he's writing books about how to endure. That's a beautiful gift. That's a beautiful gift from our King to him. *Let's do it one more time and let me show you what happens, after you've been restored.*

Anyway, the reason we're involved in this story is because this story is why Jesus came. For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, not to condemn the world, but that through grace the world would be transformed; that through grace people would be restored. And God says, "Behold I have made all things new." That's what's happened here. Peter is made new.

### **Application: Be Restored**

And so, for some of you, here's the application. You should be restored. You need to be restored. You may have experienced grace's transformation, but maybe you need to hear that grace restores as well. Can you read this chapter over and over again and hear the Lord speaking to you? He says, *Get up. Get up. Get up.* He'll keep saying it. He wants to put you back together again. Hear it--when He's asking Peter, He's asking you. "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?" He'll keep asking, because He cannot be worn down. He will ask until you start hearing yourself being convinced that you do. He wants to restore you to you. He's transformed you. He wants to give you a mission, a purpose, a reason to live. He's arranged good works in Christ for you to do from before the beginning of time. And He's asking you to answer that call. You need to be restored.

I'm telling you this. There's a campfire on a beach built for you by the King. Jesus in His humility built that campfire for Peter. In His humility He wants us to end our remorse and get back in the game, get on with life, start looking out and seeing all the prayer, care, share opportunities that are available to you. Grace transforms—He forgives. But grace restores, making you whole, getting you on mission. That's why Jesus came.

### **Application: Restore Someone**

There's a second application that is significant and convincing, and that is that maybe you need to restore someone. Jesus came so that restoration could take place; Jesus left because

there were too many campfires to build. He left so that the Spirit could come and would come, and would dwell and be sealed inside the souls of every believer in Jesus Christ. Every man and woman who call Christ their king has the Spirit of God in them. And now we are priests. We are campfire builders. We go to the broken people around us and we say, “What can be done to restore you? What needs to be allowed so that you can make a memory, a deciding moment in your life?” Jesus came for restoration. He left so that we could be part of that restoration process, so that we could build those campfires, so that we could be like Jesus, the one that touches, the one that hugs, the one that speaks the grace of God into people’s lives. That’s what ministry is. That’s why we’re here. The Lord may be bringing to your mind someone that needs to be restored, and you might need to be the person that needs to build that fire—a family member, an ex-wife or ex-husband, a brother or sister, someone at work, or just a friend. We are the priests. We bring the word of God. We bring the hugs. We bring the power of restoration. It changes people’s lives. It alters how they view all around them.

This is my story. Someone asked me this week why I like being at Grace. And it’s John 21—it’s my story. From 2008 to 2010, I had something medical—it’s something in my throat, a thyroid thing, a parathyroid, and it went rogue, and it changed all my blood chemistry. It took us two years to find out what was the cause of that. But during those two years it was everything for me to just get up and preach on Sunday. I couldn’t get out of bed, I couldn’t will myself out of bed. I had super dark, gloomy thoughts. But I couldn’t think, I couldn’t decide, I couldn’t lead. And so, the church was in a leadership vacuum for two years. You probably know about vacuums—they have a way of getting filled, and they were getting filled by probably the wrong people, and it was causing us to have not a good place for those two years. And it was my fault.

And I realized, *You know what? I’m going to see if I can get up enough nerve and courage and I’m going to go the elder prayer time that’s on Tuesday mornings and I’m just going to take responsibility for this.* So, I went in and I said, “Look, the reason guys are turning on each other in this place and there’s lack of unity and there doesn’t seem to be everything that God has for us—it’s my fault. And I think the best thing for the church would be for you guys to find someone else to lead. Because I can’t do this. I can’t shepherd.”

And the guys said, “Yeah, it’s your fault. You are not leading, and that’s why we’re where we are.” And then they got up and they came over to me and they put their hands on me

and they prayed for me. And then when I came up, they said, “Now go shepherd the flock. Go feed the sheep. Do what you’re called to do. You’re restored.”

It’ll change your life. I’m still talking about it ten years later. Right?

So, do you need to be restored? Do you need to build a fire for someone else? Let’s be a church of restoration. Every believer’s a minister. Every believer is part of the restoration process. Let’s pray.

*Dear King Jesus, to think that You came to rule, and part of ruling was to submit to the needs of a traitor, a traitor that You loved and You wanted to make well. I don’t know of a single story where a man wearing a crown would do that. And yet You did it for Peter as an example of what You do for us. If it weren’t for traitors You’d have no one.*

*So, as Your Spirit lives within us now, I’d ask that we would be the builders of fires, the voice of Your grace, the hands of affection and acceptance in other people’s lives. And Lord, I know that there are people here today that need to hear that You want them to be restored. Lord, I’d ask that they would hear You ask the questions, “Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?” And I pray, Lord, that You would wear them down until they are convinced that You love them and want them to get back in the game, back on mission and purpose—get them back in ministry where they can enjoy being in Your presence.*

*Lord, let us be a church just showing the power of grace, and that would give You glory. That’s the end. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*