

Easter Sunday

Peter's Resurrection

John 21

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- April 9, 2023

Hey, good morning, church! Hey, happy Easter! For a thousand years—maybe close to two thousand years—Resurrection Sunday has had a greeting. I will say “He is risen” and you respond with “He is risen indeed.” Ready? He is risen.

[Congregation]: He is risen indeed.

Yeah ... it changed the universe. Everything changed on Resurrection Sunday.

I want to look at a true story today about the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and how it changes a person's life. It changes a person's soul, absolutely. And I want to tell how the promise that is part of the resurrection—the promise of forgiveness—changes who we are. It changes the way we even perceive ourselves and what becomes the center of our lives. The resurrection completely changes the way we run in an opposite direction in our relationship with God. We start with running away from God in fear. But because of the resurrection and forgiveness, we find ourselves running toward God in hope. That's the change.

This is a Humpty Dumpty story today. And don't worry about the King's men. They can't help. But the King will put this man back together again.

The Story of Simon Peter

This is the story of Peter. This is Peter's story. And Peter's biography is so important to us because it's a display of what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is all about—why He left heaven and came to earth and did what He did. And the other reason Peter's story is so important to us is because his biography is our biography. It is the biography of every person that lives and trusts Jesus Christ for their salvation.

Peter: Fisherman on the Sea of Galilee

Peter's story, his life with Jesus, is a three-year adventure. And it begins with the Simon Peter fishing company on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. They'd been out all night and didn't catch a single thing. Now it's early morning or mid-morning and they're listening to Jesus preach. They're tending their nets, putting them away. And then, after the sermon's over, Jesus tells Simon, "Hey, you should go back out into the deep water and cast your net there."

And Peter says, "Lord, preacher, okay—so we've been up all night. We're exhausted. But you know what? Since you said so, we'll go out to the deep water."

They drop their nets in the deep water and they have so many fish. It's like the fish have said, *Last one in is a rotten egg!* They are jumping into his nets. They start swamping his boat. Peter calls for the other boat to come over, the one with James and John on it. They come over and both boats are filled with fish and are almost submerged.

Luke 5:8-9

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken.

When Simon gets to shore, this is what he says. "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken."

And Jesus says, "Don't be afraid, Simon. You're going to be a fisher of men." And this is the day that the universe changed for Simon Peter. He's going to get a new calling, a new mission, a new purpose in life. He's going to be a fisher of men and women. He's going to be part of a movement now. And he's going to leave. All four of these men will leave the biggest catch of their entire career, the dream catch for a fisherman. They're going to walk away from that to follow Jesus.

Peter Calls Jesus the “Messiah”

And in Peter’s story he’s going to get a name change. He’s called Simon, and Jesus is going to say, *I’m going to call you Peter. In Greek it means “rock.” You’re a rock. I’m going to call you Rocky. You’re rock-solid. I want you to wear that name for me.*

After more than two and half years of ministry together with Jesus, watching miracles, listening to His teaching, being mentored by Jesus, Jesus takes them to a place and asks them the most important question in the human experience. And Jesus says, “Who do people say I am?”

And one of the disciples says, “Some people think you’re John the Baptist reincarnated. And some people think you’re Elijah or Jeremiah.” (Those are Old Testament prophets.)

And then He looks at them and says, “Yes, okay, but who do you say that I am?” That’s the single most important question in the human experience.

Matthew 16:16

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Peter says this. “Simon Peter answers, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’” And that word “Messiah” is a loaded title. It means that He is the fulfillment of all the promises going all the way back to Abraham ... no, Adam--all the promises God has made to bring us back to His presence and make us holy again. *You’re that person.*

And so, Jesus responds to Peter’s answer here and says, “Look, you got that answer not on your own; the Father himself in heaven gave you that answer.” And He says this: “I tell you this, Peter. On this rock I’m going to build my church, and the gates of hell will fall when the church charges.”

Peter’s Declaration in the Upper Room

No doubt that was the high point in Peter’s life with Jesus. Not too many days after that they are back in Jerusalem and they’re having a meal together—the Passover meal, as Jewish followers. The Passover meal together is upstairs in a place we call the Upper Room. After they have that Passover meal together, Jesus tells them what’s going to happen next. He says, *Now I’m going to be betrayed. I’ll be turned over to the Romans. I’ll be beaten and killed.*

And Peter wants none of that. He says, *No, no, that won't happen. And I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you.*

Matthew 26:33

Peter declared, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you.”

And it's not as though he says that in isolation. Peter declares that commitment to love in a comparative way. Look what he says in verse 33: “Peter declared, ‘Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you.’” *No one else loves you like I love you. I'm Peter.*

And Jesus says, “Truly, today ... no, tonight before the rooster crows you will abandon me. You will disown me three times.” Jesus knows Peter in ways that Peter is afraid to even acknowledge in his own soul. Jesus is saying, *You are Humpty Dumpty and you're on a very high wall here, Peter, and you're swinging your legs around like you are invincible, and you are a fragile soul.*

Peter's Denial

And sure enough, just a few hours after that prophecy is told by Jesus, He is betrayed by Judas. He's given over to the Romans. Various kangaroo courts take place where they're accusing Jesus of things. And then He's beaten multiple times. And then in this one part of the plotline—it's told in all four gospels because they want everyone to know for certain what took place in Peter's life—they're at the high priest's house and it's up on this high hill. And Peter's been following Jesus at a safe distance to see what's happening. And he's watching this whole thing unravel in disbelief. And from this vantage point at the high priest's house you can literally see the Upper Room where Peter had crowed about his courage.

John 18:25

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself by a charcoal fire, because it was cold. So they said to him, “You also are one of his disciples, aren’t you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.”

Peter’s outside with some of the soldiers and some of the servants, and they’re sitting around a fire to stay warm. And this is what it says in John 18: “Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself by a charcoal fire, because it was cold. And one of the soldiers said to him, ‘You also are one of his disciples, aren’t you?’ And he denied Him and said, ‘No, I’m not.’”

Soon after that another person recognized Peter and said, *No, I think you were a follower of Jesus.*

Peter says, *No.*

And then finally, one of the servants of the high priest says, *Wait a minute. At the Garden of Gethsemane you cut a guy’s ear off. I mean, I remember seeing you.*

And then Peter says, *No, absolutely not.* He even curses about it. He says, *It’s not me.* And at that moment Jesus is being led out of the house across the courtyard. And Peter’s face, again, illuminated by this charcoal fire going—their eyes meet. And Jesus stares with this long gaze, and a rooster crows. The rooster is announcing to the world, *This is the real Peter.*

Peter has been shown to be who he’s been all along. And Peter has had a great fall. And no one among the King’s men can put him back together again. Peter has revealed himself to himself. And he is undone.

There’s a particularly poignant scene in a play called *A Man for All Seasons*. It’s a beautiful play. Some of you might have seen the play or the movie. It’s about Sir Thomas More who is serving as a lawyer or a judge for King Henry VIII. And Henry VIII is requiring everyone to sign this document saying that the king is above the Church. And this is in contrast to the strong convictions of Thomas More. He thinks the Church is the highest-ranking authority in the world. And so, he can’t sign this document.

And his daughter Meg is pleading with him, saying, “Dad, you’ve got to sign this thing. It doesn’t matter if it’s true or not. You can promise you believe this but then break the promise. Don’t die for this!”

And Sir Thomas More, who becomes a saint, says this to Meg: “This is the type of promise where a man holds his very self in his palm, like he’s holding water. And if he goes against this, it’s as though he opens his hands. The water is lost, his self is lost, and it can never be found again.”

That is what Peter has done. He has made promises—*Other people will deny you*—he has held his very self in his hands. He has built his integrity, his identity, on his courage, his truthfulness. And then in this moment of tests he opens his hands. He loses himself and he can’t be found again.

The other disciples abandon Jesus. Peter, three times, with his own voice, denies Him. This Peter is doomed. This is a mortal wound, self-inflicted. He will live nothing more than a haunted life. He will wake up every morning and he will pledge allegiance to his shame. There he is—meant to be a leader, a rock. A movement was going to be built on this man. He was to be a leader of the Jerusalem church. But not now. Peter knows and everyone else knows he’s a coward that will lie to get out of trouble.

Peter Experiences the Power of the Resurrection

The story doesn’t end here. The story ends in the last chapter of all four gospels. It’s Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. And the last chapter of John, John chapter 21, is the story about the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We have all had a great fall. And no matter how hard we try to put ourselves back together again, we can’t. We look for ways to get rid of our shame. We look for ways of getting forgiven. And they can’t be had or experienced by us on this plain. This chapter is after the resurrection and shows to us what happens in a soul, in a man’s life, when he experiences an encounter with Jesus after His death and after He’s been raised.

Okay, just to be clear, on the third day He rose again, and the power of the resurrection has to do with (we have a song about it) the promises that Jesus made beforehand about the meaning of His death. He said what the meaning of His death was, and then Old Testament prophets were pointing towards the coming of the Messiah and His substitutionary death. And He made these promises. I could make these promises. And then He died. But I could die. The resurrection proves those promises are true.

And what were the promises? That Jesus' death would be payment for our guilt and that we would be guilt-free; that Jesus' beating and method of death, His shame and humiliation, would be our shame and humiliation, and we would receive His honor. And not only is our guilt resolved and honor given us, but also power is given that allows us to have the power of the Spirit to live in our lives and change our very lives.

The resurrection story is the fullness of "For God so loved the world that He sent His own Son to come" and put us back together again. When we read John chapter 21, I want you to listen for Peter for sure. But listen for you. This is your story too. This is what Jesus is going to do to make things well. He's going to recreate moments so that Peter and you and I can understand the fullness of our forgiveness and the restoration of honor.

It goes like this. After the resurrection and six other disciples are on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. And—I don't know—they're just skipping rocks. And then Peter says, *You know what? I'm going to go fishing.* And the other men say, *Okay, well, let's all go fishing.*

They're out all night. They catch nothing. They're coming in, the sun's coming up, it's morning. And they're about one hundred yards off shore and they see a silhouette of a man. It's Jesus. And the man says, *So, you didn't catch a single thing.* Fishermen hate that.

And they say, *Right, no, we didn't catch anything.*

John 21:6

Jesus 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.

And then the man says, *Well, why don't you just throw your nets on the right side of the boat?*

What, they're left-handed fish all day, all night?

Okay, we'll just do that.

By the way, I just want to say, all the stories of Peter and Peter Fishing Company—they never catch anything until Jesus tells them how to fish. I don't know how they got along without Jesus. Honestly, it's a puzzling thing here.

Let me go back. They throw their nets on the right side of the boat and here it is again. It's "last one in is a rotten egg." They start swamping the net, the net starts to tear. John says, *Man, we haven't had a catch like this since ... oh, that's Jesus! That's the Lord!*

John 21:9

When they landed, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it, and some bread.

Peter grabs his jacket, takes it off and puts it around himself and then jumps in the water and swims as far as he can, then starts running and gets to Jesus. And things start to change dramatically. The storyline slows down. Look at all that's happening here. Listen to how vivid it is. In verse 9 it says, "When they landed they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it, and some bread."

Okay, a charcoal fire ... how else can you cook fish? No, there's power in these words. John is an artist. He understands it's not about facts; it's about facts wrapped around experience. Then you get understanding. He's mentioning this charcoal fire because there's only two times in the entire New Testament that the words "charcoal fire" are ever used. Right here on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, and at the high priest's house when Peter denied Jesus three times. He wants you and me to see this and smell this and go back to that.

Our sense of smell is the strongest trigger for remembering vivid memories. And so, here's Peter, seeing this, smelling this. He makes eye contact with Jesus, the stare, and then that gaze. And maybe the shame comes rushing up again. And Jesus is thinking, *We've got to put this man back together.*

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, watch this. 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?"

Simon son of John? Jesus' nickname for him is Peter. Jesus is saying, *Let's go back before I called you the rock. Let's go back to when we met. Let's just start all over again. Do you love me more than these? Remember the Passover meal? You made these comparative comments about your love for me—"Even if everyone else deserts You, I'll be with You, because I love You more."*

What is Jesus doing? It sounds torturous. But it's this. The truth will set you free. And Peter needs to be free. And freedom starts with repentance. You have to repent. And freedom is taking responsibility. And freedom starts with honest repentance. Repentance is when you agree to what you've done independent of circumstances or conditions around you. You take ownership of that. And true repentance—what's happening here—goes to the root cause—not just what you do but why you did it—the values that energize the decision process that causes us to act out.

See why Jesus isn't focusing so much on the behavior of Peter, but the motive? And what happened? Jesus doesn't say, *Okay, look, Peter, what did you do wrong? Let's talk about this. I think this is a learning moment. What did you do?*

Peter lied and then he acted as a coward.

Okay, so what did you learn?

Never lie again and never panic when your life is threatened.

Good. Go on your way.

Jesus is going to the root cause—*What made you do that? How was your persona built, Peter? How did you lay a foundation for your own identity? By comparing yourself to others. It was pride that caused you to crow like you would never leave, like you were a man of courage and valor and integrity. Don't you realize your cowardliness was your lack of humility? The foundation for your life has been your competitiveness towards other people?*

Sure, you know you're right and good because you're comparing yourself to the people around the room, right? It's easy to say, *I'm a good person*, when you keep looking at that guy that lives down the block. *Yeah, I'm not that guy.*

No. He thinks he's more honest or valorous or courageous because his foundation is built on the sand of his own self-righteousness, his own self-will. The center of his soul is his ego. And in this moment of his denial he finds out how thin that slab is and how it's built on sand it just crushes underneath him. And now he's without that, without a foundation.

Jesus is saying, *We've got to restart this whole life of yours and build it in the right place.* Real, true, deep healing comes from real, true, and deep repentance that's about the thing we do. But it's also about the reason we do it. And usually that is pushing God out of the way and putting us on some kind of glorified altar. And then sometimes in His grace He lets us see where that really leads.

Now watch and listen. He's going to put Peter back together again. And He's doing that in a way that you and I can enjoy. He's going to do this for us. This is what the resurrection is all about.

And He's going to ask Peter, "Do you love me more than these?"

And Peter's going to respond in a noncomparative way. He's going to say, "Yes, I love you." And he's going to need to hear it three times for obvious reasons. He's going to need to say out loud that he loves the Lord--because of his guilt. He needs forgiveness.

John 21:15

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 to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?'

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

"Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'"

He's going to have to answer that question again for the sake of shame, so that he might receive the honor that comes from trusting Christ.

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, "Shepherd my sheep."

"Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me?'

'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'

“Jesus said, ‘You can be the shepherd of my sheep.’”

And then, not just for guilt and shame, but for power, you don’t have to be a coward any more. We’ll be building this slab on a rock—the rock of Jesus.

John 21:18

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.”

So a third time He says, “Simon son of John do you love me?”

And then Peter is hurt because Jesus asks his this a third time: “Do you love me?” And he says, “Lord, you know all things. You knew my soul before, you know it now. You know that I love you.”

And Jesus says, “Well then feed my sheep.” And no rooster crowed this time. But the angels cheered.

And I want you to see what’s happening—that Jesus does not just forgive Peter; he restores Peter. He’s putting him back. He’s making him the rock again. Peter heard this: *Get up, Peter, you get up. Stand up, Peter. You’re the rock. Now you can lead that church in Jerusalem. Now you’re qualified. You weren’t qualified before because you were the most out-of-touch disciple that I had. You were the person who most had to push yourself out there and keep your image alive. But now you’re the most broken and the most restored. Peter, you baptize your failure in my grace, and when you come up, your life is different. Now you can lead. Now you can shepherd my sheep, because now you can see.*

Like in a previous story with Jesus, people were confused about a situation that took place, and they couldn’t make sense out of it. And Jesus said, *Look ... wait ... those who have been forgiven much are going to love much.* And it was there all along with everyone that was in the room, but they didn’t understand how much they’d been forgiven, even Peter.

But he does now. It was always there, but now he sees it. Peter is in that place where he’s been forgiven much, so he loves much. And because of that this broken man--restored, put back

together again—is going to understand people. He’s going to become more patient. He understands how the heart works.

And here’s the thing. He won’t be depending upon his own bravado anymore. He won’t be relying on Simon the fisherman. He’ll be relying on Peter, given grace and the gift to serve.

This Is the Gospel

So, this is the gospel, right here. True repentance, what we do and why we did it, leading to a true experience. We’re repenting of our very nature, and then that grace transforms that very nature.

It occurred to me this week as I was looking at this—I’ll bet, as saints, as followers of Christ, I wonder if there are people in our lives who need more than just forgiveness but also need restoration. Can you maybe think of someone in your life, of a situation where you might need to go to them and take them past the forgiveness and give them honor and power? You’ll need to say it with words. It might be part of an experience where you put someone back together again. It’ll be the voice of the Lord himself that will do that. Why not spread a little resurrection power around? It’s what we do as saints—the voice of God, sometimes.

Jesus’ Last Gift to Peter

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.”¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, “Follow me!”

Wait, there’s more. Here’s the last gift Jesus gives Peter. Not just the guilt and shame have been taken away, and the power, but the regret. I love this part a lot. Because Peter still has to live with “I wish I would’ve ...” He wants another shot at this. *Come on. I want to have another opportunity to answer the question “Do you follow Jesus?”* So, Jesus gives him this.

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.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, ‘Follow me!’”

Peter is given this gift of a future persecution. Tertullian writes about how Nero and his evil thugs had caught Peter in 64 AD and asked him, “Are you a follower of Jesus of Nazareth?” And Peter said, “Yes, I am.” I’m sure he said it three times, trying to make up for the past.

Peter writes two letters, two epistles, in the Bible about how to be courageous in the context of persecution. Peter becomes an authority on how not to blink. I love this!

And after Peter has been beaten by Nero and is being led to being crucified like the man he’s following, Peter asks, *Look, I love that I can be crucified like my Savior, but I’m not worthy of that honor. Could you crucify me upside down?* So church history goes. And so, Peter is crucified upside down.

This is the power of the resurrection, my friends. This is the power of the resurrection’s ability to change the human soul. And when we talk about the resurrection, it’s not just about the resurrection of Jesus; this story is the resurrection of Peter. This story is the resurrection of every follower of Jesus Christ. “I once was lost and now I’m found.”

The power of the resurrection has us running in a completely opposite direction in our relationship with God. We’re no longer running from Him in fear; we’re running to Him in hope. That’s the story of Peter. Do you remember how it started, how his journey and adventure with Jesus starts? It starts with this miraculous fish catch. And Peter’s response to that was, *Jesus, run, flee! I’m a sinful man.* He’s running from Jesus because that Peter has built his life and his identity--everything about himself--on comparing himself to others--his righteousness, his self-righteousness.

And that works until true righteousness come into your life. When you experience the real righteousness—Peter sees himself in the brilliance of that holiness. He sees himself for who he really is, and he says, “Get away from me. I am undone.” And now, three years later, after the crucifixion, after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, now they have this huge fish catch, and how does Peter respond, knowing that his debts are paid, his honor has been given to him, and he has power? He runs to Jesus. Because Peter knows that Jesus is more than a moral teacher. Jesus is more than a great example in how we should live our lives. Jesus is a substitute to pay the debt

we owe God, the cost of our sins. He's a mediator between the holiness of God and our corrupt nature, and He makes us well. Jesus is the only king who can put us back together again. And Peter knows that. And this is the story of how it looks.

The glory of the resurrection is that God so loved each and every human soul that He sent His only Son. If we were the only person here He would send His only Son to make sure this debt was paid. If Jesus were here today He'd have this same beach conversation with each and every one of us to make sure we understand and grasp the fullness that the gospel and the proof of the resurrection shows; that this debt is paid and we can have eternal life. And it's a payment in full, because many of us live in an economy of the moral soul, where if I do good and if my good outweighs the bad, I might have a chance at spending some time with God and being approved by Him. And the gospel comes along and says, *Not a prayer. You don't fully understand your debt because you don't fully realize how dark and sinful you are.* And that's what Peter's experience was. He saw a glimpse of that.

And when we have that glimpse we find ourselves saying, *Oh no, now what?* And the gospel, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, says this: that our only hope—and that's all we have is faith—it's faith only—is in Jesus Christ and His works, His life. And He didn't deserve to die. And He died as a substitute for us so that we might have, beyond hope, justification, honor, and power. And if you think that's too good to believe, that's why Jesus said, *I promise you, and I'll bet my resurrection on it.* And when He's raised from the dead, that's what we cling to. We only have faith in only the works of Jesus so that we can live for eternity with Him. And we abandon this other do-good model.

That's what Resurrection Sunday is about. That's why people are cheering all around the world right now. If you never made a choice to transfer where your faith is—if you think it's a good boy, good girl contest and you hope for that—you need to abandon that and go over to what is authentic Christianity: faith alone in Jesus alone and His works alone, not in ours. If you want to do that today, I'd love you to join me in a word of prayer, because your universe is about to change. The way you are seeing your own identity will be altered because you'll be seeing yourself as a very son of God himself, a daughter of the King. You'll inherit His righteousness, His honor, and His power.

Join me. Let's do that today—Easter 2023. Let me pray and then we have some songs to sing to celebrate.

Lord, there are people in this room who have come and this is the first time they've heard the difference between religion—the intuitive, instinctive thought that we could climb some kind of stairway of good hope, good works, good deeds—a stairway to heaven leading to hell. And now, Lord, for those men and women here who are realizing that their souls are darker than they might have understood before and that only King Jesus could put their souls back together again, and they want to trust and have only trust in the works of Jesus Christ alone, they realize that their debt is paid in full. I'd ask that they would surrender their lives to You and get a new name and a new nature and enjoy being part of Your family.

Lord, many of us know this story, and I hope that this story of Peter has rekindled and refreshed anew the power of the promises that You made that were validated on that Sunday morning. When all hope was lost on Saturday, You showed that we are no longer victims of death but now can experience eternal life in this life and in the next; that we can live an abundant life and an assured eternal experience with You. We celebrate that. Thank You for loving us, for loving me so much that You would send Your Son to die for me. We are grateful. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.