

The Empowerment of Restoration – John 21

If John chapter 20 demonstrates the reality and power of the resurrection, John 21 puts front and center the empowering restoration that the Lord offers each of us. As we come to the end of John 20 with its thesis statement for the entire gospel – “...these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that, believing, you might have life in his name...” – we might well expect the words “The End” to appear on the screen. But there’s a little more yet to go. Jesus had appeared personally, one on one to Peter on Easter Sunday and had no doubt encouraged him and expressed forgiveness over Peter’s triple failure in the high priestly courtyard. But we all need more than a clean slate, we desperately need deep healing. How awesome that Jesus took the time (and John took the time to record it) to set the stage for just such healing for Peter and to lead him through it step by step. Chapter 21 is in a real sense John’s version of the “great commission” for all of us – an empowering act of restoration gently leading us into a path of service and discipleship.

Overview: Chapter 21

Here’s one way to “slice and dice” this chapter – three images of the believer:

- Image One: **FISHERMAN** (key theme: Obey him!) **21:1-8**
- Image Two: **SHEPHERD** (key theme: Love him!) **21:9-18**
- Image Three: **DISCIPLE** (key theme: Follow him!) **21:19-25**

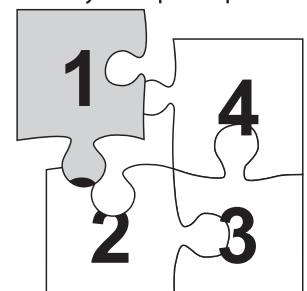
Leader Preparation

Read John 21 imaginatively. Use some different translations and paraphrases if you can, but regardless, really enter into the story with its sights, sounds, and smells. As each character enters the stage probe him – what’s he thinking? What emotions are pulsing within him? Why does he do that? Why does he say this? As Jesus sets the stage for Peter’s restoration he brings Peter vividly back to two key events in his life. First there was the first miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:1-11. Read that account carefully and notice the comparisons and contrasts between that event and this one in John 21. Second is Peter’s denial. Review that story as well in each of the four gospels, carefully noting its details. Commit the chapter in prayer to the Lord, asking him to bring out the truths in your group discussion that he wishes to highlight and drive home.

Suggested Group Activities

- Light-hearted opener: Ask your group to share their best fishing, hunting, or camping adventure. Ask what made it so memorable for them. Lead into Peter’s last great fishing adventure that he never forgot.
- Heavier opener: Share a time in your life when the Lord walked you through a process of deep healing – physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Share what that process looked like, how the Lord orchestrated it, what fruit it bore in your life. Being sensitive to who is present in your group, invite others to share their own experiences of healing. You can gently direct this sharing time into a group contemplation of Peter’s healing, how the Lord handled it and its implications. Then you can bring it full circle to a ministry opportunity for those who need

Weekly Discipleship Track



1. Life reflection – need for change, hunger for God
2. Presentation of truth – teaching and studying
3. Processing the truth – reflection and debrief in community
4. Life change – response to truth, new habits and actions

healing – perhaps prayer and ministry for healing right there in the group, perhaps prayer for the Lord's setting the stage for needed healing.

Some Choice Questions

Here are three questions that might prove worthwhile to ask and explore with your group:

- In fishing all night, using all the old gear he had left two years previous, do you think Peter was just bored and wanted something to do, or was he returning to his old business? Why do you think so?
(Note: the Greek text uses the present tense in Peter's statement "I go (depart) to be fishing...", which many scholars take as an implication to ongoing activity.)
- Why do you think people had so much trouble recognizing Jesus after the resurrection? Is there any significance in this? Who recognized him first here? Is there any significance in this? What is Peter's immediate response to the Lord's presence? How does this compare with his response after the first miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5:1-11? What emotions would be touched on in Peter as he experienced this "déjà vu"?
- As the disciples came to the shore they saw a charcoal fire with fish ready to eat. What's up with that? Why is Jesus up to with "his friends"?
- Charcoal fire, a question repeated three times...why would Jesus lead Peter so vividly back to his threefold failure in response to another set of three questions around another fire (that one at night, this one at day's dawning)? Why does Jesus press the question three times? What do you think Peter is feeling as he answers the first time, then the second, and finally the third time? What is the meaning of the three responses of Jesus to Peter "Feed my lambs," "Shepherd my sheep," "Feed my sheep"? Is there any significance the change of metaphor from fish to sheep?
- What is going in the final exchange in the chapter between Jesus and Peter about Peter's death? Why would Jesus bring that up? What impact do you think it has upon Peter? Why does he look back and ask about John? What do you see implied in Jesus' answer?
- What is the closest you have come to blowing it so badly that you thought God was through with you? What did you discover about God in that experience?
- When have you been tempted to look over your shoulder at someone else and wondered why his or her life was the way it was (especially compared to your life!)? What practical effect does such "looking over your shoulder" have on your present walk with the Lord?
- To what broken places in your life would the Lord lead you right now for the empowering restoration of his grace? Will you let him take you there?

Quote of the Week

"You know, you are very hard on your heart. You are not merciful with those broken places within you..."

He's right, of course, I'm not. They are a nuisance. I don't like feeling as though there is a young and fearful boy inside, and I handle that by shoving those fears down and pushing myself on. I think that's how most of us handle the young and broken places within; we simply try to get past them, push them down, hide them as much as possible, and get on with life. Thank God, Jesus is much more compassionate. I felt I needed to repent of my drivenness, and after a prayer to that effect, I sensed the young part give Christ permission to come in... *"The hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known."*

John Eldredge, **Waking the Dead**