

John 21:15-25

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 April 2016

Preacher: Rob Ilderton

[0 : 00] So if I were to go around the room and ask each of you, what is the gospel? Or what is John's gospel all about? How would you summarize it? Each of you would probably give me some slight variant on some different themes. One of those themes and one of the key themes that we see throughout John's gospel is the love of God for his people and the love of God's people for him.

When John starts off his gospel, he presents in chapter one an incredible thesis statement, if you will, of what the gospel is. And he presents it as the creator God taking on our flesh because of his great love for us and coming and dwelling amongst us and laying down his life for us so that we can once again be brought into the love of God and have a relationship with this gospel.

And as John approaches the end of his gospel, as we get to these last 10 verses, we see this thesis played out in the relationship that Jesus has with two of these disciples.

So as John here is, if you will, tying up loose ends, we see his thesis playing out in two very real lives, two men that Jesus knew intimately and knew well. He answers the question that should be on our minds from even just a few weeks ago.

The last time I spoke to start off the series, I spoke on the passages where Peter denies Jesus. And so now John loops back around and answers the question, well, what about Peter?

[1 : 47] What is Peter's status now? He's denied Christ not once, not twice, but three times. So what's next for Peter?

And I think it's an interesting and it's an important question for us, because I think when you think about relationships in our modern world, how many of us would go, oh, that's it.

And we would write that person off. And we live in a society of broken relationships. We'll talk about that more in a minute. But what John is emphasizing here in this passage, in the relationship with Peter and in his own relationship to Christ, is that the heart of the gospel and the calling of the gospel is for God's people to love Christ and to follow him.

So what about Peter? Peter, when after his denial and after the death of Jesus and the resurrection, we see him last week when Cephas spoke on the earlier verses of this passage.

What's Peter do? He goes back to fishing and he does kind of a rubbish job of it. He stays out all night with his friends. They catch nothing. And then what happens?

[3 : 07] Well, Jesus shows up. And when Jesus shows up, it changes everything. Just cast your nets on the other side of the boat. What's the big deal? And then they bring in such a catch that they were in danger of breaking their nets.

Well, then they sit down and they dine with Jesus. One of the most human things that a risen Savior could do with his followers. It's something that's incredibly intimate.

He sits down and he dines with them. He's not some mere phantom. This isn't a ghost that's kind of just magically shown up. But this is a real person who eats and drinks and dines.

But we also see a Jesus in our passage today who actually loves and cares for his disciples, for his people in an incredible way, in an erratic way.

Peter has denied Jesus. But when Jesus shows up, he reinstates Peter. And he gives him a calling.

[4 : 12] And we see this in this exchange that Peter and Jesus have here, where Jesus asks them what seems to be a very simple question. Peter, do you love me?

Now, if you're a young man dating a young woman, that can be kind of a tricky question to answer, isn't it? Do you love me?

You sometimes want to push that off. But Jesus asks him this question very directly. And it can be a bit of an awkward question, can't it? Given all the history that's already happened. Given his denial. Given his boast that, you know what? If all these other men were to abandon you, I would still stand by you, Jesus. Because I'm just, you know, I'm that great of a guy.

I'm that brave of a guy. And I care about you enough that I would stick by you. And the first thing he does, when asked, hey, do you know this man? Jesus, you're one of his followers. No, I never knew him.

[5 : 13] No, I'm sure. I'm sure I saw you with him, didn't I? No, I'm telling you. I never knew the man. And then a third time, no, I don't know the man. I'm not one of his followers. Very quickly, the bravado of Peter dissipated.

And so Jesus asks him this, what is seemingly a very simple but very important question. Peter, do you love me? And the first time he asks, it's, do you love me, what, more than these?

Referring to the other disciples. Do you love me more than these other men? A reference back to Peter's bravado in his sense of, even if all these men abandon you, I will stand by you. And Jesus asked this question, or some variant of this question, three times.

Harkening back to the threefold denial. And it's a remarkable question. Because it's remarkable for just the simplicity of it, isn't it?

It really cuts to the heart of the matter. It's not, Peter, do you believe in me? Peter, do you have faith in me? How strong is your faith?

[6 : 25] Peter, do you feel that I can save you from your sins? It's not that question, is it? It's a simple question. Peter, do you love me?

Do you have affections for me? Love is a tricky term, isn't it? It can be difficult for us to define exactly what it is.

Some days we can feel like we really passionately love someone. And on other days, we maybe feel less of a passion after we've had an argument or a fight. It's just the nature of life, isn't it?

But what Jesus is getting at is, do you actually love me enough? Do you define your life through me?

And that's actually one of the themes of John's gospel. Is that if we love Christ, if we put our faith in him, then our life and our identity reorients around Jesus as a central person and central aspect of our lives.

[7 : 32] And so these questions, repeated three times, just like Peter's denial, required Peter not to just simply give a straightforward answer, did it?

It actually required, I think, a good bit of self-reflection on Peter's part. What Jesus is doing with Peter is he's actually shepherding Peter along. He's showing him his wrong.

He's showing him his sin. And he's calling him back. Peter, do you love me? And Peter responds with what? Simple humility.

When Jesus asked him, do you love me more than these other disciples? His response wasn't, yes, of course, I love you more than those guys.

But it was what? Simply, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. And when he asked the second time, it's the same answer. And when he asked the third time, Peter is broken by the question.

[8 : 37] And he actually responds by appealing to the divinity of Christ, doesn't he? Lord, you know all things.

You know that I love you. And Jesus' response is very simple. Then feed my sheep.

See, what Jesus is asking of Peter, what Jesus is showing Peter, is a grace that actually heals broken relationships.

It's a grace that actually heals Peter's brokenness. Why do you think Peter was out fishing with his friends? Well, because he didn't know what else to do. So he went back to a previous life, to what he had always just sort of naturally done.

And what Jesus is coming to him and doing is he's calling him back out once again to be his disciple. He's healing this relationship after an act of what Peter probably felt was unforgivable.

[9 : 47] Jesus calls him out of that. And he gives him a new calling to feed his sheep, to establish his church. And I think this leads us to the natural question for us.

What actions against you are unforgivable? If we were to put ourselves in the position of Christ and Peter, what things have you done that you feel are unforgivable?

See, we've all in some way denied Jesus, haven't we? We're born in sin.

We're born denying Jesus. What things have you done that you feel are unforgivable? Well, Jesus comes and asks this simple question.

Do you love me? He doesn't ask, how strongly do you believe? He doesn't ask, how strong is your faith?

[10:55] He simply asks you this question. Do you believe in me? Or do you love me? See, Jesus' forgiveness of Peter isn't simply some kind of model of forgiveness for us to follow.

The message of the gospel is not, look at Jesus. He was such a forgiving guy. Maybe you could go and forgive some people too, maybe. That's not what the gospel is. It's not some template for living a better life and just being better people and good people.

But it's the power for us to forgive. It's the calling for us to reorient our lives around the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And what we end up with with Peter is this calling that Jesus gives him. He says, he tells him three times, care for, tend, feed my sheep.

And the calling that Peter is given, we see it towards the end here, is a calling that will carry him to his death. Peter does this because of who he is in Christ.

[12:06] He's no longer simply Peter, the fisherman, but he is Christ's man. He is one who's been saved through the grace of Jesus and has been called to be an under shepherd, to feed and tend Jesus' sheep.

What does that mean? What we see later in Peter's life, in the book of Acts, which is the book right after this one in your Bibles, is the ongoing ministry of Christ through his Holy Spirit in the establishing of his church.

And Peter plays an important role and a key role in it. As the gospel goes forth, we see Peter going out and sharing the gospel and seeing it spread throughout the world.

And the result of this, the tradition holds, is that in the end, Peter was crucified. Tradition says, crucified upside down, in or around Rome.

And John actually points to this in the conversation that Jesus and Peter has. He says in verse 19, this is to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.

[13:19] So Jesus is calling him out of his sin, out of his denial. He's showing him grace and love and mercy.

And then he's calling him to go out and share the gospel to the point of death. See, Jesus' love for Peter was what really saved Peter.

Jesus' love for Peter is what called Peter to a right relationship with him. So that's Peter. What about John? We see in verses 20-25, John actually referring to himself.

Peter turns and he sees in verse 20, the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. And that's an interesting way of referring to himself, isn't it? We see that throughout John's gospel.

Him calling himself simply the disciple whom Jesus loved. Rather than just saying me or I. And it's probably for modern years it sounds kind of odd.

[14:19] We might be going, well, what's John saying there? Is John saying, well, I'm the disciple that Jesus loved. Jesus really loved me in a special and unique way.

That's not actually what he's saying. It's not a title of pride. But it's one of humility. John no longer identifies himself in relationship to who he believes himself to be.

But he defines himself in relationship to Christ. I'm no longer John. I'm one who's been loved by Jesus.

I'm a man who Jesus loved. See, identity has become a central and polarizing aspect of our society.

And what we see in the gospel is identity is actually something very important. But what we see in political debate today, how do we identify ourselves?

[15:21] In political debate, are you labor or conservative? Thankfully, I'm American. I don't have to be either. Or we see it in the gender debate. Does one have the right to choose their gender based on who they feel that they are?

We see it in all kinds of ways. Even teenagers struggle with this. Which crowd are you going to run with in school?

I don't know if you have these same categories here, but in the States it's, are you an athlete? Or are you a nerd? We all sort of create this persona and this identity.

And the message of the gospel is that there's actually no satisfaction or peace or value in any of our self-identification. It's only if we are identifying ourselves in relation to Christ.

And John shows us an example of that in himself. He's no longer referring to himself as me or I or as John, but simply as the disciple who Jesus loved.

[16:32] And what we see in John's calling, John's also given a calling, isn't he? Peter sees John and the reason why he refers to John, I think, is because they were good friends and he was

