

20260628 Repentance, Restoration and Reinstatement - Dr John Tan
John 21

I want to consider the apostle Peter this morning. Peter, who was referred to as Cephas (John 1:42) meaning 'rock' by the Lord, who was called to be a fisher of man and who was also rebuked as Satan (Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33). Peter, described as impetuous, outspoken, bold, zealous, flawed, fallible, cowardly and passionate. Peter, the one who in John 13:37, Matthew 26:35 and Mark 14:31, boldly stated that he would lay down his life for the Lord and that he would never deny the Lord. Peter, the one who would be recorded in Luke 22:54 – 62 as being the only one who denied Christ three times, despite the fact that Peter knew that the Lord had already said (Matthew 10:33) that whoever denied the Lord before men, that same person would be denied by the Lord before the Father and before the angels of God. Consider Peter who saw the Lord after Jesus's resurrection, Peter who longed to sit down with the Lord to confess his sin of denying Jesus. For in all that time between Peter denying Jesus to seeing His Lord again, one thing weighed heavily on Peter's mind and heart. The others had run away when the Lord was brought before His trial. Peter was the one who denied Him, not once, not twice but three times.

Peter really did love the Lord but here he is now, feeling like he had really fouled this up big time. Would Jesus forgive him and take him back? Or would Peter now be denied by the Lord before God?

All that time, Peter was waiting for a chance to talk to the Lord, but he was made to wait for what must have seemed like an interminable length of time. In all that waiting, Peter decided to do what he had done for a good part of his life – Peter decided he might as well go fishing. And the others decided to go with him.

Peter is an experienced fisherman and yet all that night, they caught nothing. If the catching of fish might have been taken as a sign of God's favor, a sign that the Lord Jesus was going to tell Peter that it was time for them to have that little chat where Peter would be restored, imagine the message that Peter must have had with not being able to catch even one fish for the whole night! It must surely have seemed like a terrible time for Peter.

Then something changed. This was when the disciples made the two meters shift and followed the call of the Lord. The result was an incredible 153 fish haul.

Now we turn to the rest of the passage that looks at the matter of Peter's repentance, restoration and reinstatement which is at the heart of today's message. We should note that this account can only be

found in the book of John – the other three Synoptic gospels are silent on this matter. There has always been a bit of tension between Peter and John. For instance, Peter is referred to as the apostle who loved the Lord whereas John is known as the one whom the Lord loved. And yet despite the tensions, it was John who recorded this very important part of Peter's life. Where the other three gospels clearly wrote about how Peter denied the Lord three times, it is only the book of John that reveals Peter's repentance, restoration and reinstatement. But instead of the cheap, easy, almost careless 'repentance' that we so often engage ourselves in when we have failed the Lord, this passage would show us what true repentance, true restoration and true reinstatement really is.

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

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁷The 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."

Repentance and restoration

Now after breakfast, and presumably in front of the others, Jesus looks at Peter and asked Peter 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' In this threefold line of questioning, this first question was the only one that contained the words 'more than these'. We are not totally sure what 'more than these mean' but it must have jolted Peter when the Lord asked him whether he, Peter, loved the Lord more than anything else.

We also need to note the language used and also the subsequent linguistic shift in this section. In the first two instances, the Lord asked Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you *agapao* or do you *agape* me?' The word used here represents the highest, unconditional, covenantal, self-sacrificing love, which was

demonstrative of the love that the Lord had for all of us when He went to the cross for us. In other words, ‘do you love me more than everything, do you love me so much that you would die for me if necessary?’

Peter’s answer to the first two questions was ‘Lord, you know that I *phileo* you’. What Peter said here was ‘Lord, I have a deep affection and feel this great brotherly love for you, but I really cannot claim that I am totally devoted to you’.

Then came the linguistic shift. Note that on the third question, the Lord asked Peter, ‘do you *phileo* me’. This time the Lord comes down to Peter’s level of definition of love and accepts the humbler, honest affection that Peter was ready to give at that point in time. Once again, albeit frustratingly so, Peter says ‘Lord, You know everything, You know that I have a deep affection for You and that I really respect You.’ Peter was not about to make the mistake of saying, even if the others do not love You, I will love You to the very end and even die for You. Eventually though, and at the end of his life, I think that Peter was able to say ‘Lord, I *agape* You’ for Peter died, crucified on a cross, upside down for his Lord.

One thing that we can all take to heart from the linguistic shift from this story is that while it is impossible to satisfy the Lord (i.e., to *agape* Him) it is actually not difficult to please Him. We start to *phileo* Him and then over time and as we continually follow Him, He transforms that *phileo* to *agape* for Him. Let me say that again, it is impossible to satisfy God, but it is not difficult to please Him, for when we set our hearts aright, He who began the good work in us will bring it to completion (Phil 1:6)

Reinstatement

It is worthy to note that regardless of whether the Lord had used the words *agape* or *phileo*, He reinstated Peter by saying, ‘Feed my sheep’, ‘Take care of my sheep’, ‘Feed my sheep’ and capped it all off by saying ‘Follow Me’.

So then, what is this all about?

I think that the first thing we need to remember that where there is true repentance, there will be forgiveness and restoration (with the exception of the one unforgiveable sin). Failure does not mean that it is all over for you and that you will forever be of no use to the Lord. Of course, if you have done wrong and you keep insisting that you have done nothing wrong, that would be a different scenario altogether. But

sometimes we fail the Lord, and we fail so badly that we think that we will never amount to anything in God's eyes, or that we would never be able to return to His fold again, that He would never accept us again. And even though we ask for forgiveness God seems to take forever to answer to our prayers. When there is repentance, the Lord's forgiveness may seem to take a little while (or even a long time) in coming. But when it comes, it often comes with the blessing of what we need – much like fishing the whole night and then being blessed with 153 fishes, with breakfast and then with His blessings and confirmation.

The second is that in the reinstatement process, we are reinstated to actually do something for the Kingdom. We are reinstated to bring people to the Lord and to feed and tend to His sheep. We are restored and reinstated to do the will of the Lord, and not just so that we can say "I'm forgiven".

The third thing that we need to be mindful of after we have repented, been restored and reinstated is that we need to continue to 'Follow Him'. If we do not continue to follow Him, we will soon fall away again. But the beauty of it all is that when repentance, restoration and reinstatement all work together, the Lord will complete the good work that He began in us.

I take encouragement and heart to know that He who asks this question will also provide the way to restore and reinstate our love for Him. And what we need to do is to follow Him. And just like the song says, 'So if You find it in Your heart to let me start again, I'll be Your witness Lord, Your witness Lord, Your witness to the end of my life. Let me make it right. Let me start again. I'll be Your witness to the end.' And this great God of love and forgiveness, will restore and reinstate us, if whenever we fail, we repent.