

INTRODUCTION

We have been going verse by verse through John since May of 2018. There is one more message in the series before we finish it. A lot has changed in the past 30 months. But one thing that hasn't changed is the Word of God. The Bible says in Isaiah 40 verse 8, "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever."

One year ago Al Fadi stood here dressed in his traditional Saudi attire and gave his testimony of how he converted from Wahabi Islam to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He was pretty funny. He talked about the first time he attended a Christian church. He expected the preacher to be dressed like the Pope and he was surprised to see the pastor wearing a Hawaiian shirt. But he said the thing that surprised him the most was when the pastor asked everyone to open their Bibles to John, and he mentioned he was beginning the third year teaching through John. Al Fadi was blown away by the thought that a person could study and talk through one book in the New Testament for three years. He knew all the parts of the Koran by heart, and he didn't think any section of it had enough teaching to spend that long studying it. He said that day he began his love affair with the Bible.

So you may be thinking, "This sure has been a long series." But the very fact that I have been studying and teaching the Bible for the past fifty years, and there's still plenty I haven't covered says something about the Word of God. You never finish studying it, because it is the eternal Word of God.

The setting of our scripture is on the lakeshore of the Sea of Galilee. It's in the early morning and this is the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples since He had been resurrected. They were out on the lake fishing and Jesus invited them to share breakfast. We've all heard of after-dinner conversations. Jesus has a very important after breakfast conversation with Simon Peter.

John 21:15-23. When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said to him, "you know that I love you."

"Feed my lambs," he told him. A second time he asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord," he said to him, "you know that I love you." "Shepherd my sheep," he told him.

He asked him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

"Feed my sheep," Jesus said.

"Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don't want to go." He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, "Follow me."

So Peter turned around and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them, the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and asked, "Lord, who is the one that's going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?"

"If I want him to remain until I come," Jesus answered, "what is that to you? As for you, follow me." So this rumor spread to the brothers and sisters that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not tell him that he would not die, but, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

Jesus had this conversation with Peter because He wanted to restore him to usefulness. Peter had failed the Lord and he probably wondered if the Lord could ever use him again. Let me remind you that God is the God of the second chance—He's the God of the third fourth and hundredth chance. If you have failed the Lord in the past, remember that Jesus can restore you. The devil comes to kill, steal, and destroy. He's the great destroyer. But Jesus is the great restorer. He took a murderer like Moses and used him. He took an adulterer like David and used him. He took Christ-hating Jewish terrorist by the named Saul and gave him a new name, Paul, and used him mightily. And God can use you. He is the great restorer.

A couple of hours southwest of Tyler, two believers, Cliff and Joanna Gaines, have put Waco on the map by taking run-down houses and restoring them. That's what God does with people. God is the original Fixer Upper. Here are three important truths about how God restores us.

1. LOVING JESUS IS THE KEY TO KNOWING HIM.

This after breakfast conversation takes us back to the night before the crucifixion. There are too many clues to miss the point. While standing around a campfire Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Days earlier, while standing around another campfire at the House of Caiaphas, Peter had denied the Lord three times. Peter had failed the Lord. Jesus confronted Peter to restore him to usefulness. The first campfire was a fire of humiliation; the second fire was a fire of restoration. At the Last Supper Jesus predicted that one of the disciples would betray Him and that all of them would forsake Him and scatter into the darkness. But big, bad Simon Peter boasted to Jesus, "Lord, these other guys may run and hide. But I won't fail you. I'll die for you if I have to!" Jesus had smiled and said, "Peter, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Luke tells us that after Peter had denied Jesus while cursing like a sailor, the guards were moving Jesus toward a holding cell and Jesus locked His eyes on Peter's. The Bible says that Peter went out and wept bitterly.

There is a play on words that occurs here that doesn't come across in the English translation. Jesus and Peter use different words of love. Jesus asked, "Simon, son of John, do you *agapao* me?" (Meaning: Do you have a perfect love for me?) Peter said, "Lord you know I'm fond of

you." Peter used *phileo* so he wouldn't boast of having *agapao*, perfect love. Round two: Peter do you love me perfectly? Lord, you know I'm fond of you. Round three, Jesus changes to match Peter's word for love. He asked, "Peter are you even fond of me? (He used *phileo*). The Bible says that Peter was grieved. And Peter said, "Lord, you know me better than I know myself. I'm not going to make claims I can't keep. You know that I'm fond of you."

There have been songs written about to know him is to love him. But it is literally true that to know Jesus is to love Him. And we are called to love Jesus, even though we've never seen Him. The Bible says in 1 Peter 1:8: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy."

Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me more than THESE?" What was He talking about? "Do you love me more than these other disciples?" Or was he pointing to the boat and nets and asking, "Do you love me more than fishing?"

Personal question: Do you love Jesus more than any person or anything?

The Christian life isn't complicated. It's not learning a multitude of rules and regulations. It isn't performing a series of religious rituals. It's simply loving God. Jesus said, "The first and greatest commandment is this: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your strength, and your mind."

In Matthew 13 Jesus told a parable in one verse. He talked about a merchant who was shopping for pearls. He found one pearl that was the most beautiful, perfect pearl he had ever seen. Without hesitation, the merchant liquidated all his assets and bought that one pearl. That's why it's called The Pearl of Great Price. So what is the pearl Jesus was talking about? It's knowing and loving Jesus. You can't put a price tag on that

2. SERVING JESUS IS THE RESULT OF LOVING HIM.

Each time Peter answered, Jesus said, "Feed my lambs. Shepherd my sheep. Feed my sheep." People are like sheep who need a shepherd. Sheep aren't smart, and they can wander off into danger. We need someone to shepherd us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd, and we serve Him by feeding and shepherding His sheep.

Jesus said, "Feed MY lambs." "Shepherd MY flock." Through the years I've heard preachers talk about what's happening in MY church and they sometimes forget that it's not MY church it's the Lord's Church.

Jesus didn't say, "Upon this rock you will build your church." He didn't say, "Upon this rock I will build YOUR church." He said, "Upon this rock I will build MY church."

Our job is to show our love for Jesus by serving others. The writer of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 6:10: "For God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you demonstrated for his name by serving the saints—and by continuing to serve them."

The first commandment is to love God, but the second is to love our neighbor as ourselves. We show our love for God by loving and serving others.

Personal question: Are you laying down your life for others?

We tend to be so selfish that we focus on ourselves more than others. Before cellphones, narcissists had to find a mirror to see themselves. But now, we take thousands of selfies. We have to be the center of the frame. The first time I visited the Louvre, people were taking pictures of the Mona Lisa. The last time I visited the Louvre, thousands of people were taking selfies of themselves in front of the Mona Lisa. As followers of Jesus we should be more interested in being un-selfies than taking selfies. According to USA Today on average a millennial will take 25,000 selfies in his or her lifetime.

Are you investing in serving others? But you may be thinking, "Sheep aren't that lovable. I know some sheep who are mean and vindictive. There are some sheep who have hurt me. Am I still supposed to serve them?"

Jesus didn't ask Peter, "Do you love my sheep?" He asked, "Do you love ME?" if the answer is yes, then you'll be willing to serve others.

Years ago Don Francisco wrote a song entitled "The Steeple Song." It was a song about Jesus speaking to the modern church. It goes this way: I don't care how many busses you own or the size of your sanctuary. It doesn't matter how steep your steeple is if it's sitting on a cemetery. I don't care if you paved your parking lot and put pads upon your pews. The thing that I need to ask you is, "Are you missing all my cues?" Do you love your wife? For her and for your children are you laying down your life? What about the others? Are you living as a servant to you sister and your brother? Do you make the poor man beg you for a bone? Do the widows and the orphans cry alone?"

Jesus said, "Greater love has no person than this: that a person would lay down their life for their friends." He laid down His life when He died. But when we talk about laying down your life for others, it doesn't necessarily mean that you die for them. It may mean that you call up that shut in neighbor and offer to bring some groceries. It may mean that you rake the leaves in the yard next to your house.

And Peter did change his job from fishing to being a shepherd. We never read that he went fishing again. The next time we see Peter in the book of Acts, he is feeding people with the Word of God and 3,000 people were saved. And Peter was the first one to feed the Word of God to a Gentile named Cornelius, and he and his household were saved.

3. FOLLOWING JESUS GIVES US HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

Jesus made three important statements in this passage one was a question and the other two were commands. He asked, "Do you love me more than these?" Then He said, "Feed my sheep." And then He said to Peter, "Follow me." That wasn't the first time Peter had heard that. Three

years earlier on the same lakeshore Jesus had said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

But in this context, we're told that Jesus said, "Follow me" in reference to the kind of death in which Peter would glorify God. Jesus said, "When you were a young man, you got to go wherever you wanted. But one day when you're old someone will take your hands and tie them up and take you to a place you don't want to go." The Bible doesn't tell us how Peter died, but one of the first church historians, Eusebius quotes Origen who wrote that "Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer." The tradition is that Peter didn't feel worthy to be crucified in the same way Jesus was. That's how far Peter had grown spiritually since denying Jesus three times.



Crucifixion of Saint Peter
Caravaggio
Oil on Canvas, c. 1601

One of my favorite paintings of this scene was done by the Italian Master Caravaggio. Peter is depicted as an old man, but still a man of strength. He is already nailed to the cross and three men are lifting the cross. Peter is looking to his left, perhaps staring at the spike in his hand, or perhaps looking back in time to the day His Lord was crucified.

Jesus knew how and when Peter would die. And He knows how and when you and I will die. In Psalm 139:16 we read: "You saw me before I was born. The days allotted to me had all been recorded in your book, before any of them ever began."

In 2003, the U.S. had invaded Iraq and Sadaam Hussein was on the run and hiding. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, was at a press conference. And he reported that they were on the trail to find Sadaam. One of the reporters asked him, "So you would say that Sadaam's days are numbered?" Donald Rumsfeld, who is a man

of faith paused and said, "I guess you could say the same for all of us—all our days are numbered."

But in spite of troubles around us, we have one of the most precious commodities on the planet: Hope. The Bible is full of hope. In one of the darkest times of Israel's history, after they had been invaded by a foreign power, and the Solomon's Temple had been demolished. God gave this word through Jeremiah in 31:17: "There is hope for your future—this is the Lord's declaration—and your children will return to their own territory." When Jeremiah wrote that, Jerusalem was a war zone. But Jeremiah had so much hope, that he bought a piece of property in the middle of a war zone. That's faith and hope!

If the Lord tarries, all of us will have our D-day. Our death day. But Paul said we don't sorrow like those who have no hope. We have the hope of knowing where we're going and who will be there.

Personal question: Are you willing to glorify God in your life and in your death?

Jim Elliot is one of my spiritual heroes. On January 8, 1956, he and three other men were attacked and killed by the Auca Indians in the jungles of Ecuador. Elliot and a few others went to take the gospel to these primitive people. The story about their deaths captivated the nation because of a story in *Life Magazine*. Jim's wife, Elizabeth Elliot, wrote about the event in *Through Gates of Splendor*. Although it was a tragedy, Jim was ready to die. In his journal, Jim Elliot wrote: “God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life that I may burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God for it is Thine. I seek not a long life but a full one like You, Lord Jesus.” And then he wrote the quote for which is famous: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Jim Elliot was 28 years old when he died carrying the Gospel to those who had never heard.

Those jungle warriors didn't kill Jim Elliot because he was already dead before he got to South America.

CONCLUSION

Let's circle back to our scripture. After his conversation with Jesus, Peter pointed to John and said, “What about him Lord?” I think he was just trying to change the subject. But Jesus said, “So what if I say that John is going to live to see my coming, what is that to you? Follow me.” John wrote this Gospel as an old man and he addresses a rumor—yes they had rumors back then, too. A rumor spread that John would remain alive until Jesus returned. John was trying to correct the rumor. And eventually John died, and Jesus hadn't returned. But John DID see the return of Jesus and he wrote about it. Later John was arrested by the Romans and exiled to the Island of Patmos—and if you've read the book of Revelation, John describes the return of the Lord.

I mentioned a few weeks ago that when I was a boy I loved to read the Hardy Boys mystery books. Joe and Frank would always get in trouble. Some nights, my mother would tell me to turn off the light and go to sleep but I didn't want to stop reading because Joe and Frank were lost in a dark cave, or hanging onto a tree at the edge of a cliff. So I couldn't just leave them without knowing what happened. I would flip to the last page and would read where Joe and Frank were sitting down to a hot meal safe at home. And I could go to sleep. I didn't know all the details, but I knew that in the end, they would be safe and sound.

Brothers and sisters, we are living in crazy times. But I have read the last page of this book, and I know in the end Jesus wins and we will be with Him. Here's what we read on the last page of the Bible: “There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun,

because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever... He who testifies about these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!
(Revelation 22:3-5,20)

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"For God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you demonstrated for his name by serving the saints—and by continuing to serve them." *Hebrews 6:10 CSB*

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"There is hope for your future—this is the Lord's declaration—and your children will return to their own territory." *Jeremiah 31:17 CSB*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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