

Series: What Jesus Would Say

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

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John 21:15-22

“The Restorative Power of Jesus”

Every year, Time Magazine gives a review of the highs and lows—the good and the bad

-2013 was a GOOD year for—

-Cronuts—those croissant/doughnut hybrids

-the Red Sox, Ron Burgundy, the Dow Jones, Pope Francis, Peyton Manning, Candy Crush Saga, and Water Melon Oreos

NOT SO GOOD a year for—

-the White Sox, the Lone Ranger, the Houston Texans, the NSA, the Mayor of San Diego, and Blockbuster

-if we haven't already—we will likely do an assessment of our highs and our lows—what was good and what was bad

-in the gospel of John—the year 33 wasn't so good for Peter

-a disciple who made a string of bad choices

-and even returning to the world he knew—coming back to his career—even here he didn't do so well—read 21:3

-it must have felt like life was falling apart

1. his life had been one of empty boasts—13:38

“I will lay down my life for You”

-but Jesus was right all along when He responded—“Really?”

2. he thought he was doing the manly thing when he pulled out his sword—only to be rebuked by Jesus

3. and then there was the total collapse in the courtyard—denying he ever knew Jesus—18:15-21

-everybody fails—but few like Peter

-to be tagged for eternity as the guy who denied Jesus

-this was a man affectionately referred to as the “Rock”

-but why?

a) was it because Jesus saw a certain gravitas in Peter?

-a fortress like strength?

b) or was it a device to remind Peter of what he needed to become—stable, solid, unwavering, steady—a heavyweight

-for in most of Peter's narrative—he was anything but a rock
-brash, impetuous, impulsive, vacillating—a lightweight

-not that Peter is alone—he joins a long cast of biblical characters that were not anything but rocklike
-Abraham, Sarah, Saul, David, Solomon—were all God-loving, courageous, brilliant, fearless, loyal—as well as adulterers, murderers, and manic depressives
-and here in John—nearly every character in the book—Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the paralytic, the crowd, the brothers—all needed redemptive work—JUST AS US!

-so what is Jesus to do with Peter—for Peter's failure was especially personal?
-condemn Peter? Write him off?

*“Peter, you know you really disappointed Me?
“I really thought you were better than this”*

-it's what we often do with people who have personally disappointed us—betrayed us—hurt us

-John 21 tells us what Jesus did with Peter
-the same thing He does with us
-He reveals Himself and speaks—engaging our wills and asking questions—read verse 15a

-what we first notice is that Jesus used Peter's full name—not his nickname “Rock”—nor simply “Simon”
-which might signal a rebuke
-*we all know the tone—“John Johnson—get this mess picked up now!”*

-the second thing we notice is the question
-it's hard to know what Jesus was asking—“love Me more than these...these what?”
-Peter must have wondered...

- a) do I love You more than I love THESE—MEN?
-do I want You more than I want their acceptance and applause and approval?
- b) do I love You more than I love THESE—THINGS?
-more than these fish, these nets, this boat, these oars?
-do I love You more than my work—more than my profession—more than my career?

APPLICATION—these are fair interpretations
-sometimes we can sense God asking us these same questions
-are You more important to me than this relationship?
-is there something in my life I have put in front of You?

-but the context suggests this is not what Jesus was asking Peter—here's what makes better sense—

c) "Do you love Me more than THESE—LOVE ME?

-do you still think that you stand above everyone else when it comes to loyalty to God?

-are you still ready to say—*"Even if everyone runs away because of You, I will never run away!"—Matthew 26:33*

-Peter's response is concise, measured—read 15b

-no longer is Peter using comparative language

-his swagger has been reduced to a simple affirmation of affection

-he does not venture to use the higher word for loveⁱ

-he knows he cannot impress Jesus any longer with words—Jesus can see through him

-this is—the One who knows all things

-*knows what side of the boat the fish are on*

-*knows what side the heart is on*

-but Jesus is not finished—He is doing heart surgery—and this requires time—going back to make sure

-maybe Jesus now stops and looks more deeply into Peter's face—read verse 16a

-no longer is Jesus asking Peter if his love trumps others

-He wants to know if Peter really does love Him

-again—Peter responds with the same exact words—read verse 16b

APPLICATION—John is not writing this so that we can listen in like some passive audience

-this is Jesus asking us the same question—and it probably needs to be repeated to us

-just as here—one more time in this conversation—Jesus probes and asks—read verse 17a

-Peter once again affirms his love—read verse 17b

-Peter is now offended, hurt

-*"Are You not listening? Are You not taking me seriously? Don't You believe Me?" "Don't my words mean anything?"*

-well—not quite yet—but we're getting there

What is Jesus doing here? The same thing He does with us when we fail—and one could use a number of terms—

1. HE IS REPAIRING

-putting back together what has been torn, broken

-*God doesn't intend to leave people wallowing in their failures*

-Jesus is putting Peter's broken world back together—and this is not always pleasant

-He does not overlook sin, sweep things under the carpet

-Jesus' questions offer gentle and excruciating reproachⁱⁱ

-“Peter—could it be that I am asking again and again because I still see words that may not stand up to action?”

2. HE IS RESTORING

-more than putting back together—He is returning Peter to his original condition

-there is a sense of déjà vu—a charcoal fire, three questions—only they are not asked by a servant girl—but by Jesus

-and maybe with each question of love—He is erasing each statement of denial

-I like how Bruner puts it—

“Perhaps Jesus wants Peter’s final memory of his last meeting with Him to be Peter’s threefold ‘I do love You Lord’, ‘I do love You Lord’, ‘I do love You Lord’ rather than his shameful threefold ‘I don’t know the Man’, ‘I don’t know the Man’, ‘I don’t know the Man’ⁱⁱⁱ

-Jesus wants to restore Peter to a life of rocklike grace and humility and gratitude

3. HE IS REINSTATING

-He is taking what has been repaired, restored, and putting back in us

-rather than consign to the failure pile—no longer of kingdom use—forgiven but no longer functional

-Jesus did more than untie the knots and repair the holes—He called him back into mission

-so...with every question is a corresponding charge

-Jesus wants Peter to hear three times—I have a future for you—rather than—You are no longer salvageable

-feed My lambs—15b

-shepherd My sheep—16b

-feed My sheep—17b

-Jesus was doing what He often does with us

-create the conditions for people in disrepair to succeed

-it’s not that Peter suddenly got it

-even here—before the conversation is over—He still compares himself to others (verse 21)

-and down the road—Paul will severely rebuke Peter for caving in (Galatians 2)

-and the conditions for success are in motion

-and by the time he writes his epistles—Peter is a ROCK

CONCLUSION

Every time I read about failure in Scripture—I go back and reread parts of MacDonald’s Rebuilding Your Broken World

-and maybe that is because—like his—there are times our worlds break apart

-a personal life breaks in pieces

-a marriage falls apart
-a career crashes to the ground—a hope collapses

-this time—I focused on his final chapter—“Finishing the Race”
-during his season in the valley—MacDonald received this letter
This is Jesus’ letter to the church
-when we stray outside of His will—and screw up
-and join this worldwide fraternity of those who know what it is like to feel useless and hopeless
-there is repairing and restoring and reinstating to be found^{iv}

-GET UP AND FINISH THE RACE

LG QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have a story of God’s restorative grace?
2. Why do you think Jesus commissioned Peter to feed His sheep rather than win a lost world?
3. What is the message of this conversation for the church today?
4. What is it about Peter that wants to compare himself with others? (verse 21)
5. How does this conversation encourage you?

ⁱ Bf Westcott, the gospel according to john, 367

ⁱⁱ Duke, irony, 98

ⁱⁱⁱ Bruner, 1230

^{iv} MacDonald, repairing Your Broken World, 222