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RUF Bible Study – The Gospel According to Peter  
April 21, 2009  
Another Great Commission – John 21:1-19

When I was five I broke my arm. It was 1976, the bicentennial year celebration was in full swing. I had just learned how to ride a two-wheeler. On my maiden voyage, I realized I didn't know how to stop or turn, so I bit it hard at the end of the street, going head over heels in the ditch when the road veered to the right. Ouch. But no broken bones. Later that summer, after I perfected the turning and stopping part, I had a rather unfortunate thing happen. I was sitting there on the grass on my bike, legs on the ground. I lost my balance and fell over. And broke my elbow. Oh baby, the pain. I can remember them pulling my arm straight to xray it – I almost passed out and am sure I screamed the entire time.

Apparently they didn't care too much to minimize scarring back then, because I have the biggest one possible. That was a bad day for me. Have you broken any bones in your life yet? How did that feel? Not fun, I'd guess.

Here we have a post-resurrection occurrence of Jesus with his friend, Peter. When we last left Peter in the spotlight, he was a broken man, having denied Jesus three times, betraying his best friend and Savior, the one he had called the Son of God.

We did briefly see Peter at the tomb as he raced to see what the women were talking about. He couldn't believe that Jesus actually had risen from the dead; surely his body must have been stolen. But he was wrong. Jesus was alive, somehow. And he remembered that Jesus had said that this very thing would happen. The gospels then record Jesus showing up now and then – the road to Emmaus, at a meal, here and there, sometimes, most the time unrecognized at first.

Unmistakably, Jesus rose from the dead. This proved that all he said and did was true, that he really was the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior, come to save sinners. Prophet, priest and king for all time. Jesus of Nazareth.

Let's look at three results of this resurrection, three implications that we see here at the end of John's gospel.

***Because Jesus rose from the dead, we receive motivation.***

It's interesting to notice that with a resurrected Jesus walking around, the disciples... go fishing. It seems like they're unsure about just what to do with themselves. Jesus hadn't thrown the Romans into the sea after all. He wasn't the kind of king they had expected. And yet he'd done everything he'd said he would do. So what should *they* do?

Peter heads to the lake with his buddies. *1-3 After this, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee). This is how he did it: Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed "Twin"), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter announced, "I'm going fishing." 3-4 The rest of them replied, "We're going with you." They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night.*

He finds his boat and his nets, and he goes back to his job, or the task that used to be his job. He wants to keep busy, to do something he knows. He's motivated to work with his hands. They're not sitting around doing nothing, waiting for Jesus to tell them what to do. They are motivated to be with his buddies side by side, talking about what had happened.

And it's then – while fishing – that they see him.

In the normalness of fishing, Jesus shows up.

You have to wonder if they knew it was him right away. John writes his name so we know, but the disciples had been surprised again and again by Jesus since Good Friday. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn't recognize him.

*5 Jesus spoke to them: "Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?" They answered, "No."*

*6 He said, "Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens."*

*They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren't strong enough to pull it in.*

*7 Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Master!"*

In a task Peter had done thousands of times, he hears a man telling him to throw his nets over the side. Peter is motivated to obey, after all, who knows what will happen, right? He's seen miracles before; he might see them again. So he obeys, and what happens? Another miraculous catch. Who must it be that had given him the instructions? Jesus! So what does Peter do? *When Simon Peter realized that it was the Master, he threw on some clothes, for he was stripped for work, and dove into the sea.*

He's motivated to jump into the water and swim to Jesus. Remember that he has in the past walked on water, but

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For this series, I used commentaries all throughout the gospels. I also used as my base text Michael Card's book, *The Fragile Stone*. I consulted sermons by Rev. Tim Keller found out [www.redeemer.com](http://www.redeemer.com) and RUF Campus Minister Les Newsom in many instances. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

here he doesn't want to mess with all that – he wants to get there and see his friend. Imagine him pulling himself out of the water dripping wet and exhausted. Have you ever swum 100 yards? I would be gasping for air, hanging on to Jesus and then pulling back telling him I'm sorry for getting him so wet. What a moment. They never knew if they would see him again. And they would be so glad when they got to.

Peter's pretty motivated by Jesus here. A dead Jesus wouldn't have done that nearly as much. But a resurrected one brings even more vitality to this simple fisherman.

Are you motivated by Jesus? Are you looking for him to show up? He may not come as you expect. In fact, you may not recognize him at first, but when you see him it will be unmistakable. Will you jump out to see him? None of the other apostles did. They did get to see him, but only after Peter did. Wet and tired, risking his reputation, he saw Jesus first. Would you do that? Would you risk your pride, your energy and your comfort to be next to Christ?

***Because Jesus rose from the dead, we receive mercy [forgiveness and restoration].***

The rest of Jesus' disciples do pull up and they haul in the nets, counting out the fish. Jesus has made them breakfast, something that Peter has learned not to protest any more.

*The other disciples came in by boat for they weren't far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it.*

*10-11 Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you've just caught." Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore—153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn't rip. 12 Jesus said, "Breakfast is ready." Not one of the disciples dared ask, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Master.*

*13-14 Jesus then took the bread and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus had shown himself alive to the disciples since being raised from the dead.*

That would be enough wouldn't it? To have another meal with Jesus, are you kidding me, how cool would that be? Again served by Jesus. No one was arguing over who was the greatest. The greatest was making them breakfast. I'll bet they were thrilled to be there. Listening to him talk and recounting their stories around the fire. Making s'mores probably.

At some point, Jesus pulls Peter aside. Maybe this conversation takes place in front of all of them, or maybe in private. He wants to say something to Peter. John is the only one to record this conversation, a delightful grace for him to do so.

*15 After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"<sup>2</sup>*

What would Peter have been thinking? Do I love you more than the other disciples love you? Duh, Jesus. I hate to say it, but if you're asking, Yes, compared to the others I love you more. I just dived in to water and swam to see you, didn't I? But Peter restrains himself.

*"Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

Here Jesus calls Peter not to be a fisherman, but to be a shepherd. He tells him to feed his lambs. Peter loved Jesus, but Jesus is telling him that his love will be shown in his obedience. What is he supposed to feed these lambs? – Jesus.

Jesus asks again. *16 He then asked a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"* Again, Peter answers him. *"Yes, Master, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Shepherd my sheep."* You know that I love you, Jesus. Why are you asking me this? Well, aside from the fact that I betrayed you, but I thought we were past that. Yes, you know that I love you. Jesus told him, *Take care of my sheep. Pastor them. Shepherd them.*

Now we have to wonder. How much time goes by between the second and third questions? They might be right after each other, rapid fire. But maybe Jesus lets it go and then brings it up again awhile later when Peter has forgotten. Maybe Peter has dozed off a bit.

*But Jesus doesn't let it go. He asks again. Then he said it a third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"* And here we get classic Peter. He's annoyed. He's now upset. *Peter was upset that he asked for the third time, "Do you love me?" so he answered, "Master, you know everything there is to know. You've got to know that I love you."*

Jesus! Will you stop with this question?! Let's think this through together, because you're not getting it. I know I denied you back then, but sheesh, the pressure and the questions, and you have to admit you were a little difficult to follow with all the "dying" stuff. You really went through with it and then you came back to life and that was pretty awesome. Okay, now you might have forgotten but – you know everything! You know what I'm thinking right now! And now! And what I'm going to say next. I can't fool you if I say – slug. Or how I love my shuffle songs feature on my iPod. You know everything. So it only stands to reason that you know that I love you. And the only reason I can think of you asking this again, for the third time is ..... Oh.

Now that is certainly a hypothetical way of Peter thinking. We don't know if he totally got it. But it appears that at least John did, for he includes it here for us to see. I think Peter did get it. Three times he denied Jesus. Three times Jesus is asking the question for Peter's affirmation of love.

Jesus is the perfect Friend. Friendship entails forgiveness. His questions really are painful, but they are meant to restore Peter. In the perfect way, Jesus lovingly reminds Peter that his forgiveness comes at the price of his failures. And, like we've said before, Jesus died for those failures, even for Peter's betrayal of Jesus those few nights before.

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<sup>2</sup> This is the text where you'll hear of the different forms of the word "love" and all that. Don't buy it. There are different words that overlap in meaning, and also John uses different forms of the word "know" here too. Aw shucks.

Jesus goes out of his way to show Peter that he is restored. Why?

Because we all struggle with this. We're all really big huge messes. I sure am.

To borrow from John Piper, "I AM BAD." Doug Serven is bad. I am a bad, bad man. I do things that hurt people. I disappoint people. I am vile, and filled with sin and wickedness.

Many of think we're mostly good people with a little bit of bad wrapped around on the outside. But the Bible says – and Reformed theology affirms, that we're mostly bad with just a teeny bit of good wrapped around. The farther you get to know me, the more bad you get.

Do you agree with this assessment? Do you know your own soul? Do you understand this basic truth?

What do you do when you mess up? When you really mess up?

I'll bet you either try to ignore it or you beat yourself up over it. You try to ignore it, saying to yourself, Well, that really wasn't that bad. People do worse. I had to do it, was forced to. My conscience is clear on this. And you're fooling yourself, denying your guilt.

Or else you kill yourself over it. You stew and sit in the muck of guilt, going over it again and again in your mind. You feel unforgivable, so you don't bring your sins to Jesus either.

Peter denied Jesus, practically to his face. Have you done worse than that? Not metaphorically, but actually worse than that?

And look at what Jesus does. Not only does he forgive Peter, not only does he atone for Peter – he restores Peter. Like the father who runs out to his lost son and hugs and kisses him and puts the robe on him and kills the fatted calf for him, Jesus lovingly assures Peter that they are friends.

We all want that restoration. That assurance that, despite the bad things we've done, we're accepted back into the family. Do you feel that? To get it you might have to revisit a few things. These questions open a wound "that can be tended to and healed only by being reopened."<sup>3</sup> You may have to have Jesus point out a few things in your life. You may have to go back to the scene of the crime, so to speak. But trust Jesus. He loves you and will do right by you.

### ***Because Jesus rose from the dead, we receive a mission.***

Think of how great Peter must have felt. Jesus had just communicated tremendous love and care for him. He'd just restored him, taking him to his worst moment in order to picture for him the greatest grace. Peter is ready to turn over to take a nap. Or maybe a wistful walk by the shore, thinking of his best friend Jesus.

He has a lot to think about, after all. Jesus has told him that he is to pastor the sheep. That is the first mission Peter hears in our passage. The mission of pastoring.

This is a strange thing because we're both used to it and yet we don't really understand it. The Bible cares a lot about pastors. There are many other jobs possible for groups of people – coordinators, planners, administrators, motivators, public speakers, arbitrators, visionaries, on site trouble shooters, teachers, disciple makers, moderator, marry-er, and much more. And these are all, or at least mostly, good things.

But they aren't a pastor. What is a pastor? I'm not sure exactly, to be honest. A pastor seems like he has to care about the above things. But tending the flock is much more involved than those things. More personal, I think. I meet people sometimes who talk about a "movement" on campus, and I start to feel swept away because I want to be a part of something big, sweeping and awesome. But then I step back and wonder if that really is pastoring. I sometimes want to "target" a certain kind of person or group, thinking that they will unlock the campus to me, or influence the next generation.

And then I wonder if that is really pastoring after all.

Peter's mission is to pastor Jesus' sheep. To feed, care for, defend, protect, lead and love them. Peter hears this call, this mission, out of the brokenness of his own life. Peter now sees that his leadership is founded not on strength but on brokenness. Peter has been forgiven of the greatest sin among the disciples. And now Peter's position of leadership is based not on faith but on love. "His faith has failed him more times than either one of them can count, but his love has been constant, powerful, even if occasionally misguided."<sup>4</sup>

Then Jesus does it again. He doesn't stop talking, and what he says next is jarring. *"I'm telling you the very truth now: When you were young you dressed yourself and went wherever you wished, but when you get old you'll have to stretch out your hands while someone else dresses you and takes you where you don't want to go." He said this to hint at the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.*

He gives him another mission - To go and die. Jesus gives Peter what everyone wants to know and is scared to know. How he will die.

You've heard the stories and seen the movies where someone is given a month to live, and she does incredible and amazing things. Those are inspiring. There are also stories where, under the same situation, someone does pathetic things. I recently read in the paper of a man who killed his girlfriend, knew he was going to die, so he hid her, spent \$1000 on drinks, drugs and whores, left a note, and shot himself.

What is on the inside of you gets revealed under pressure. When you have little time left, what will you be like? When Jesus comes for you, what will you do at the end? Jesus has big plans for Peter, to use him for the kingdom, but it comes at a great price. Peter needs this sort of confidence, to know that his death has been foreseen by Jesus. Not just that

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<sup>3</sup> Card, 125

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Peter will die, but Jesus knows how he will die too.

Stretch out your hands. This surely meant, and everyone would have known it, a reference to another crucifixion.

Peter had years to think about this, and when it came he knew that he wanted it to be different than Jesus' so he asked to be killed upside down. He didn't feel worthy to die as Jesus did.

Jesus gives one more mission to Peter – Follow me. *And then he commanded, "Follow me."*

It is the most general command and mission, and yet it entails everything. Follow me means live as I did, trust me, love me, give over to me in every area.

Some of us are called to be pastors, but most aren't. We should all take seriously our role in the church and world, however, and realize that we are given positions not merely based on competency, but on brokenness. Do you see your brokenness? Do you embrace your role?

We will all die of course, some of us maybe even for our faith. But it will happen. We are on a march toward our last day. If you go to actuary tables, you can look up when you will most likely die a normal death and see how long you have. What if you knew your last day? It might be 80 and you have 60 more years. What will they be like? What if it's 27, a scary thought? Will your death glorify God? Will your life glorify God?

What about Jesus' command to Peter to follow him? Do you think Peter took that lightly after all that had happened? It was a big call, a huge one. To follow him is to give everything over to him. Are you motivated to be near him, rearranging your schedule to get time with him? Do you consider inconvenience and possible embarrassment worth it so you can be near Jesus? At what cost do you follow him?

Do you see his mercy for you? Can you understand how he replaces you on the cross? How his mercy for you never ends? Is his mercy the theme of your song, the joy of your heart, the boast of your tongue?

Will you follow him, then? Jesus calls us all to go and die. He asks us to take up our cross and follow him. To lay down our lives for his sake, for others. If we do so, we'll live.

One of my favorite movies is Unbreakable. The main character is played by Bruce Willis, and he slowly discovers he's a super hero, one that cannot be hurt. He's impervious to physical pain.

No one is unbreakable. Most of try to be, want to be. But we're not.

What Peter shows us by reading about his relationship with Jesus is that the broken places become the strongest when they're healed. Doctors say this is true about bones.

My elbow was broken, but now it's healed. The process of xraying and setting the bone was a painful one, but now I'm fine.

It's a message we don't like too much, but it should give us hope if we embrace it. Our motivation, our mercy and our mission are made possible by Jesus and his death and resurrection for us. It's in the broken places of our lives where grace and mercy make the most difference, where they break through. David Wilcox realized that in "Broken Places":

*Looking at the X-Ray you cried in fear  
To see the bones you walked upon were shattered  
A year ago you crashed on this bridge right here  
But we can run back home today, you were made that way*

*You're stronger than ever now  
In the broken places*

*I found my own apartment a broken man  
Cause I did not have the right to stand beside you  
Trust grows slowly but here we stand  
In the place I know is true, all my vows to you*

*We're stronger than ever now  
In the broken places*

*Maybe where the heart breaks in two  
That's the only place grace can get through  
To find you*

*Stronger than ever now  
In the broken places*