

# Easter Sunday Message | “Free From Your Past”

## Text: John 21:1-19

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

### INTRODUCTION

- This morning I want to talk about something very practical. I want to show you how the message of Easter can free you from regret over things you have done in your past.
  - Regret is a powerful thing. It has to do with things you’ve done in your past, maybe even decades ago. But those things don’t stay in the past do they?
    - They keep jumping forward into the present. They haunt our thoughts as we lie awake at night. They steal our joy. They crush our spirit.
- You know what I’m talking about don’t you?
  - There are things you have *done* that you are ashamed of.
  - Things you have *said* that have broken relationships.
  - Things done in *private* that you would not want anyone to know about.
  - Things done in *public* that you wish you could take back.
  - Things done *together with others* that you knew were wrong.
    - Perhaps the video of those incidents is replaying in your mind right now.
- Now the good news of the Bible is that God sent Jesus to die for our sins so that anyone who comes to him can be forgiven of their past. Oh, what good news this is! But do those old regrets ever come back to haunt you even after you have asked God for forgiveness?
  - I’ve talked with many Christians who at one time dreamed of doing great things for Jesus, or still dream of it, but they are paralyzed by regret over past sins, particularly past sexual sins.
    - They believe that God may have had a great plan for their life but they’ve wrecked it. Plan A is over and now they must settle for plan B or plan C. Some are so consumed by regret that they feel disqualified from serving Jesus at all.
- This is the work of the enemy. His goal is not only to lead you into sin; it is to then use that sin as a weapon against you for the rest of your life.
  - He strikes you with it again and again: **“How could you have done such an awful thing? And you call yourself a Christian? You say you want to serve Jesus can you really do that after all that you have done?”**
    - The shame of past regret makes many feel disqualified from serving Jesus.
- My aim, this morning, by the grace of God, is strip the enemy of this weapon in your life that you might be free from your past.
  - To do this I want us to look at a story about the risen Jesus, which is found in John 21. This story is not dealing with *the fact* of the resurrection. This story is about *the meaning* of the resurrection.
    - This morning I am praying that you will encounter the risen Jesus and that he would set you free from past regret in order that you might use your life in service for him.

### WHY DID PETER GO BACK TO FISHING?

- The story we are going to look at describes Jesus’ third appearance after his resurrection. Jesus appears this third time for the sake of Peter.
  - Let’s get into the story. We read in verse 1 that this was by the Sea of Tiberias. **READ 1-2 - After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he**

**revealed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.**

- And we read that the disciples, led by Peter, have gone back to their old occupation of fishing. In verse 3 we read that Simon Peter said to them, **“I am going fishing.”** They said to him, **“We will go with you.”**
- Why did they, and why did Peter specifically, go back to their old occupation?
  - Professor Darrell Johnson, whom I am borrowing some thoughts from, points out that these men have not yet grasped the meaning of the resurrection. These are not the energetic disciples that we see later in the book of Acts. No, these are men without purpose, men who have seen great things but do not know what they mean.
    - Because they have no purpose they return to that which is familiar.
- For Peter though things are worse. Peter returns because he has an **unresolved past**.
  - His past hinders his present and his future. Peter is haunted by regret from his past. In his mind, he is disqualified and therefore might as well go back to fishing.
    - What are these past regrets that haunt Peter?

### **PETER’S BOAST**

- Think back to the night before the crucifixion. Jesus and the disciples have enjoyed the Passover meal together. At the end of the meal Jesus said to them, **“This very night you will all fall away on account of me.”**<sup>1</sup> The disciples were shocked. Then Peter, always the one to speak up, interrupts Jesus and says, **“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”**
  - **“I mean Jesus I can understand Philip. I’ve been around him and that is quite likely. Thomas, well he does not believe anything anyways. Andrew, he is my younger brother. I can see that. John, he is so sentimental. He’s always talking about love. He won’t have the backbone to stay with you. But me . . . I’ll never fall away.”**
    - Jesus answers Peter and says, **“I tell you the truth, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. Not just once like the rest of them, but three times.”** To which Peter declares, **“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”** He is saying, **“Jesus, even if they have to put four crosses up there, I. Will Be. On a cross. With you.”**
  - Now let me ask you, **“Do you think Peter was just trying to talk big?”** No, he meant what he said, just like we do when we say, **“Jesus I really want to love you and follow you.”**

### **PETER’S DENIAL**

- Do you know how Peter’s story goes? After Jesus was arrested the guard led him into a courtyard. Peter followed. At the door a servant girl came up and to him and said, **“Aren’t you one of this man’s disciples?”** **“I am not”** Peter replied.
  - It was a cold night. The soldiers had made a fire and so Peter moved in front of a fire to warm himself.
    - In the dim light of the fire a soldier said, **“you are one of this man’s disciples, aren’t you?”** **“I am not”**
- Jesus stands bound on the other side of the courtyard. His back is to Peter. He is about to be beaten and flogged. Then another person says to Peter, **“Didn’t I see you in the garden with him?”**
  - Now I cannot tell you what Peter said next because the Bible says he cursed and denied Jesus again.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26:31.

- Imagine the rest of the scene in slow motion now. As the last curses trail out of his mouth, the silence of the courtyard is pierced by the sound of a rooster crowing.
  - As his lips close together, Peter glances toward Jesus and Luke 22:61 says, **“The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.”** What must have passed between their eyes? What was the look in Jesus’ eyes?
    - With the sound of the rooster crowing and eyes of Jesus looking right into his soul, Peter suddenly realizes what He has done and the scriptures say, **“He went outside and wept . . . bitterly.”**

### BACK TO THE SEA OF TIBERIAS

- Let’s go back to the Sea of Tiberias. There are Peter and the disciples. They have gone back to their old occupation of fishing after Jesus rose from the dead.
  - Peter is in the boat throwing the net over the side but his mind is not there. The video of that night is on repeat and he cannot push the pause button.
    - The others may have *deserted* Jesus. But Peter...he had *disowned* Him. Peter knows Jesus is alive but he is unable to enjoy this fact because his past keeps haunting him.
- Unable to move into the future because of his unresolved past, Peter retreats back to what is familiar.
  - But Jesus appears this third time for the express reason of setting Peter free from His past in order that he might serve him in the present and the future.

### JESUS PLANNED THIS LOCATION

- Jesus sets up the entire event for this purpose. The first is **the location** that Jesus chooses to do this.
  - Verse 1 tells us that it is at the Sea of Tiberias, which is also known as the Sea of Galilee. Verse 4 tells us that Jesus stands on the shore. But this is no chance occurrence that they are here – Jesus has planned all this out.
    - Remember when the angel appeared to the three women at the tomb he told them. **“Go tell his disciples and Peter.”** What were the women to tell the disciples and specifically Peter? Mark 16:7 says they were to tell the disciples and Peter, **“[Jesus] is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”**
- Why Galilee? Why specifically the shore of this lake? It is all a set up. Jesus has planned all of this for Peter. The answer is in Luke 5.
  - We had it read for us a few minutes ago. It was most likely at this beach on the Sea of Galilee, not three years before that Jesus had first called Peter. It was here that the disciples had fished all night and caught nothing. It was here that Jesus had told them to let their nets down on the other side of the boat and they had caught so many fish their nets started to break. It was this beach that Peter had first learned of the grace of Jesus. He knew he was a sinful man but Jesus had received him. Peter then left his nets and **followed** Jesus.
    - But that was three years ago. Now Peter feels disqualified and unworthy to serve Jesus.

### ARE WE REALLY SO DIFFERENT FROM PETER?

- What is your beach? Where did Jesus first meet you? For me, it was our kitchen table where Jesus drew me to himself and forgave my sin. What is your beach?

- It was there you had a powerful experience of his grace. But that may have been many years ago. Since that time you might have fallen into many sins. You may have even abandoned Jesus for years or decades.
  - That old day of grace may seem far away, especially considering how unfaithful you have been.
- Are we so different from Peter? We have experienced the grace of God and yet, on many occasions, have returned to old patterns of living.
  - Speaking personally, Jesus saved me at a very young age. But to my shame, after tasting of that grace, I have at times **denied him with words**. At other times have consciously and deliberately sinned against him.
    - At certain points I thought that perhaps I was disqualified from really serving him. Perhaps I had wrecked his Plan A for my life and now had to settle for plan B or plan C.
      - Are we really so different from Peter?
- But this is Easter Sunday! Jesus wants to bring forgiveness for your past but he wants to do far more than that. He wants to free you from your past. He wants to bring healing to you in those areas.
  - Even more, he wants to restore you and call you to serve him in ways that you never dreamed of before.
    - Watch now what Jesus does for Peter and what he will do for you.

## THE CHARCOAL FIRE

- Everything is prepared for this encounter with Peter. The disciples are fishing just a few hundred yards off shore. **READ 4-5a - <sup>4</sup>Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?”**
  - Here are these men sweating in the cool morning air because they have worked all night and this man calls from the shore, **“Do you have any fish?”**
    - The reply that comes back is abrupt and to the point. **READ 5b-6 - “No.” <sup>6</sup>He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.**
- Sound familiar? It’s Luke 5 all over again. Now just imagine being on that boat. As this great catch of fish threatens to pull them down into the water, you can almost see John turn his eyes to shore and strain to see who is there. Luke 5 flashes through his mind like lightning. The penny drops and he shouts out, **“It is the Lord.”**
  - **READ 7-14 - When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. <sup>8</sup>The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. <sup>9</sup>When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” <sup>11</sup>So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup>Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup>Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. <sup>14</sup>This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.**

- Again, remember this is all planned out. Besides the location did you notice anything unique about how Jesus set up the beach? Let me read it again for you. **READ 9 - When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread.** This isn't just any kind of fire, such as a wood fire. It's a specific kind of fire. It is a fire made of charcoal. Why do you think Jesus lit a charcoal fire?
  - Answer: Peter's unresolved past is bound up in what happened around another charcoal fire. Three chapters earlier in John 18 we read these words: **The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."** <sup>18</sup> **Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.**
    - Do you see it? It was around a charcoal fire that Peter had denied Jesus. Charcoal fires remind him of his greatest regret. Charcoal fires make him feel that he is disqualified from serving Jesus.

### QUESTION 1

- Come back to chapter 21. You can just picture what is happening here, can't you.
  - Peter is sitting there eating and staring into the charcoal fire but he can hardly taste his food. The fire may not be able to speak but it is screaming to Peter of **that night** around the other fire.
- The video plays in his head. But as he stares through the flames, Jesus catches his eye and asks him a question: **"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"**
  - By calling him **"Simon, son of John"**, Jesus was taking him back to his old self in the days before Jesus met Him.
  - By asking him **"do you love me more than these"** Jesus is recalling Peter's statement when he said, **"Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."**
    - Peter had boasted of his love for Christ saying he loved Jesus even more than others. But with the charcoal fire recalling his past, Peter has been humbled.
      - Peter does not compare himself to the others now. He simply says, **"Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."**
- What will Jesus say? **"Peter, you really failed me that night!"** No, he says, **"Feed my lambs."**
  - Astounding! **"Feed my lambs."** Jesus completely bypasses any rebuke. He doesn't say, **"Peter, I am willing to put you back into service but only on a probationary level until you prove yourself."**
    - With these three words Jesus is saying, **"Not only do I forgive you Peter. I am fully entrusting you with that which is dearest to my heart, which is my people. I reinstate you. I commission you to go and serve them"**
- You can just imagine Peter's thoughts. **"What? Me Lord? Who am I to lead your church?"**
  - I am sure he averted Jesus' gaze and looked into the fire as his face turned red with shame.

### QUESTION 2

- But Jesus is not done. Again, he asks the same question: **"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"** **He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."**
  - And how did Jesus respond? Did he rush over to Peter: **"Love me?! Peter, you are supposed to be in my inner circle. I trusted you Peter. How could you?"**
    - No. Like the first time, Jesus says, **"Feed my lambs. Peter, I fully restore you and empower you to serve my people."**

### QUESTION 3

- You can just see Peter starting to fall apart emotionally. As he looks across at Jesus. He sees the slave girl's face. He sees the soldier's face. How could Jesus possibly forgive let alone restore him to service? Is he really serious? And then Jesus makes it all come together. **He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"** And then we read that **"Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."**
  - Surely this time Jesus will explode and say, **"Peter, how can I trust you to be a leader in my church and preach about me when you cannot even say you know me?"**
    - But again, listen to Jesus' response. **Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."**
- What is Jesus saying? He is saying, **"Peter, I know who you are. I know your failings. But look Peter, I knew your sin 3 years ago when I met you on this beach. The grace I gave you then still stands today. My call on your life still stands today. I am reinstating you to serve to my people."**
  - Three acts of denial. Three acts of acceptance.
  - Three moments of rejection. Three moments of restoration.
    - What a compassionate Lord. What a gracious Saviour.

### PETER'S DEATH

- Then Jesus said some more words to Peter: <sup>18</sup>**Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.** <sup>19</sup>**(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."**
  - There is no question that this changed Peter forever. With his past healed Peter went on to become one of the most influential men of history. He poured out his life caring and feeding the church, which is Christ's sheep. He wrote two of the letters of the NT and is the source behind the gospel of Mark.
    - In approximately A.D. 68, under Emperor Nero, his arms were stretched out on a cross beam and he was led where he did not want to go, that is, to be crucified. Tradition says that he requested to be crucified upside down because he did not think himself worthy of being crucified like His Lord.

### APPLICATION

- How about you? What is your charcoal fire? What have you done that fills you with the shameful regret?
  - Do not run from the memories. Jesus forced out Peter's past so he could heal him.
    - Like any good surgeon, he must wound before he can heal. Take that pain this morning and bring it before Him.
- Perhaps you have never sought forgiveness from Jesus. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for that sin you are thinking of. This very moment the risen Jesus stands ready to receive you.
  - Come to him and say, **"Jesus, forgive me of my past and make me right with you."** You have seen how compassionate and gracious he is. He will do it.
- Perhaps you have been a Christian for many years but you can relate to Peter. You have wept over those old sins. You have confessed them to God. But you are still haunted by regret and feel like you are disqualified from really serving him.
  - If that is you then listen to the risen Christ this morning. He looks at you across your charcoal fire and says, **"I forgive you. I restore you. I have a calling on your life. It is not second best. Now get up and serve me. Leave your past behind and show your love to me by serving others."**