
Lesson 59

The Restoration of Peter

The Scripture Lesson

John 21:14-23

After the miracle of the great catch of many fishes, Jesus provided food for His disciples to eat. After the breakfast was finished, Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?”

Do you know why Jesus asked that question? You will remember that Peter had once boasted that though *all men* would be offended (or be ashamed of Jesus), yet *he*, Peter, would *never* be offended. But that very night, Peter denied Jesus—three times! Was Peter forgiven for that terrible sin? We know that he was. But can Peter ever, now, be a *minister of the gospel*? Can one who, so to speak, ran away when there was danger to himself, ever be a *shepherd of Jesus’ sheep*? Peter probably was not so sure of that. Perhaps the other disciples, too, wondered what Peter’s place would be. Peter, therefore, as well as the other apostles and all of those who would ever hear Peter’s preaching, must know that Peter was not only forgiven but also restored to his place as an apostle, and that he could speak the word of Christ with as much authority as if he had never denied his Lord. In order then to be restored before his brethren, Peter must also confess his sin, and tell of his love for Christ, before his brethren.

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That was the reason for Jesus’ question: “Simon, do you really love me more than do these your brethren, as you once said you did?” In Peter’s answer we see that he has learned his lesson. No longer does he claim to have a love that is greater than that of anybody else. No longer does he even dare simply to claim that he does truly love Jesus. He says that *Jesus* should be the judge. Jesus, after all, knows the hearts of men. Peter says, “Yea, Lord; *thou knowest* that I love thee.” No longer is Peter a proud, self-confident man. He is humble. He truly confesses his sin, without trying to make a single excuse for himself.

Jesus accepted Peter’s confession. He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” The lambs are God’s people, of course, the people whom Jesus loves and for whom He died. To *feed* them is to be their shepherd. That is the work of a minister of the gospel, which is what Peter will be.

But Peter had denied Jesus three times. Three times also will Jesus ask him, “Do you love Me?” And three times does Peter repent and show that he is sorry for his sin. He is therefore fully restored as a shepherd of Jesus’ beloved sheep.

Jesus had something more for Peter. Someday, Jesus said, when “thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst

not.” Peter, that is, will be taken by the enemy, who will put a rope around him and lead him away to be killed — for Jesus’ sake.

Was that a terrible thing? Would Peter be afraid, for the rest of his life, about what was going to happen to him? No, for by his death, Peter will “*glorify God.*” And that will make Peter very happy — to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake.

The Great Commission

Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-20;

Luke 24:50-53; John 21:25

Jesus next appeared to His followers on a high hill near the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had told His disciples He would meet them there. So more than 500 people came together to see the Lord. They were people who loved Him and wanted very much to see for themselves that He had really risen from the dead.

They waited expectantly, and then, suddenly, Jesus was there. Perhaps some of His heavenly glory could be seen in His face. They could see that He really was the *Lord* — not just a *man*, but the *Son of God Himself*, as He had said. They believed, and they fell down and worshiped Him.

But Jesus had told the people where He was going to meet them not just so that they could *see* Him, but also so that they could *hear* Him. He had something important to *tell* them. They must know that He will not remain with them; and they must know what they have to do when He is gone. His people must not keep *to themselves* the good news of salvation in Jesus. They must *tell others* — *everywhere*.

Yes, the gospel must be preached to the ends of the earth. To the Eleven, and to the 500 gathered there, it must have seemed an *impossible* task. They need not worry. Why not? They must remember, first, who it is that gives this command. It is the *Lord*. “All power,” Jesus said, “is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” True, He will leave them. He will go to heaven and they will remain on earth. But in heaven He will *rule* — over everything and everybody. Besides, He will in fact *return* to them. He will

send them *His Spirit*. By His Spirit, He will be *with* them. “Lo, I am with you *always*,” Jesus said, “even unto the end of the world.”

Jesus will also give them power to work miracles. At the very beginning of the history of the Christian church, people must know for *sure* that the risen Lord is speaking through the apostles. To *prove* that, the apostles will be able to do mighty works. They will be able, Jesus said, to speak in different languages without even learning them, to heal sick people, to cast out devils, and to be bitten by snakes without being hurt by them. All of these will be mighty signs that prove that the apostles do not come with their *own* word but with the word of a risen and living Christ.

After this appearance, the apostles went back to Jerusalem. One day Jesus again came to them and led them out of the city to the Mount of Olives. He talked with them there for one last time and then He ascended, or went up to heaven, while they watched. We will learn more about that next time; but for now we want to see how the disciples felt about it. Would they, do you think, feel very sad because Jesus was leaving them? No, they went back to Jerusalem *rejoicing*. They knew who Jesus was, and where He was. He was in heaven, exalted at the right hand of God. All power was His. Men and angels, kings and princes, floods and tornadoes, *everything* was in His control. And He would make all things work for their good. And *they*, just think of it, *they* would be His witnesses! No wonder that they did not grieve but rather rejoiced!

MEMORY WORK

Group A

John 21:25 “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”

Group B

Matthew 28:20 “And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- ___ 1. When Jesus asked Peter, “Lovest thou me more than these?” Peter answered, “If all men forsake Thee, yet will I never forsake Thee.”
- ___ 2. Jesus told Peter and the other disciples not only that Peter was restored to the apostleship, but also that he would be privileged to die for Christ’s sake.
- ___ 3. The one announced appearance of Jesus after His resurrection was witnessed by more than 500 of His followers.
- ___ 4. When, therefore, the apostles later preached that Jesus arose, there were hundreds of people who could testify that it was true.
- ___ 5. Jesus at this time told His followers that the calling of the New Testament church would be to preach the gospel to all nations.
- ___ 6. Jesus promised to give the apostles power to work miracles, which would prove that their preaching about the risen Christ was really true.
- ___ 7. Jesus later appeared again to His disciples, this time on the Mount of Olives, and from there He ascended up into heaven.
- ___ 8. The disciples, knowing that they would not see Jesus again on this earth, returned to Jerusalem in great sorrow.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. Why did Jesus ask Peter *three times* about his love for his Lord?
2. Peter’s answer was, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.” How does this answer show that Peter had learned an important lesson from his terrible fall?
3. Jesus’ answer to Peter was not just “You are

forgiven,” but it was “Feed my sheep.” How does this show that Peter was again an apostle?

4. Jesus also told Peter that, when he became old, he would be killed for the sake of Jesus. What do you think, did that make Peter feel *good ... or bad*?
5. Who came to see Jesus on a mountain in Galilee? How did they know that they would see Jesus there?
6. Do you understand why it was important that there be a *large number* of people who saw the risen Lord?
7. What did Jesus tell these people that the work of the church would be when He was gone?
8. From what Jesus said to His followers at this time, can you tell how it would really be *good* for them that He would go away into heaven?
9. Why did Jesus give His disciples the power to work miracles?
10. What did the disciples do after Jesus ascended to heaven? Why were they happy instead of sad?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. Each of Jesus’ appearances after His resurrection was intended by the Lord to serve a purpose. As we saw in our last lesson, Jesus appeared to His disciples at the Sea of Galilee in order, by a miraculous draught of fishes, to strengthen them in their calling to be His ambassadors. A second reason for that appearance was the public restoration of Peter to the office of apostle. By his denial of his Lord, Peter had forfeited his right to the office of apostle. The other disciples knew that. It was necessary therefore that Peter be publicly restored, so that all would know that he again had full authority to teach and preach. So Jesus put to Peter the

question: “_____, son of Jonas, _____ thou me _____ than these?” (John 21:15). A painful reminder, that was, of Peter’s proud boast that “though _____ men shall be _____ because of thee, yet will _____ never be offended” (Matt. 26:33).

2. Peter’s answer shows that he has learned his lesson well. For no longer does he compare himself with others, or make bold claims about the strength of his own convictions. He appeals simply to the knowledge that *Jesus* has of his heart, when he replies, “_____, Lord; _____ knowest that I _____ thee” (John 21:15).

3. Those words of Peter were his public confession of sin. And it was followed at once by the public restoration. For Jesus proceeded to put His most loved possessions in the care of Peter: “Feed my _____” (John 21:15).

4. Peter had, however, denied Jesus *three times*. Three times must he now confess. Jesus therefore asked him again, a second and a third time, “Simon, son of Jonas, _____ thou me?” Peter was _____ because Jesus asked him the third time; and he said, “Lord, thou knowest _____ things; thou _____ that I _____ thee.” Once more, and finally, Jesus accepts that confession with the words, “_____ my _____” (John 21:16, 17). Thus was the matter of Peter’s denial closed.

5. If, as we think, Peter died during the time of Nero, he had some 35 years still to feed Christ’s sheep. Jesus hinted that that would be the case, when He told Peter what would happen when he “shalt be _____.” Peter could therefore look forward to a long ministry ... and also to a ministry that would be crowned by a martyr’s death. For, Jesus said, “thou shalt _____ forth thy hands, and another shall _____ thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst _____.” And John tells us that Jesus said this, _____ by what _____ he would _____ God (John 21:18, 19). Not at all,

therefore, was this to be viewed as a terrible prospect for Peter. Rather, Jesus declares in effect that Peter was so completely restored that he would not only be given a long career of service in the kingdom, but he would also in the end be counted worthy to die for the sake of Jesus.

6. This appearance of Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee took place during the time when the Eleven were in Galilee waiting for a promised appearance on a “_____ where Jesus had _____ them” (Matt. 28:16). This latter appearance is very likely the one that Paul later describes as having been to “above _____ hundred brethren at _____” (I Cor. 15:6). Because it had been announced three or four times in advance (see Matt. 26:32 and 28:7, 10), a large number of Jesus’ followers in Galilee came together for this promised manifestation of their risen Lord.

7. A primary purpose of the appearances was that they might serve as “_____ proofs” (Acts 1:3). The fact that there were no fewer than 500 witnesses to this appearance in Galilee would surely add to the credibility of the testimony that He was indeed alive. Matthew tells us that, of those present, some _____. For the most part, however, it is apparent that they did believe that He was the resurrected Son of God, for, when they _____ Him, they _____ Him (Matt. 28:17).

8. Jesus did not, however, announce this appearance in advance only in order to assure that there be a multitude of witnesses to His resurrection. He did so also because He had for them an important message. They were the church of that day. Jesus would therefore instruct them concerning their calling, the calling of the church of the entire new dispensation. “Go _____ therefore, and _____ all _____,” Jesus commanded them (Matt. 28:19). Not, of course, that all in His audience were to become preachers. But the church must call, and send,

and support ministers and missionaries to preach the Word — among themselves first of all, but also to all nations. Thus was the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled that the Messiah would be for a _____ to the _____, that He might be God's _____ unto the _____ of the earth (Is. 49:6).

9. Teach all nations, Jesus continued, “_____ them in the _____ of the _____, and of the _____, and of the _____” (Matt. 28:19). Our Heidelberg Catechism calls this the “institution of baptism.” By the command of Christ here the sacrament of baptism became for the church of the new dispensation the sign and seal of the righteousness that is by faith in Jesus.

10. Ambassadors of Christ. Commanded to teach all nations to _____ all things whatsoever He has commanded (Matt. 28:20). An impossible assignment it would seem! Except for this: “All _____,” Jesus said, “is given unto _____ in _____ and in _____” (Matt. 28:18). Exalted soon, at His ascension, to the right hand of God, Jesus will receive power over angels and men, sunshine and rain, storms and earthquakes. And He will exercise that power for the good of the church. “Lo,” Jesus assured them (and thus the church of the entire new dispensation), “I am with you _____, even unto the _____ of the world” (Matt. 28:20). Never need they fear, therefore, or doubt their authority to command men everywhere to repent. For He who rules heaven and earth has sent them. Those therefore who despise the ministers of His Word despise Him who sent them. And they will do so, Jesus said, to their own damnation. For, he that _____ and is _____ shall be _____; but he that believeth _____ shall be _____ (Mark 16:16).

11. Further, Jesus said, their word (that is, the word of the apostles) would be confirmed by signs. The authority of their preaching, in other

words, would be proven by miracles that they would perform by the power of Him who sent them. In my _____, said Jesus, you will cast out _____, speak with new _____, take up _____, and lay hands on the _____ and they shall _____ (Mark 16:17, 18).

12. We know of only one more appearance of Jesus prior to the time of His ascension. This one is mentioned in passing by the apostle Paul. After the appearance to above 500 at once, Paul wrote, Jesus was seen of _____ (I Cor. 15:6, 7) — probably the “Lord’s brother,” who later became a leader in the church at Jerusalem.

13. The apostles must have returned to Judea soon after the appearance of Jesus in Galilee. Very likely it was then from Jerusalem that Jesus led them out as far as to _____, and then, after He had lifted up His _____ and _____ them, He was _____ from them and carried up into _____ (Luke 24:50, 51).

14. The disciples surely understood, from the manner of His departure, that Jesus would not anymore suddenly appear in their midst, as He had done during the 40 days since His resurrection. Yet we read that they _____ Him and returned to Jerusalem with great _____ (Luke 24:52). Their Lord was gone from them; but, though they could not *see* it, they believed that He was received up into _____, and sat on the _____ hand of _____ (Mark 16:19). Jesus was now King of kings and Lord of lords. He was *their* Lord. And they were His ambassadors. No time was this therefore for *grieving*. No wonder that the next ten days (till Pentecost) found them _____ in the temple, _____ and blessing _____ (Luke 24:53).

15. Thus do the gospel accounts come to an end. In them are recorded many of the words and works of our Lord when He walked among men. John tells us, however, that we have in those

written accounts only a small fraction of all that Jesus said and did. Reflecting not only on the *number* of Jesus' works but also on their great *importance*, John writes, "There are also many _____ things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be _____ every one, I _____ that even the _____ itself could not contain the _____ that should be written" (John 21:25).

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Jesus' earlier appearance to Peter alone must have been for the purpose of private confession of sin, forgiveness, and restoration. Why it was important that there be also a more *public* restoration of a disciple who had denied his Lord?
2. Note these four things concerning Peter's reply to Jesus' question, "Lovest thou me more than these?"
 - a. Peter makes no comparison.
 - b. He makes no excuse.
 - c. He says, "Thou knowest ..." — not, "I surely do."
 How do these three characteristics of Peter's answer show that Peter had been truly humbled?
3. How was Jesus' answer, "Feed my lambs," a *restoration* of Peter?
4. Jesus told Peter that, when he is old, he will be carried where he "wouldst not." John explains that Jesus was thus "signifying by what death he should glorify God." Ordinarily the Lord withholds that kind of information from His people. Why is it better that we *not* know whether we will die old or young, and whether we will die of old age or be killed? Can you think of a reason why Jesus would have revealed that to Peter — both for his benefit and for the benefit of the other apostles?
5. The disciples did not see very much of Jesus after His resurrection. He appeared to them only a few times, and only briefly. Why did He not *live with* them for the forty days before His ascension, as He had done prior to Good Friday?
6. One of Jesus' appearances was announced ahead of time. Can you tell why Jesus informed His followers where (and surely when) one of them would be?

7. Some of these who, when they saw Jesus at the appointed place in Galilee, "doubted" (Matt. 28:17). What exactly did they doubt? Why was doubting at this point, though perhaps understandable, nevertheless *wrong*?

8. Whom did Jesus have in mind when He said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations"?

9. The command to teach "all nations" must have seemed to the disciples to be not only an *impossible* but also an *improper* assignment. Why would it at first have seemed wrong to them to go to all nations? (Think of Peter's vision recorded in the first part of Acts 10.) Why would they not have been surprised if they had understood Old Testament prophecy?

10. How would Matthew 28:18 and 20b satisfy the disciples with regard to the *possibility* of their fulfilling the Great Commission (of teaching all nations)?

11. Matthew 28:19 is called the Lord's *institution* of baptism. If John the Baptist had already baptized, how can we say that baptism was here instituted by Jesus?

12. Jesus' promised presence *in the Spirit* was actually better for the church than a continued *bodily* presence could have been. Can you explain why that would be?

13. Jesus told His disciples that they would have power to work miracles, to confirm (or establish, or prove) their word. Many believe that the church still today has that power. Why do we believe that gifts of miracles did not extend beyond the time of the apostles?

14. We read that, after Jesus ascended, His disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). Jesus was gone from them. Why did they *rejoice*, and not rather *mourn*?

15. In the last verse of the gospel according to John, the writer informs us that Jesus did many other things not recorded. How did it happen that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John selected what they did from the many words and works of the Lord?