

JOHN 21:15-25
RESTORATION OF PETER!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to John chapter 21 as we finish up our in-depth study of the Gospel of John.

We have been studying this Gospel for some two years with 90 different studies and my prayer is that as we finish up this morning you would have a better understanding of Jesus and His tremendous love for you.

Not only that, but you know who Jesus is more intimately, that He is Almighty God the Creator of the Universe and the Creator of you and me! His love is rich, it is deep, and I don't think we can even fully understand how much He loves us.

This morning we are going to finish up the Gospel of John by looking at the –

RESTORATION OF PETER!

Now maybe some of you are wondering why Peter needed to be restored, so I will share that with you.

Remember that the Lord told Peter that he was going to deny Jesus and Peter was not buying into that. He loved the Lord way too much to deny Him. And He basically told the Lord that, ***“I know these other guys and they may deny you, but never me Lord! I am Peter, the Rock, I will die for you!”***

And the Lord told Peter, **“... ‘Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.’”**

John 13:38.

And we know what happened to Peter. Jesus was arrested by the Jewish religious leaders. He was brought to the house of the High Priest and Peter was allowed in with John to be in the courtyard of the High Priest.

And the people started to recognize Peter as one of the disciples of Jesus and he ended up denying the Lord three times and then the rooster crowed, and Peter was broken. Not only because He denied His Lord, the One he said he loved, but we are told in Luke 22:61-62, **“And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So Peter went out and wept bitterly.”**

There was Jesus, looking at Peter through the window with love, compassion and it was just too much for Peter and he ran away weeping. He was a broken man. All that pride he had in what he could do was now gone!

I am sure we have all been there. We are strong in the Lord and then something happens and we deny Him and we are broken, like Peter.

But let me share this with you because it will play out in our study this morning. We are told in Luke 22:31-32, **“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.’”**

Notice what Jesus didn't say. He didn't say, ***“Peter, if you blow this one, I am done with you. There are no more second chances, no more hope. You better get this one right!”***

No, Jesus did not say that. What He did tell Peter and what He is saying to us is that He is praying for us, for our success, that we would not fail, but if we do, or maybe I should say when we do, the Lord is there with open arms. He is there wanting to restore us never destroy us. We need to remember that because God is not a vindictive God but One who loves us so much that He died for us!

I love what He told Peter. He said that “**... when you have returned to Me ...**” I like that. The Lord wants Peter to know he is not lost, and he will return and when he does return to Jesus, “**... strengthen your brethren.**” Share with them the lessons you have learned, share with them what I have shown you!

I pray that this study is encouraging to you.

Let me share this with you and it will lead us to what we will be looking at this morning –

THE RESTORATION OF PETER!

We are told,

One of the world’s most beloved paintings is Rembrandt’s “The Return of the Prodigal Son”, which is on display at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

Imagine for a moment that some men decided to break into the museum during a night of drunken revelry in order to deface various pieces of ‘boring’ art, in their estimation.

Completely oblivious to the value of Rembrandt’s painting, they rip it off the wall, slash the painting diagonally from frame corner to frame corner, pour cheap beer over it, and stomp on the painting itself leaving muddy boot prints ground into the canvas.

When the curators discover this, they are distraught, in their eyes what was once priceless has been reduced to nothing more than trash, a dishonor to the masterpiece that communicated deep truths about the world and its artist to many.

Deemed to no longer be worthy to be on display, the tarnished and vandalized painting was put on auction, and people from all over came to bid on this once masterpiece for either bragging rights or sentimental value.

Imagine for a moment that Rembrandt were still living. Seeing and hearing about what had happened to his masterpiece, he was furious and aghast at the complete disregard for what is esteemed to have been the pinnacle of his life's work.

He sent his representative to the auction to reclaim the painting and when he arrived he encountered men and women who could only see the painting in its present form, bedraggled and disheveled, limply hanging from a frame that it once proudly filled out.

As such, they were bidding a pittance on the work, outdoing one another by a few dollars here and a few dollars there. Rembrandt's representative, however, had clear instructions from the artist and the room grew silent as he boldly bid the full value of the painting from before it had been vandalized, an astronomical sum.

The silence was broken by the auctioneer's gavel and Rembrandt's representative walked out of the room with the painting and returned it to the artist.

As Rembrandt gazed at his once masterpiece, his heart was full of fury and sorrow, his life's work reduced to trash by the callous and dispassionate actions of those who could not see its value. And yet, although he was not blind to the slashed canvas, ground in mud, and the odor of stale beer, in his mind's eye he could still see the painting in its original glory.

And so he began to painstakingly restore the painting, weaving together the painting along the slash line with almost imperceptible thread, although a faint crease like a scar now traversed what had once been immaculate.

He painstakingly cleansed the mud from the canvas and where the paint had been distorted by spilt beer he matched the hues from memory and touched it up. After many long hours of laborious work he stood back, sweat pouring from his brow, and simply smiled.

His representative came in and stood shoulder to shoulder with him and admired the restored masterpiece and declared, “Although I believed in the vision you shared with me and was willing to pay the full price to restore this painting to you, I can see it now, the painting restored is even more beautiful now than when you first painted it. The crease through the painting only seems to bring out the motif of restoration and reconciliation from scarcity and separation even more.”

Putting his hand on Rembrandt’s shoulder he said, “You are the greatest artist I have ever known.

All well-known artists have left masterpieces for the world to appreciate, but you are the only one who I have ever seen restore a masterpiece defaced and destroyed to more sublime beauty than its original form.”

My friends, this is the story of the gospel. This is the story about you and me.

God is an artist, and he created humanity to be on display for all to see, intending for us to communicate deep truths about the world around us as well as the artist who made us.

Like the painting, our lives have been defaced and vandalized by the callous and indifferent actions of people, whether others or ourselves, that betray a complete lack of understanding of our intrinsic value.

As is the way with people in general, all that most others and even we can see are the slashes, stains, and disfigurement that mar and obscure what was always intended to be a masterpiece. However, those who are closest to us catch glimpses of what the artist always intended and comment on the subtlety of a brush stroke here or the masterful blending of colors there. . . .

Thankfully, God sent his representative Jesus, who walked into the world's auction house and observed God's defaced and tarnished masterpiece being auctioned off for pennies. Informed by a vision of what the painting was intended to be and guided by the desires of the artist he boldly paid the full price for the original painting, silencing every other competing voice.

Humanity was the pinnacle of God's life work, thus Jesus laid down his life in order to restore us to God.

When God looks at us, he is not unaware of the slashes, disfigurement, stains, and odors, and his heart is full of both fury and sorrow at what has befallen his masterpiece. And yet, this is not all he sees. In his mind's eye, he sees its original form and he begins the work of painstakingly restoring it to its original glory.

Those slashes that we thought would leave us hanging limp for the rest of our lives are mended with almost imperceptible thread, although there will always be a scar.

He cleanses the stains and disfigurement with tender gentleness, replacing mottled hues with those in his original design. Rather than diminishing the beauty of the masterpiece, these touch-ups and mending work communicate the original message proclaimed by the painting with greater force and beauty.

Although any master artist, whether Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Monet, or Da Vinci, can leave us with a masterpiece to delight in - it is only the Master Artist who can take a masterpiece once defaced and destroyed and restore it to more sublime beauty than its original form.

This is the gospel. This is good news.

- <http://bit.ly/3KqYRim>

That is not just good news it is – ***GREAT NEWS!*** This is what God has done and is doing in our lives. Restoring us like He is going to do with Peter here in John chapter 21 – ***THE RESTORATION OF PETER!***

I have broken down these verses we will be looking at this morning into the following points. They are,

PETER, HOW DO YOU LOVE ME – JOHN 21:15-17

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP – JOHN 21:18-19

STAY FOCUSED – JOHN 21:20-23

THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN – JOHN 21:24-25

So with that as our introduction, let's begin reading in John chapter 21, beginning in verse 15 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this topic –

THE RESTORATION OF PETER!

JOHN 21**VERSES 15-17**

Here we see the public restoration of Peter, and, as I have said, Peter needed to know that the Lord still loved him and that the Lord was going to still use him. He did not get put on the shelf!

Also, keep in mind that this is taking place after they had breakfast with Jesus. And as they are sitting around this fire, the Lord asks, “**... ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ ...**”

What does the Lord mean by asking Peter if he loved Him, loved Jesus more than these?

He could be saying, “*Peter, do you love me more than this fishing boat and that old life?*”

Keep in mind that Peter had taken them out fishing and pretty much gave up on serving the Lord. I am sure he loved to fish and since he failed the Lord, he might as well just go back to his old ways. Really, what’s the point!

He also could be saying, “*Peter, do you love me more than all these fish you have caught?*”

It had to be exciting catching all those fish, something that he had not done for over three years. And now that excitement has come back! “*I am back in business now!*” he could be saying!

He also could be saying, “*Peter, do you love me more than all these other disciples?*”

Remember, in Matthew 26:33 Peter says, “**... ‘Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.’**”

Again, he was prideful. He thought he loved the Lord with all his being, but when push came to shove, he denied the Lord. But so too did these other guys.

And they spent three years together and I am sure they had a great time of fellowship together and thus, has Peter's love for these men superseded his love for Jesus?

Or "*These other disciples loved Jesus and do you Peter love Me more than these other men?*"

Did he have that same fervent love as he use to have for Jesus?

For Peter, all of these can apply because all these things can get in the way of his relationship with the Lord.

And the same is true for us. It may not be the same things that Peter was struggling with, but are there things in our life that are getting in our way of our love for the Lord?

That is the point here and what is interesting to me is that the word that Jesus uses for "love" is *AGAPAO* or *AGAPE* love, unconditional love, sacrificial love.

Peter's love for the Lord was strictly a human love and that can wax and wane from time to time.

And we see that with how Peter responds. What we see here is that Peter responds by saying that he has a *PHILEO* love for the Lord or a brotherly type of love.

Now there are some who don't make a big deal regarding these two Greek words for love, but there is a huge difference!

Because, as I have said, one is a human love and the other is a supernatural love that can only come from God.

Why the difference? We will see in a few minutes the difference.

What is interesting also is that even though Peter had this imperfect love for the Lord, the Lord still commissions him to ***“Entertain My Lambs!”***

No, He doesn't say that.

Maybe He said to Peter, ***“Peter, make them feel good, nothing too deep, no conviction because that might hurt their fragile self-esteem! And please, please don't talk about sin!”***

No, He doesn't say that either.

Listen closely to what the Lord tells Peter to do. We need to pay attention to this, especially in the days we are living in!

What the Lord tells Peter to do is, **“Feed My lambs.”**

How important that is today! Feeding the young ones in His flock! And keep in mind that the conversation had changed from fishing to shepherding.

The former speaks of the works of evangelism – ***FISHING!***

Peter was told that he would be a fisher of men and not of fish anymore!

And there is more. You see, the latter suggests teaching and pastoral care – ***EDUCATE THEM IN THE THINGS OF GOD!***

Both are important!

Now, as we read in John 21:16, we see Jesus once again ask Peter if he loves Him. And Jesus and Peter use the same Greek words for love as they used back in John 21:15.

Only this time Jesus narrows things down a bit and says, ***“Do you AGAPE ME?”***

No longer is Jesus asking Peter if he loves Jesus more than all those other things, but the focus here is this. Peter, do you love me unconditionally, unselfishly?

Remember, Peter was willing to die for the Lord and now he is struggling just to live for the Lord!

And Peter's response is, "***Yes Lord; You know that I am found of You.***"

I think Peter is understanding that no matter how hard he tries in the flesh, he just can't love Jesus with that Agape love. In other words, Peter is broken, and he is doing the best that he can, and the Lord is working with him on this. The Lord is in the business of restoration not destruction.

The problem for us many times is that we hear what He is saying to us but then we do not walk accordingly. Peter is going to walk!

We also see that the Lord is not condemning Peter and we see that this time Jesus said to Peter, "**Tend My sheep.**"

The word "**Tend**" in the Greek is POIMAINO and it is the word we get "*pastor*" from. It means to shepherd, watch over, protect and so on!

And Clarke expounds on that by saying this idea of "*Tend My sheep*" ". . . seems to intimate that it is not sufficient merely to *offer* the bread of life to the congregation of the Lord, but he must take care that the sheep be properly *collected, attended to, regulated, guided* . . . and it appears that Peter perfectly comprehended our Lord's meaning, and saw that it was a direction given not only to *him*, and to the rest of the *disciples*, but to all their *successors* in the Christian ministry."

Here's the thing. The pastor is to teach the Word of God. In other words, feed the sheep. That is important or they will starve to death, spiritually speaking.

Also, not feeding them what they need can make them susceptible to false teaching. Their spiritual immune system will not work correctly and they will not be able to discern what is truth and what is a lie. They will be easily deceived!

Like a shepherd the pastor is to care for those that have been entrusted to them. That is so important.

It is not coming and doing a Bible study and then getting out of the church as fast as you can so you can do whatever else you want to do. It is being there for the sheep. Listening to them. Talking to them. Loving them.

There are those who are Bible teachers and that is needed. But they are not pastors and if they try to get into that role, it is a disaster.

I have seen this before with pastors. They finish the Bible teaching, and they are gone, nowhere to be found. That is a Bible teacher not a pastor and those roles are vastly different as I have said.

And there are those who are truly shepherds, and they are willing to sacrifice their life for their sheep, those that have been entrusted to them by God!

Listen to what Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-32, **“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”**

God has placed these men in this position. And these sheep that He has entrusted to them He purchased with His blood. Don't take this position lightly because there will be those who will try to attack the flock like savage wolves. And they will do this with false teaching that will cause divisions and they will try to take these sheep from you and bring them to themselves instead of the Lord.

Some of you have seen how I respond to false teaching in the church, that I will not stand for it. Now some may see that as harsh, but God has given me the responsibility to watch over and protect the sheep that He has entrusted to me, the ones He purchased with His blood! So I don't take that lightly and I will deal with false teaching as God has called me to do!

And as we can see, Paul warned them and then he placed them in the hands of God that they may fulfill the work that God had called them to do.

And God is telling Peter the same thing. He tells Peter to tend these sheep! Feed these sheep, Peter!

And we are not done yet with what the Lord is telling Peter.

Here in John 21:17 we see Jesus ask Peter “**... do you love Me?**” and this time Jesus uses the same Greek word that Peter used for love, *PHILEO*.

And we see that Peter responded by saying that of course he likes Him, He is a friend to Him.

That had to be hard for Peter because he did try his best. Yes, his love for Jesus was not all that it should be, but Peter did love Jesus.

The key here, to me, is that Peter says, “**Lord, you know all things; you know that I love You.**”

You see, before Peter thought he knew himself better than the Lord did. Now he is recognizing that he doesn't and the Lord knows all things and thus, he needed to listen to what the Lord was showing him!

Remember what we read in Luke 22, "**And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.'** **But he said to Him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.'** **Then He said, 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.'**" Luke 22:31-34.

Peter didn't believe that until after he denied the Lord and he found out that the Lord was right, that Jesus knew him better than he knew himself! He learned the lesson that when God speaks, He knows better than we do!

Once we realize that apart from God we can do nothing, then God has us in that place where we will look to Him and not our own strength to accomplish these things.

The bottom line is this, and this speaks volumes of what Agape love is and what it isn't. We are told, "*Agape love is Christ-centered, and others centered - not self-centered. You are not a true disciple of Jesus Christ if all you do is think about yourself and your problems and your needs. That's a self-centered love, exactly opposite to the kind of love Jesus demonstrated on Calvary's Cross when He proved His love for a world of fallen sinners by serving them to the point of death - even the death of the cross.*"

As we read on Peter is going to find out that apart from being empowered by the Holy Spirit, He will never have the kind of love that God desires him to have!

Many years ago, an angry, distraught, and hostile man slipped into St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome with a hammer and began to smash Michelangelo's beautiful sculpture *The Pieta*.

This cherished work of art was severely damaged.

But what did officials do?

Throw out the sculpture?

Absolutely not!

Using the best experts, who worked with the utmost care and precision, they made every effort to *restore* this treasure.

And that is what God is doing in our lives just as He did here with Peter.

We are broken, messed up, and God comes alongside of us and restores us.

Like Peter, we love the Lord but how often, in our own strength, we fail as Peter failed!

I don't know where you are at this morning. Maybe you feel that the Lord is done with you. That you are on a shelf never to be used again. You blew it.

But like Peter who thought he was done, he wasn't. In fact, the Lord is telling Peter that he has just begun!

Now in saying all that, as the Lord restores Peter and, as we will see as we serve the Lord, there is – ***THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP!***

VERSES 18-19

I believe what John is telling us here is that these words of Jesus are referring to Peter and that he will be crucified for his faith.

And Peter, when this came to pass, felt he was unworthy to die like His Lord and thus, he was crucified upside down!

We see this played out in history, not in the Bible, as we are told that, *“Ancient writers state that, about thirty-four years after this, Peter was crucified; and that he deemed it so glorious a thing to die for Christ that he begged to be crucified with his head downwards, not considering himself worthy to die in the same posture in which his Lord did. . . .”* (Clarke)

Also, *“Jerome says, that ‘he was crowned with martyrdom under Nero, being crucified with his head downwards and his feet upwards, because he alleged himself to be unworthy of being crucified in the same manner as his Lord.’”* (Alford)

It is interesting to me that Jesus here at the beginning of Peter going forward in ministry, is telling Peter what the price is going to be to follow Jesus. To feed the sheep. To take care of the flock of God. Peter, it’s going to cost you your life. They’re going to crucify you.

What is the cost of discipleship?

It will cost you your life and the questions can be and truly are as simple as this, *“Are we willing to give it? Are we willing to hear and obey the words of Jesus as He said to Peter ‘Follow Me’?”*

You can see for yourself what the passion is in your life by the time you spend doing whatever it is you are doing.

Did you know that 26 million Americans stopped reading the Bible regularly during COVID-19 and most of that is related to the fact that they stopped going to church!

Listen to this and you can see why the church is not impacting our nation like it once did.

We are told,

In 2021, about 50 percent of Americans said they read the Bible on their own at least three or four times per year. That percentage had stayed more or less steady since 2011.

But in 2022, it dropped 11 points. Now only 39 percent say they read the Bible multiple times per year or more. It is the steepest, sharpest decline on record.

According to the 12th annual *State of the Bible* report, it wasn't just the occasional Scripture readers who didn't pick up their Bibles as much in 2022 either.

More than 13 million of the most engaged Bible readers - measured by frequency, feelings of connection to God, and impact on day-to-day decisions - said they read God's Word less.

Currently, only 10 percent of Americans report daily Bible reading. Before the pandemic, that number was at about 14 percent. . . .

Pew Research Center found that nearly a third of regular churchgoers have not returned to church buildings. Some choose to participate online, but others have dropped out completely.

And at the same time, there was a sharp decline in Bible reading. . . .

Isolation from other Christians has "lethal" impact on private Bible reading, he said.

When people are not in church, they're not reminded of the blessings of Scripture and its importance for their lives. And they aren't encouraged by other Christians sharing about their own Bible reading.

- <http://bit.ly/3U7xXPV>

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP or how important it is for you to live out your faith.
And if you are going to live out your faith you need to know what you believe!

You will not sacrifice your life, serve the Lord at any cost, for something you don't believe and if you are not in the Bible, then you are not going to know what you believe!

And as we have seen here with Peter, yes, he loved the Lord, but he could not love the Lord until he was empowered by the Spirit of God. Then he will be able to love God with that Agape love or that unconditional love!

And we see that empowerment take place in Acts chapter 2 and we also read of this in Acts 4:5-12 as we see this transformation in Peter.

From someone who could not acknowledge that he even knew the Lord to a person who is proclaiming with boldness about the Lord!

Listen to what we are told in Acts chapter 4, **“And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, ‘By what power or by what name have you done this?’ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the “stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.” Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’”**

Again, some three months earlier he couldn't even acknowledge that he knew the Lord and now before the Jewish religious leaders he is telling them that there is salvation only in Jesus, the One you guys put to death! That is boldness and that is this empowering of the Holy Spirit.

We must die to self and take up our cross and follow Jesus! You see, true love doesn't fade but it is faithful to the end, as we have seen in the life of Peter!

And those words that Jesus said to Peter He is saying to us – ***FOLLOW ME!*** Yes, it may be difficult, it may not be easy, it may cost you a lot, but stand firm in the power of His might and – ***FOLLOW HIM!***

And I know it is not easy. Maybe you are thinking that you have fallen, and you just can't get up! You are having a hard time going forward.

If you are struggling or when you struggle, listen to the Lord who spoke to Peter and encouraged him by telling Peter, ***“Peter, don't give up. Your ministry is not over. It is really just beginning. Yes, you have fallen down but now it is time to get up and KEEP FOLLOWING ME!”***

What encouraging words those are!

But what happens many times is that we lose our focus and that is the next point – ***STAY FOCUSED!***

VERSES 20-23

Isn't it easy to become distracted! Look at all we are bombarded with on a daily basis that is trying to catch our attention. And as all these things are before us, we sometimes lose our focus, and we lose sight of God. We can't hear that still small voice that is speaking to us because of all the other noise, all the other distractions that are out there!

Remember in the Wizard of Oz when Dorothy and the others went to see the Wizard and there was all that smoke and noise and fire and that ugly picture that was to be the Wizard of Oz.

All those distractions and then Toto, the dog pulls back the curtain to reveal a man, just a man that caused all that fear, all those distractions. And I love what he said to Dorothy, ***“Pay no attention to what is behind the curtain!”***

That is what Satan is doing to us, distracting us from following the Lord. So instead of letting him distract you, follow Jesus or you will be distracted!

That is what we see here with Peter.

Peter sees John and asks the Lord, ***“Hey, what about this guy? If that is going to happen to me, what is going to happen to him?”*** And Peter is speaking of John.

Jesus just renewed His challenge to Peter, follow Me and now we see how Peter responds to what the Lord told him. Instead of following Jesus he is looking back at John, a distraction from the Lord and what He called Peter to do. And now Peter is wondering what is going to happen to him, to John.

That is not what Jesus told him to do!

Now Jesus is not saying that we are not to care for others, especially our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We are to look out for them. But before we can minister to them, care for them, we have to follow the Lord!

And that is what we see here. The Lord basically tells Peter not to worry about what He is doing with others, but you follow Me, don't be distracted.

Now there was this rumor that got started that said the Lord was going to return before John died. And could you imagine the excitement when John got sick, got a cold!

Then, when they tried to put John to death by boiling him in oil for his faith, can you imagine the excitement some had that the Lord was coming now, and then John lived.

You see, this was just a rumor, it had no basis in truth.

Isn't it amazing how rumors can distract us from the real work. Don't let them!

Let me share this story with you about Yogi Berra and you will see what I mean about people trying to distract us from what we are called to do.

We are told,

There is a story involving Yogi Berra, the well-known catcher for the New York Yankees, and Hank Aaron, who at that time was the chief power hitter for the Milwaukee Braves.

The teams were playing in the World Series, and as usual Yogi was keeping up his ceaseless chatter, intended to pep up his teammates on the one hand, and distract the Milwaukee batters on the other.

As Aaron came to the plate, Yogi tried to distract him by saying, "***Henry, you're holding the bat wrong. You're supposed to hold it so you can read the trademark.***"

Aaron didn't say anything, but when the next pitch came he hit it into the left-field bleachers.

After rounding the bases and tagging up at home plate, Aaron looked at Yogi Berra and said, "***I didn't come up here to read.***"

- J. M. Boice, Nehemiah, Learning to Lead, p. 38

Exactly. Don't become distracted by all the things that are coming down, but be in the Word of God, be listening to what God is showing you. In other words, we are to – ***FOLLOW JESUS AND NOT LET THESE OTHER THINGS DISTRACT US – STAY FOCUSED!***

And like with Peter, we have to decide if we are going to follow Jesus or be distracted.

But please understand that this is not a suggestion by Jesus to Peter. This is a command.

In fact, Tenney put it like this, *“The use of the second person pronoun in Jesus’ command makes the statement emphatic: ‘You must follow me.’”*

We must – ***STAY FOCUSED ON THE LORD!***

But again, distractions come our way.

“Lord, how can you use someone like that?”

And that list can go on and on, but we need to understand that God has a plan for each of our lives and we need to stay focused on what He has called us to do and not on what others are doing.

And I will tell you that if you take your eyes off of Jesus, let distractions take you away from Him, you will sink!

Remember when Jesus walked upon the Sea of Galilee. He walked up to the disciples who were in the boat. When Peter saw this, he got out of the boat and started walking on water!

Everything was going great as he was focused on Jesus. But then we are told, **“But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’”** Matthew 14:30.

What happened?

He was distracted and he let other things get in the way of him focusing on Jesus. Now he was focused on the waves crashing over his head and I am sure it was terrifying. But think about this. He got out of the boat and was walking on the water and now, this distraction caused him to fear instead of walking by faith!

Isn’t that our life in a nutshell! God calls us to do something, and we step out of the boat, and we are doing it and then something comes along, we get distracted and we begin to sink!

What God calls us to do is the impossible. It is that Spirit filled life that gives us the ability to accomplish these things!

Paul, in Galatians 2:20 wrote, **“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”**

We must walk by faith and as God calls us, we need to go! Don't get distracted!

Let me show you what made Peter take that step of faith out of the boat. I don't think we give this much thought but in Matthew 14:29 Jesus said, **“Come”** and Peter did!

Why did Peter get out of that boat?

Because he had faith in the Word of God to him and that is what we need to do as well.

As the Lord calls us to go, we need to get out of the boat you might say or that comfort zone that we are in and follow the Lord according to His Word!

As I have said this morning, many are not even reading their Bibles anymore or if they do it is a little here and a little there, when they have time. And then they wonder why their faith is not growing.

Remember what Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”**

Our faith grows as we read and apply the Word of God to our lives. If we don't read and apply God's Word to our lives our faith will not grow, it will become stagnant!

Don't let the distractions of this world cause you to lose your focus. Keep your eyes on Jesus and follow Him!

In Hebrews 12:1-2 we are reminded, **“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

Let these witnesses of faith encourage you to *STAY FOCUSED* and keep your eyes upon Jesus. Because it is not only that Jesus is the author of our faith, but He is the finisher of our faith as well. Thus, follow Him! That should be the aim of all of us – *LOOKING UNTO JESUS!*

As we finish up this morning we are going to be looking at – *THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN!*

These are his concluding remarks in this Gospel, this Good News about Jesus Christ. That God became flesh, dwelt amongst us to pay in full the penalty for our sins!

VERSES 24-25

Remember what John wrote in John 20:30-31, **“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”**

In other words, Jesus did many other things that John did not put down into words in his Gospel. There were far too many and thus, his focus was on Jesus Christ being Almighty God, the Savior of the world and through what he penned, he wants you to come to saving faith!

In fact, listen to the point that John made here in John 21:25, **“And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.”**

Think about all that Jesus did and said and you could not put them all down, there were far too many things, as I have said!

And look at what we have in our hand today. God has given to us His Word. That is 66 books! That is 1,189 chapters! That is 31,102 verses! That is 783,137 words!

And how much more does a person need to see how much God loves them and died for their sins so that they can fellowship with Him and live with Him!

If a person does not want to believe, they won't! And it is not going to matter how many books were written or chapters or verses or words in the Bible! It is a choice on their part.

But let me also say this. You can't read the Bible and come to the conclusion that God doesn't love you! You may not want to believe in Him, and that is your choice, but His love is seen throughout the Scriptures!

Remember what Jesus said in John 3:16-21, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”**

How does God show His love for us?

He sent us a Savior, God became flesh, not to condemn us because we are already condemned. But a Savior to save us from our sins. His love is out there for every person to receive, but they must make that choice and repent of their sins and ask Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of their life.

If you believe, then you are no longer condemned because your sins have been paid in full by Jesus.

If you refuse to believe, then you remain condemned because you have rejected Jesus!

The light is out there for everyone to see, and you can receive the light of God into your life, Jesus, or you can reject it and remain in darkness! It is a choice and John has given to us ample evidence to believe that Jesus came to save us from our sins!

Now if I was to ask you, ***“Give me the main theme of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation!”*** what would your answer be? And it is really only one word!

Do you know what that word is?

It is – **REDEMPTION!** Or more specifically – **JESUS!**

Yes, the first two chapters deal with creation, and everything was very good. But then, when sin entered the world, it was very bad, and it is really from Genesis chapter 3 through Revelation 22 we see the story of **GOD'S REDEMPTION FOR SINFUL MAN!**

Now, in saying that **REDEMPTION** is the focus, what does that show you?

It shows me **THE LOVE OF GOD FOR SINFUL MAN!** And it is through that love we see His **REDEMPTION!**

John Newton, who was a slave trader before he got saved, understood the love of God for him and he wrote the song – **AMAZING GRACE!** Listen to what he wrote,

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come
This grace that brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been here ten thousand years
Bright, shining as the sun
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind but now I see.

- John Newton, Amazing Grace

How can anyone reject that kind of love? It is hard to figure that out but before I was saved, I was in that boat. But praise God I got out of that boat that the world had me in and I came to Jesus, and now I am following Him and so are you!

And let me say this because the work of God is not done. John wrote, “**... there are also many other things that Jesus did . . .**”

Yes, during the times of His earthly ministry but that work of Jesus continues on through believers today. We are living epistles that people are reading and learning about our God! Never forget that!

And, as I have said before, John wrote specific things down about Jesus for a specific purpose, that through the reading of this you would come to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, that you would believe.

Once you have made that commitment to Jesus, then you must “**Follow Him**” and see the works that He will do in you and through you as you serve Him and follow Him!

It is as Jesus said in John 8:36, “**Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.**”

We, like John, are a witness of what Jesus has done in our own lives and how He has touched the lives of others, setting us free from sin, and thus, may we share that with others so that they too may believe!

In other words, Jesus is telling us - *Follow Me!*