

The Key to Our New Assignment  
John 21:15-19/#thegospelofjohn

Is it hard to concentrate and engage this morning? Is there something that feels “off” in your heart? Has it felt like that for a long time? Do you feel stuck?

It could be that you are stuck, and a good sermon from a very good looking pastor isn’t going to free you. Neither is the right combination of songs or the perfect service opportunity. Better circumstances will mask the problem for a while, but ultimately your “stuckness” is going to rush back once those good circumstances go away, and they always do.

For most of us, our “stuff” is under lock and key but the problem is that buried sin, buried unforgiveness, and buried brokenness are always buried “alive”. We think we are hiding it, but we aren’t fooling anyone. All of this unresolved junk oozes out of us and some of us have become human time bombs - resentful, guarded and ready to blow.

I’m so thankful that we have a Savior who raises His hand and says - I will go where your pain and sin is. I volunteer to walk with you and heal you in all that “stuff” that is under lock and key. Not only that, but once you are restored, I want to give you new assignments. In fact, your best assignments are yet to come.

**Jesus wants to go where our pain is, heal it, and give us new assignments.**

<sup>15</sup> Then when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these do?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus told him, "Feed my lambs."<sup>16</sup> Jesus said a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus told him, "Shepherd my sheep."<sup>17</sup> Jesus said a third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" and said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus replied, "Feed my sheep."<sup>18</sup> I tell you the solemn truth, when you were young, you tied your clothes around you and went wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will tie you up and bring you where you do not want to go."<sup>19</sup> (Now Jesus said this to indicate clearly by what kind of death Peter was going to glorify God.) After he said this, Jesus told Peter, "Follow me." (John 21:15-19)

Remember this all began the night before Christ was crucified (John 13:33-38). Jesus explains that He is going away, and Peter replies by asking where Jesus is going. Jesus tells Peter that he can’t follow Him right now, but that he will have the opportunity to follow Him later. Peter asks again, “Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake” (John 13:37). Then Jesus explains that Peter will have that opportunity, yet will fail Him three times. Fast forward a few hours...

Servant girl who was the doorkeeper—“Surely you are not also one of this man’s disciples are you?” (18:17)	1 <sup>st</sup> denial -- “I am not” (18:17)
Those standing in the courtyard warming themselves—“You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?” (18:25)	2 <sup>nd</sup> denial -- “I am not” (18:25)
Relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off—“Did I not see you in the orchard with him?” (18:26)	3 <sup>rd</sup> denial -- “Peter curse and swear, ‘I do not know the man!’” (Matt 26:74, Mark 14:71, see also Luke 22:60, John 18:27)

In that final denial, Luke says that the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter and the rooster crows (Luke 22:60-61). Matthew, Mark and Luke says that Peter flees into the night weeping. A snapshot of Peter’s life right here would have told us that Peter’s life would be an absolute train wreck. This is Peter on his worst day, but God is not finished with Peter. This scene between Jesus and Peter here in John 21 is one of the most spectacular interchanges in the whole Bible.

The smell of charcoal fire lingers and Jesus asks the question that gets to heart of it, “Do you love me more than these do?” The disciples’ relationships are soaked with prideful competition (i.e. Mark 10:35-45, John 13:38, Matt 26:33). Peter humbly refuses to answer in terms of comparison to others and instead relies on Jesus’ knowledge of his heart, three times affirming, “You know I love you.” In vs. 17, Peter was pained with the symbolism of his three denials and Jesus’ three questions, “Lord, you know everything.”

Jesus is very clearly telling Peter -- your past is past. It's forgiven; let's get on with it. Jesus wants to go where your pain is to heal you, but even more importantly than the benefit for you personally is how we all get to benefit when you are healthy. The bondage that Jesus wants to deliver us from isn't only a personal bondage, but a corporate bondage that affects us all. When you get healthy, we all get healthy. We get healthy not for personal significance, but for community influence.

Just as Jesus came to be the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-15), He is calling Peter to be His undershepherd: FEED MY LAMBS (vs. 15), SHEPHERD MY SHEEP (vs. 16), FEED MY SHEEP (vs. 17). Peter's true love for Jesus will be expressed in His love for Jesus' children. Our true love for Jesus will be expressed in our love for Jesus' children. As Jesus says earlier in chapter 10, the hireling is there for the paycheck -- there is no relational investment with the sheep, but just personal gain (10:13). There are thieves and robbers who have come to steal, kill and destroy (10:10) but the true shepherds lay down their lives for the sheep (10:11).

Peter is also told that he will get the chance to redeem his claim to be willing to die for Jesus (13:37) when he is condemned as a prisoner and stretched out on the cross like His Savior (tradition has it that Peter was crucified upside down, Acts of Peter 37-38). Jesus says, "Do you love me? Follow me" (in feeding my sheep, vs. 19)

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### **Jesus asks, "Do you love me?"**

Here is the secret of all that Christ asks us to do. Whether you are the ones that humbly and quietly bring out chairs for the 2<sup>nd</sup> service, or you have a microphone in front of you, or are the ones doing the snacks for VBA tomorrow or on the stage all week long -- somewhere, deep down inside, there needs to be a simple and pure love for Jesus.

If love isn't your primary motivation, you will get exposed because time is the revealer of all motivations. If you are going to do anything for Jesus, this is what it's built on.

He knows you struggle, and He wants to go where your pain is. He wants to heal it. He wants to find that love in you, to give you an opportunity to express it, to heal the hurts and failures of the past and give you a new work to do.