Week 33, John 21:1–19

Hook

Main Point: Jesus is the one who restores.
Main Application: After failure, find restoration and purpose in Jesus.

Current Event: How long does a Twinkie last? Urban legend has it that the common Twinkie has an uncommon shelf life; in 1974 a science teacher in Maine wanted to find out. Roger Bennatti at the George Stevens Academy spent his teaching career attempting to engage his students through innovative means. Bennatti kept the snack cake in his lab for the duration of his 31-year career. It seems that the Twinkie outlasted the man. At Bennatti’s retirement, the Twinkie was passed along to another educator at George Stevens Academy. Despite being decorated with a few specs of mold, the Twinkie was still bright yellow. The man claimed, “It’s rather brittle, but if you dusted it off, it’s still probably edible. It never spoiled.”

Discussion Questions:

Do you follow expiration dates closely? How long do you think the shelf life of a Twinkie is?

Do you believe people have shelf lives in ministry? What would cause someone to be “spoiled” in his or her ability to do big things for the Lord?

John 21:1–19

Book

Main Point: Jesus is the one who restores.
Main Application: After failure, find restoration and purpose in Jesus.

Text Summary: After Jesus appears to His disciples twice, He comes to them a third time while they are fishing. When morning comes and they haven’t caught anything all night, Jesus stands on the shore and calls out for them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They listen to Him, even though they believe Him to be a stranger, and catch so many fish they are unable to haul in the nets. When they get to shore, Jesus has already prepared a fire and some fish and has breakfast with them. When the disciples and Jesus have finished eating, Jesus asks Peter about his commitment to Christ. He says, “Do you love me more than these?” Jesus wants to know if Peter loves him more than the other disciples do. Peter insists that he does, but Jesus asks the question three times.

John 21:1–14 (Read)
Sub Application: In our obedience, Jesus provides.

Jesus appears to His disciples. He encourages them to cast their nets on the right side and they catch many fish. What’s interesting in this passage is that after the disciples’ previous commissioning, they return to their jobs. These men were fishermen by trade and it appears they are back on the job. This is potential evidence that the disciples didn’t fully understand what they had seen in the locked room. It seems they didn’t completely grasp Jesus’ words to them. The most likely explanation is that the disciples were providing for themselves while waiting for Christ and for the Spirit that He promised them.

While in the boat, Jesus calls to them from the shore. None of them in this moment realize it is Jesus. They assume it to be a stranger. We know previously from verse 3 that throughout the night the disciples hadn’t caught any fish. Now, in the early morning, what they believe to be a stranger, calls out to them from the shore and tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. After doing that, the disciples catch so many fish they can’t haul the nets into the boat.

Keep in mind, these are professional fishermen. They have been doing this their entire lives. They’ve fished here before. They have had nights where they haven’t caught anything; this isn’t abnormal. And yet, these trained, experienced fishermen listen to the advice from a stranger standing on the shore. “Whatever may have been the reason for their willingness/desperation
in moving their net, it soon becomes evident that these disciples were in for a huge surprise.”

After seeing the amount of fish, the beloved disciple recognizes this is no coincidence and that it is no stranger on the shore; it’s the resurrected Lord. Upon hearing this, Peter jumps out of the boat and swims to shore, leaving the others behind to take care of the fish.

When the disciples get to shore, Jesus has been busy starting a fire and preparing fish and some bread. They drag their net from the boat and Jesus tells them to bring some more fish for the fire. This is just another picture of Jesus being a servant. He has just risen from the dead and here He is making breakfast for His disciples. His defeat of death and victory over sin brings life to the disciples. It brings hope, and because of the Resurrection, the Spirit will now empower them. And here we see that empowering and equipping isn’t so lofty a task that it’s above making His disciples breakfast.

Jesus, around the fire early in the morning, is meeting the needs of the disciples. Through His death and Resurrection, He has already met their most important needs, but in these several verses, He is meeting simple, physical needs of his closest friends. This setting is more common for them. They are on the shore after hauling in fish, a very normal thing for these men. In this passage, unlike Luke’s account, “there is no mention of his own eating—eating which had earlier been done less to sustain him than to establish the faith of his disciples.” Here, the focus is on Jesus serving the disciples.

Here, the disciples aren’t in a locked room huddled together fearing Jewish authorities. They are in their everyday routine. And in the midst of that, Jesus visits them. This visitation of Jesus is different than the others. Jesus “reassures them, meets their physical needs, serves them as he did before his passion. It is a time ... to speak to them powerfully, as they meditated upon it, about the Lord’s continued presence and power with them as they prosecuted the mission with which he charged them.”

Why did the disciples go fishing?

What caused the beloved disciple to tell Peter that it was Jesus on the shore?

Why do you think Peter jumped out of the boat and swam to shore?

In what ways is Jesus serving His disciples in these verses?

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4 Ibid.
What makes Jesus’ visit to His disciples in this passage different from the others in John 20?

What is the significance of John writing that the net wasn’t torn? How does this connect with this being a work of Jesus?

John 21:15–17 (Read)
Sub Application: Find restoration in Jesus after failure.

Jesus has a conversation with Peter. Some believe this conversation between Jesus and Peter happens separately from the presence of the other disciples. However, the passage gives no indication that the other disciples left. What John tells us is that after breakfast, Jesus asks Peter if Peter loves Him. Peter, of course, responds in the affirmative. But Jesus continues and asks Peter the same question three times.

Remember that Peter spoke boldly about his commitment to Jesus in front of the other disciples. Remember that it was also Peter who denied Jesus publicly three times. Here, Jesus reinstates Peter in ministry. We don’t know the conversations between the disciples since Peter’s denial of Jesus. We don’t know if Peter told the others. But we do know that Jesus knew about this. Publicly, Peter had removed himself from the group. For Peter, “[whatever] potential for future service he had therefore depended not only on forgiveness from Jesus, but also on reinstatement amongst the disciples.”

After being asked three times, in verse 17 John records that Peter is upset. Did Jesus really have to ask that many times? Why not just once and believe Peter? “As he had disowned Jesus three times, so Jesus requires this elementary yet profound confession three times.” Peter’s grief here may be caused by the memory of his denial of his Lord.

Jesus forgives Peter and reinstates him in service. Peter is to care for the flock. He is to love and comfort and serve the children of God. Jesus wants Peter’s confession because the Father desires “shepherds who are devoted to God, care for his sheep, and carry out his will.”

What does Jesus say love for Him looks like? What are those who love Him commanded to do?

What is the significance of Jesus’ asking Peter the same question three times?

Why does this upset Peter?

6 Ibid., 678.
John 21:18–19 (Read)

Sub Application: Don’t expect Jesus’ call to be easy, but know that it’s worth it.

Jesus tells Peter that when he is older, he will stretch out his hands. In these verses, “the younger Peter carries the positive connotations of freedom, while old here signals not serenity but restriction and martyrdom.” These verses don’t simply carry with them the imagery of the aging process. There’s much more to them than just that.

Peter, we know, died by crucifixion. The phrase Jesus uses here in verse 18, “stretch out your hands,” was commonly associated with and referred to crucifixion in the ancient world. In Peter’s death, “he imitates Christ, not only in the kind of death he suffers, but also, though to a lesser extent, in bringing glory to God by his death.”

Jesus, after giving this prophecy, invites Peter to follow Him. Jesus’ invitation has so much more attached to it now. This isn’t an invitation to merely serve and care for the world as Christ did. That was the original invitation. That was Jesus’ original call to all the disciples. Now, it’s an invitation to live as Christ did but also to die as He did. For Peter, “The rest of [his] life must be lived in the shadow of the cross, just as Jesus’ was. As such a man, who has renounced all earthly ties and who has declared his supreme loyalty to Jesus, Peter is commissioned to serve as shepherd of Jesus’ flock as the Great Shepherd takes his leave.”

Why was this a heavy invitation for Peter?

What was different about Jesus’ call to Peter this time?

Why might it make sense now, knowing Jesus’ prophecy, that Jesus asked Peter three times in the previous verses if Peter in fact loved Him?

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
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Took

Main Point: Jesus is the one who restores.
Main Application: After failure, find restoration and purpose in Jesus.

Discussion: As it turns out, Twinkies are not everlasting. They do boast an impressive shelf life, 45 days, but cannot last forever. Despite being highly processed, each cake holds $\frac{1}{500}$th of an egg. Thankfully, unlike Twinkies, believers are not intended to become spoiled beyond use.

Lesson Conclusion: Jesus reveals Himself once again to His disciples and provides them with fish. He then asks Peter three times if he loves Him. Upon each response, Jesus challenges Peter to feed and tend to the sheep. Jesus foretells of Peter’s fate and then presents the disciple with the familiar call, “follow me.”

Discussion Questions:

How did today’s passage challenge you?

Why do you think Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him?

How did Jesus’ final call (“follow me”) differ from His first call of Peter?

If you were Peter, how would the encounter in John 21 shape your ministry?

Challenge: Jesus provides. In today’s passage, He provides not only fish but restoration, a reinstated purpose. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, is brought back into service with the mission of caring for the flock. He was facing the shame that came with turning his back on Jesus. But in the midst of Peter’s brokenness, Jesus gave him a mission. The mission would have

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12 www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2013/07/09/200465360/the-science-of-twinkies-how-do-they-last-so-long
a heavy cost, following Jesus without reservation does. Challenge those in your class who have faced failure and feel shame to remember that Jesus has the power to redeem, to restore. The enemy wins when Christians become crippled by the weight of their mistakes. Seek repentance, be restored, and follow Jesus.