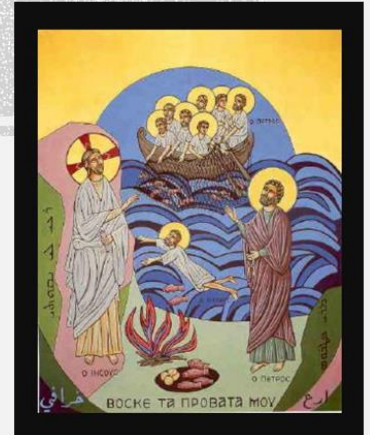


(& SIFTING) THE RESTORATION ^ OF PETER

A Story of Amazing Grace From John Chapter 21



THE RESORATION (AND SIFTING) OF PETER

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2 Corinthians 3:3 says the Church is Christ's letter, written with the spirit of the Living God on human hearts. Now is that a miracle or what? I mean, that's what we can participate in this morning. So look past me, look past all the PowerPoint slides, and let's open our hearts this morning by the Spirit of God and allow Him to write on our hearts. What does He want to write on our hearts as He transforms us into Christ's letter, Christ's aroma? Amen!

So, we're going to flip back and forth a little bit. If you have your Bibles, you're going to probably have two spots. Mostly you'll want to hold your fingers in the last chapter of John - John chapter 21. And the other will be Luke chapter 22. But primarily I want to look at John chapter 21. It's been called The Restoration of Peter Chapter. It's almost like an addendum to the Gospel of John. Here are the last two verses of the previous chapter:

And many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that believing you may have life in his name.

What a conclusion! Everything that is recorded there is selected by the Holy Spirit. Of all the things that Jesus did, that could have been recorded, these are the ones that were selected by Him. These are what the Holy Spirit has inspired as the signs, the attesting miracles for us to learn about, that we might believe in Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit we can meditate on these signs, these words of God, and have life in his name. That's how chapter 20 ends.

But then, as if to say, "Oh there's one more I've got to tell you about..." And so begins John 21. One more story, one more miraculous sign, one more attesting miracle that can give life in Jesus' name, that can reveal the beauty of the Lord, that just has to be included. And so we have this Restoration of Peter story.

Scholars tell us that at the time of this writing the Apostle John may have been the only living original disciple. All the other Apostles may have been martyred by this time. Maybe Peter was gone at this time and so John adds this chapter

that's primarily about the Apostle Peter, who as you know became a leading Apostle. So maybe there's this add-on that the Holy Spirit wanted to share. Ninety percent of the Gospel of John is new material compared to the other synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. There are just so many precious, rich signs and attesting miracles and things to learn from that are in the Gospel of John up to this point, but there's this one more that he has to tell us about and so it begins with chapter 21, verse 1...

After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples. This word, *manifested*, it means he took the lid off, he showed forth the beauty of the Lord. So that's what we're going to dip into. We're not going to read the whole chapter but I want to unpack some of these dealings of God with Peter that the Holy Spirit includes here for our edification, for the edification of the church. The deep things of the dealings of God in Peter's life that I believe touch on his dealings in all of us. These are foundational building things, when God digs down to the very bedrock of our relationship with him, sifting, pruning, stripping away the rot, in order to build something firm and eternal.

Before we dig in, I want to try to help set the stage a little more, if I could, and just share a personal anecdotal experience that to me just reverberates with this theme. So, let me just share a little personal story and get it out of the way. But I really hope it'll help you understand what I'm seeing here this morning, and what I believe the scripture is touching on in this story of the restoration and sifting of Peter.

About 36 years ago we bought an old farmstead and it had many old outbuildings on it; several sway-back buildings that have since fallen down and some that we were able to save and restore. But there was one building on our old farm that I call the bunk house. It had a cement foundation under it but it was pretty rickety and made of all rough sawn lumber. Well, early on I caught a vision for making that into a guest-house and I put some steel on the leaky roof and I gutted it out and I marked out the lines in there where I kind of foresaw the walls being, and I had a vision for this thing. And then next thing I knew 20 years went by and there it still stood just waiting, and actually pretty cluttered up with junk too. But the day finally came when I had some resources, and I had some time and I told Jill, "Today I'm going to start on that project. I've got a vision to finish that guest house." So I went out there one Saturday when I had the whole day set aside to start on this project afresh. We had breakfast and I said "I'm going to buzz out to Home Depot and get some OSB flooring and I'm going to start on that floor and get a good solid floor down. I'm going to get started on this thing and I'm ready to go! I'll see you at lunch." And I went out with my tape measure and started measuring stuff out and I'm getting all excited, thinking this is going to finally come together, I'm going to make a bunch of progress today... But oh, there's one little soft spot in the floor over here in the corner. Ahh, I'm a getter-done kind of guy so I said to myself, "no time to deal with that now. I can just cover over that. Who cares about one little soft spot?" So, I press on and take some more measurements but I start to realize, oh I just can't ignore that soft spot. But how I don't want to stop and deal with what's under that soft spot. And I realize there's a corresponding hole in the roof where it had been leaking rain over the years. But you know it's just a little soft spot in the floor, isn't it? Do I really need to take it seriously and dig into it, Lord? And I knew as time went by, yeah okay, lets dig into this thing and see what we've got here. So, I got out the pry bars and I think I got a chainsaw and I started investigating that little soft spot and, ugh, sure enough underneath the soft spot the floor joists were rotten and the rot extended far more than I could see at the top. And so finally I just had to say, okay well, let's get to the bottom of this. I've got to do this right. And so I kept digging and well I went in at lunchtime and Jill asked how it was going. "Oh, I said, it looks *a lot* different."

"Really?," She said, "That's great!"

"Yeah, you won't believe how different it looks." So I took her out there to see all the progress, and a quarter of the floor of the whole building was gutted all the way down to the cement foundation. Well, she just couldn't believe it! It was so much worse than I thought! So, off I went and I got some new beams and lumber, and long-story-short it got done right, praise God. Thankfully God overruled my tendency to just gloss over these sorts of things, and now today we do have a guest house with people coming and enjoying it. And, in the long run, I'm so thankful that God made me do it right and

got all the way down to the foundation, and I can know there isn't anything squishy down there, and unsound and rotten below the surface.

So that's a little bit of the setting here in this story, I think. God is dealing deeply with Peter. Even though Peter had been walking with the Lord for years now and he should be much farther along; there shouldn't be any little rotten spots. But God was putting his finger on something deep in Peter, and this is what I'm calling the sifting. That's why it's this little parenthetical part of the title, included into this grand story of the restoration of Peter. But you know what? we've got to include the sifting along with this story of redemption. The glory is about Jesus and his restoring grace, but to really do this story justice, to really understand all that's going on here, and why Peter even needed some restoring, we're going to have to look over at Luke chapter 22 and take a look at the sifting chapter. But first let me just read the first four verses of John chapter 21.

After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius, and he manifested himself in this way. There were together Simon Peter and Thomas, called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I'm going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat and that night they caught nothing. *But...*

Oh how I love that word, "*But...*" Here's the scene, they have caught nothing. They'd fished all night and caught nothing on the Sea of Tiberius, also called the Sea of Galilee. Do you know it's the lowest freshwater lake in the world? They are *low*! This is a scene of lowliness! They have been brought low. In addition to everything else we'll read about, they had fished all night and there was nothing to show for all their effort. They are low, **BUT**, the scripture says, **when the day was now breaking Jesus stood on the beach, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.**

Okay, now hold that thought, and keep your finger in that spot, and let's look at the sifting that preceded this scene. Let's look at the back story and refresh our memories. I'm going to jump in at verse 23 of Luke 22. Now it's the Last Supper, the profound Last Supper. The sharing of that meal with all its symbolism has already taken place. Jesus has already washed the disciple's feet and then we jump in here at the point where Jesus is telling them, "**One of you is going to deny me. One of you is going to betray me.**"

Luke 22:23: And they begin to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be the greatest and he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those who have authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you, let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as a servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. And you are those who have stood by me in my trials; and just as my father has granted me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at my table in the kingdom and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Wonderful stuff! Hallelujah! And then comes this verse about the sifting, verse 31

Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and you, when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

SIFTING FORETOLD

So, here begins a section I'm calling, "Sifting Foretold." This sifting is foretold by Jesus. He just foretold them a lot of glory, but he has also foretold that they are going to be sifted first. And this isn't the only time he's foretold this kind of thing in their



Christian walk. John 15:2 records Jesus saying, **“My father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit, so that they will produce even more.”** Every branch that bears good fruit the father prunes that it may bear more fruit! And there's a season for pruning. You just don't prune any time you want to. And that season had come for Peter and it's a severe thing, but it's what you do for more fruit bearing.

There are a lot of important things that go into getting fruit from a tree. There's watering, there's fertilizing, there's weeding, there's the need for sunshine, -all these things. But pruning is a long-term strategy and initially it looks like you just wrecked the tree, doesn't it? I mean sometimes it will be two or three years before you see that the tree is actually bearing more fruit than it would have otherwise, and it can now even bear more fruit. Before, the branches would have broken under the load. And there are all kinds of wonderful metaphors in this idea that the Father is the one who prunes us. If you're bearing good fruit you're going to get pruned, and it's at His time, it's at His season. We don't get to choose. We don't! These things are far beyond our comprehension, but that's what he's telling Peter here. It's foretold. And of course, Peter argues with Jesus and objects. He has a lot to learn in this department.

I'm going to read a couple paragraphs here for us from an old book by Watchman Nee called, *The Release of the Spirit* because I think it touches on this in another way that Watchman Nee, in his Watchman Nee kind of way, explains well. He refers to it as the breaking of the outer man, this pruning and sifting, and he has some good things to share with us. I'll just refer to a couple paragraphs, but even the front cover of this book touches on it. It says **“One Basic Lesson Every Servant of God Must Learn, that any Measure of Fruitfulness Requires the Breaking of the Outward Man to Allow the Release of the Spirit of God.”**

On page 12, Nee is referring to it as the Alabaster Box. Remember the story where the woman comes to Jesus, and has this alabaster box full of super valuable ointment inside and the box has to be broken for it to be released? He says that's kind of like what we are. We're like the alabaster box, and without the breaking of the outward, the inward will not come forth. He writes: *Each disciplinary working of the Holy Spirit has but one purpose -to break our outward man so that our inward man may come through. Yet here's our difficulty: We fret over trifles, we murmur at small losses. The Lord is preparing a way to use us yet scarcely has his hand touched us when we feel unhappy, even to the extent of quarreling with God and becoming negative in our attitude. Since being saved we have been touched many times in various ways by the Lord, all with the purpose of breaking our outward man, whether we are conscious of it or not. The aim of the Lord is to destroy or break this outward man.*

So that's what Jesus is beginning to share with Peter here, as he foretells the sifting. He goes on in verse 31: **“Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat.”** This means he's obtained permission, permission to sift you like wheat. “You” here means “all of you disciples,” but he's singling out Peter as a sort of focus and lesson. It's kind of like the story of Job. You remember how Satan had to get permission to touch Job? He could only do what God was allowing in order to test and refine Job. So, nothing is going to touch Peter, nothing is going to touch any of us, that permission hasn't first been granted for.

So it says Satan has demanded permission to sift you all like wheat, and then Jesus says in verse 32, **“But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”** And that makes all the difference! Jesus has prayed that our faith may not fail. Romans 8:34 says that Jesus continues to intercede for us at the right hand of the father. Did you know he's still praying for us? Hebrews 7:25 says, **He is able to save to the uttermost**, which means *forever*, **those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for us.** Halleluia, he is still interceding with that prayer that your faith would not fail. We see another similar prayer that Jesus prayed for us, for his church, in John 17:15 it says: **My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.**

Now I have to ask you, I have to ask myself, are we busy praying that God will save us from the world, rather than the evil one? Do we have an opposite kind of prayer going on, so that we're not praying according to Jesus' prayer? In 1 John 5:14 it says, **This is the confidence that we have in him that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.** Let's

grow, let's mature in our prayers so that we can be praying in accordance with the way that Jesus prays for us and the Church. He doesn't pray that we will be taken out of the world. He doesn't pray that! He even says, **"I send you out as sheep amongst wolves."** Wow! *But he is with us* and his concern is that our faith may not fail as we go through these trials, as we go through these buffetings, as we are out in the world with all of its hard knocks. He doesn't pray that we will be taken out of the world, he prays that we will be protected from the evil one, and that was his concern with Peter as he goes into this very dark sifting.

Elizabeth Elliott, you may recall who she is, Jim Elliott, her husband, was a martyr and a missionary. After he was killed, she went on to serve the same people that killed her husband. She eventually had a lot of profound things to share and teach. There are a lot of good quotes out there by Elizabeth Elliott. One is that she says, *"God will not protect you from anything that will make you more like Jesus."*

So sifting has been foretold and it's in God's timing, and in his way. And Peter is kind of being singled out here for a deep study, so we can learn from him. What needs sifting in Peter? But I have to say, what needs sifting in *us*? As we consider this, I believe the scriptures show us some things that need sifting in Peter. But let's also ask, what needs sifting in me, Lord? What needs sifting in your church? I don't think that it's a matter of going off to identify them and then getting all introverted and gazing into our belly button to work it all out. It's God's business, but there are things that by his Holy Spirit he will put his finger on in his time and sift and bring to the surface.

I was in a prayer meeting just this past week where we were worshipping and praising God and one brother just under the conviction of the Holy Spirit confessed and repented of grumpiness. That is what God was putting his finger on in him at that moment. Another brother a little later was convicted of and confessed to being cynical and having a hard heart. And he repented of that and it was precious. It was in the presence of God and there was release and forgiveness. But you know, when you're in that moment, when God is putting his finger on you, on that thing, it's as black as Peter's denial. It's like, *"Oh Lord, now I see it!"* You know, maybe you've been grumpy for years but now you really see it and cry out, *"Lord sift this thing out of me, prune it away. Now I see it!"* And in the presence of the Lord, and by his grace, we have these periods when, if necessary, we encounter these things that break us, that bring whatever God is dealing with to the surface and that's what's going on here with Peter.

WHAT NEEDS SIFTING IN PETER?

So, let's consider a few of these things briefly revealed in these scriptures that are needing sifting in Peter.


1. We see in the passage I just read, in Luke 22, this desire for greatness thing. I mean how is it even possible that right after the

Lord's Supper, and his washing their feet, that they're arguing about who is going to be the greatest among them? It's almost unfathomable, but praise the Lord the scriptures are so brutally honest about this. Jesus had said over and over, and taught them for years that, **"He who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted."** And, **"When you go to a banquet take the lowest seat."** And yet here they are, arguing over who's going to be the greatest. And so yes, that was going to be pruned. That was going to be sifted. God is putting his finger on that thing in them.

2. Another area needing sifting I believe, as we see Peter's personality coming out here, is this argumentative self-confident thing. You know, here he is insisting that he loves the Lord more than any of the other guys and that he's ready

What Needs Sifting in Peter?

- **The Desire for Greatness –vs 24**
- **Overconfidence in Self. Operating out of the strength of his personality –vs 33**
- **Attitude about the Cross & Suffering – Matt. 16:22**



to go to prison and even go to death. And Jesus says to him, "You're going to deny me three times before the rooster crows in the morning." And by the way, it wasn't like God was going to annihilate his personality and that he desires to make us all Christian clones, but there was something of Peter's operating out of his own personality, his own strength and overconfidence, that God was putting his finger on here and it was going to get sifted.

3. Peter's attitude about the cross wasn't in this passage but I believe it's another thing getting sifted at this time. Because in these same days, when Jesus was talking about the cross, we see another time that Peter argued with the Lord. You know the story, he says, "Far be it from you to go to the cross, Lord." Gary Gilbertson has looked at the Greek phrase here and tells us that it actually means, "pity yourself." He was essentially saying, you know, "This talk of crosses and suffering and sifting, no, no, no. Far be it from you Lord, have some pity on yourself. You know, let's not have that be a part of this kingdom of God stuff!" And that was another area God was putting his finger on in Peter, and it was going to get sifted. it was foretold.

SIFTING FULLILLED

So now, with that in mind, let's go to this brief passage in the same chapter of Luke 22. Skip ahead to verse 60. We're going to see the sifting fulfilled. Jesus foretold it, and this is what sifting fulfilled looks like. I'm jumping in at verse 60. We're at the tail end of Peter's denial of the Lord. It says:



Peter said, "Man I do not know what you're talking about. And immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had told him, "Before a rooster crows today you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. And the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him and beating him.

I wonder, it sounds like even at the very moment that the words of denial were coming out of Peter's mouth, that Jesus was in the middle of getting beaten, and they make eye contact. I mean wow, what a scene! What an epic failure of Peter. **...And he went out and WEPT BITTERLY.**

What is this "went out" phrase? The Bible says Judas also *went out*. It says, "he went out and hung himself." Peter *went out* also. What I think it means is when you go away, and you're alone with your thoughts. You're left with nothing but how much you have failed. All the regrets of that horrible thing you did. You went out and you're left alone with that. Judas went out ...and hung himself. Peter went out ...and *wept bitterly*.

I wonder if at that time Peter had some flashbacks of Jesus saying, **"Whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my father who is in heaven."** He must be thinking, "Oh you're right Lord! I'm doomed I'm going to be denied before my father in Heaven. I denied him!" Or, what about another place where Jesus said, **"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the son of man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his father's glory, and with the Holy Angels."**

"Oh, what an epic failure I am!" Peter must've been thinking as he wept bitterly. "Is there any hope for me? Can anything good come out of this?" This is the bitterness that Peter was experiencing, knowing that the Lord would have every right to reject him. He is utterly *broken*.

Let me just read another passage here from Release of the Spirit. It's called, The Treasure is in the Earthen Vessel: *But if the earthen vessel is not broken who can see the treasure within? What is the final objective of the Lord's working in our lives? It is to break the earthen vessel, to break our Alabaster Box, to crack open our shell. The Lord longs to find a way to bless the world through those who belong to him. Brokenness is the way of blessing, the way of fragrance, the way of fruitfulness. But it is also a path sprinkled with blood. Yes, there is blood from many wounds when we offer*

ourselves to the Lord to be at his service. We cannot afford to be lenient, to spare ourselves. We must allow the Lord utterly to crack our outward man so that he may find a way for his outworking.

RESTORATION!

So, this is where we're at when we come now, back to the restoration part of the story. Now we can begin again in chapter 21, in John chapter 21. Now I think we have a little better appreciation for the context of where we left off earlier. **"But,"** it begins in verse four. When they were broken, when they were low and had caught nothing all night. **But, when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach.**

Hallelujah! Jesus is not done with Peter! There's hope! Jesus has shown up! And kind of in the same way he showed up personally for Thomas. Remember when Thomas said, "Unless I see the scars and I put my finger in the wound, I'm not going to believe." And Jesus shows up for Thomas and shows him the very thing he needed? I think this is Jesus showing up for Peter.



So, Jesus has set the stage for this ministry to Peter, and it starts out with a question. Jesus says in verse five, **Jesus therefore said to them children you do not have any fish, do you? They said no.** Now, Jesus already knew this. So why does he ask? Why does he ask us things that he already knows? Sometimes we just need to confess. So, he draws out that confession. "Lord I've been grumpy. Lord I've got hardness of heart." And he draws it out. He already knows it but there's something good about just confessing it out to Jesus. And Jesus says, **cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch. They cast therefore and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.**

Hallelujah! Let me just give you another little flashback. Peter is probably having flashbacks at this point. It's starting to sink in, I think. They don't know it at first, that it's the Lord, but he's like, "*Wait a second...!*" And he's remembering back to his very first calling in Luke chapter 5. It was almost the exact same scene when Peter had his first encounter with Jesus. It says in verse 3 of Luke 5:

[Jesus] got out into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little away from the land. And he sat down and began teaching the multitudes from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered and said, "Master we worked hard all night and caught nothing. (it was another one of those kind of nights) But at your bidding I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish and their nets began to break and they signaled to their partners in the other boat, for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus feet, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

What a difference we see in Peter from this time of his first encounter with Jesus and the story in John 21. Now, he has history with Jesus. In that first time, his first encounter with the divinity and power of God, he said, "Oh my sinfulness! Just depart from me. Just depart from me Lord." But this time is entirely different. You would think maybe it would be a similar kind of reaction going on in Peter, but this time he can't get to Jesus fast enough!

Now he's had history with Jesus. Now he's had that time when others were forsaking the Lord, and the Lord said, "Are you guys going to leave too?" And Peter replied, "**Where else can we go, Lord? You alone have the words of eternal life.**" This had been working into him, in spite of his failures. Now he knew, where else can you go? The Lord alone is our only hope. And this is something in Peter I see here in this second calling, this restoration, the second manifestation of the Lord's calling of Peter. Rather than recoiling, he's drawn to Jesus. This time he just can't get to Jesus fast enough.

In First Peter 1:3, years later as an apostle, Peter would say, **“Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”** He knew that his only hope was the grace to be brought in Jesus. So, in the next verse in John 21, when they say, “It’s Jesus! It’s the Lord!” All his hopes were on the grace that Jesus had for him and something in him just threw himself into the water. I just picture a spontaneous response. He couldn't help himself. Everybody else starts rowing, but Peter throws himself into the water and starts swimming. Hallelujah! And this I believe, is a picture of the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ, when he comes on that great day of his ultimate appearing. As the scripture says in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, **“The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trumpet of God.”** Then we will all say, *“It’s the Lord!”* and those who remain on Earth are going to go to him, like Peter and meet him in the air! We’ve been longing for his appearing. We can't get to him fast enough. There will be something in our spirits that just wants to be with him, when he appears, when that great shout of, “IT’S THE LORD!” comes on that great day and you fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you on that great day. Peter knew that well. It had been worked deeply into him through this and other experiences. When the Lord appears, he appears with grace for you who have longed for him, who have longed for his appearing.

In Luke 12:36, in one of Jesus’ parables, he says, **“Be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding. Be ready to open the door immediately when he comes and knocks.”** Let's abide in him and be like those kinds of servants who, when he comes, were immediately able to open that door when he comes and knocks!

So, the stage is still being set. It's almost complete. There's a fire there on the beach. I wonder if it smelled a little bit like that fire where he denied the Lord? Remember when Peter gathered around the fire to warm himself and the little slave girl said, “You're one of them!” And it says in Matthew, it says he denied him with cursing and swearing. That's the R rated version. I wonder if there's something of a little flashback from that charcoal smell, from that fire where he was warming himself with the world, and denying the Lord?

But now a different kind of fire had been kindled. It was kindled by Jesus. They didn't even know it was Jesus at first. But he had been busy preparing a charcoal fire on the beach, preparing some fish, preparing a meal for them. And he says, “Bring some of the fish which you've caught.” I mean, this scene is so saturated with the grace of God. “The fish which you caught,” he says of the miracle he performed. He did it all!

And so they start coming, and he says come and have breakfast. Do you know how many of the scenes in the gospels occur around meals? it's a staggering number. It's worthy of a study or a written book. I'd like to look into it. Almost all of the scenes, the real ministry settings of interaction with the Savior, take place around meals. it's astounding! There's a quote by Frederick Brunner, he's written volumes of commentary on the Gospel of John, he says: *Jesus wants to eat with his disciples because it is at the meals especially, for some mysterious reason, that people most freely talk and get to know each other.* That's the setting that Jesus loves to have with us.

Revelations 3:20, you know the verse, **“I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears me and opens to me, I'll come in and dine with them.”** He wants to have that kind of relationship with them and with us. And that's what he's saying when he invites Peter, invites the disciples, to come and have breakfast. *Hallelujah, what a wonderful savior!*

So that's the setting. It's now complete. *It is so saturated with Grace.* They come and Jesus has prepared so much. Now the restoration can begin. And again, Jesus is asking questions, he's drawing something out. He already knows the answer but he's drawing something out of Peter in such a profound way. Volumes have been written on all the subtle nuance here of the different words. “Do you love me?” Three times Jesus asks this, and three times Peter replies. And there are different shades of meaning in the Greek. Jesus starts out with, “Do you love me more than these?” and it's *agape* love. “Oh, do you love me with this agape unselfish love, Peter? Remember the time back when you were so adamant? When you said, “Yes, I love you more than these. I'll go to prison for you. I'll die for you!”

“How's that going for you? Jesus seems to ask. Do you love me like that, more than these, Peter? And the new Peter, the sifted Peter says, yes it is a love, but it's the love of a friend -called *phileo* love. And Jesus says, “Feed my Lambs.” Again Jesus asks, “Do you *agape* me?” The same thing, and again Peter replies, “I *phileo* you.

“Shepherd my sheep,” Jesus says. And again, one more time, but this time Jesus asks, “Do you *phileo* me?” and Peter says I *phileo* you.” And Jesus says, “Tend my sheep.” The proper order is getting established here: “I I Love You Lord, and I want to serve you, and I'm called to serve out of that first-things-first place. Jesus is just drawing out this this confession. But it's coming out of the new Peter, the new sifted Peter.

--That soulish self-confidence, it's been sifted! Peter is being humble now. He's just being real, and Jesus can work with that. You know, he's saying, “Yes, I do love you Lord. I love you with my humble *phileo* love. I've got that much.” And Jesus accepts that.

--And the lust for greatness that was present on that day when Jesus announced that Peter would be sifted, the lust for greatness, that's gone! I believe that's been sifted out of him. We see that plainly in Acts 3 right after Pentecost. It's the first recorded miracle that Peter is used in. And it's a profound miracle of healing. It says the man was born lame from his mother's womb. He was over 40 years old. You remember the story. And Peter is used for the man's instant healing. And then they go into the temple together and it says that a crowd gathered and they were amazed. It was amazing! And it implies they were in awe at what Peter had done with this miracle. And here is a glimpse, I think, into just how much that greatness thing had been sifted out of him. In verse 12 Peter says, “**Why do you gaze at us as if by our own power or piety we made him walk?**” The crowd hadn't even started saying anything yet, they're just thinking how great Peter must be, and gazing at him, and he nipped it in the bud. That thing had been sifted out of him, and God actually went on to use him greatly. People began to get healed even by his shadow falling on them later on, because God could do that with him and he wasn't going to get proud. He knew that nothing great was of him. That had been sifted out.

--And that attitude about the cross. I believe it was in the process of getting sifted. Do any of us ever have it sifted all the way until we're dead? I don't know. But Jesus, at the end of this passage, he prophesied about it. In verse 18 he foretells how Peter is going to die. Tradition says, and it goes way back to the early church, it's probably reliable, that he was crucified. Apparently, he did die by crucifixion. And we're told that when the time came, Peter said, “I'm not worthy to be crucified right side up like my Lord, crucify me upside down.” And tradition tells us that's how he died. That may or may not be true but Jesus is foretelling something similar here. “You're going to stretch out your hands and someone will gird you and bring you to where you don't wish to go.” Verse 19 says this was signifying the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. There's a cross in your future, Peter. But you know, God will be there with you. And he didn't seem at all to have the same attitude and objection that he once did about the cross and suffering. It had been sifted, I believe, or was deeply in the process.

--There's one more thing that had been sifted out, I believe here. We see it in each of the times when the Lord asks Peter, “Do you love me?” and Peter gives this humble reply. He answers with the phrase, “*Lord you know.*” That argumentative Peter had been sifted. Those times when he would argue with the Lord and say, “No, no, no, far be it from you Lord.” Or, “No, I'm not going to leave you,” and “I love you more than these.” Now he just says, “*Lord thou knowest.*” And that's a phrase that, as a Hebrew, he would have known well from the scriptures. It's a common expression in the Psalms and Prophets. Also, remember in Ezekiel, when the Lord says to him, “Son of man, can these bones live?” his

RESTORATION!

John 21:15-17

- **Soulsh Self Confidence = SIFTED!**
- **The Lust for Greatness = SIFTED!**
- **Attitude Toward the Cross and Suffering = IN PROCESS OF SIFTING!**
- **The Old Argumentative Peter = SIFTED!**

reply is, "Lord thou knowest." Isaiah said it too. In Revelation, John himself says it when he's in heaven and has this vision of the great multitude and he's asked, "Who are these?" and he just says, "Lord thou knowest."

So, Peter has that new attitude. The argumentative Peter had been sifted out and he just says, "Lord thou knowest," each time he replies to the Lord. And it's the right attitude. But did you know that the Lord wants to involve us in this knowing thing? In Matthew 7 the worst thing a human can hear on that day is, "Depart from me, I never knew you." And Psalm 139 verse 1 begins, "**Lord, you have searched me and you know me.**" David had been sifted and he had allowed the Lord to search and know him. Interestingly though, in the last two verses of that psalm, he's asking for more. David says, "**Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**"

That is the heart of a disciple, I think. It's opening the door to being sifted by God and known by him. And yet, we can't say, "Okay, I'm going to go do it; I'm going to go sift myself. All we can do is, like Gary said, trust that verse that says, "**If necessary, you have encountered various trials.**" When it's time, in God's way, when it's that necessary pruning season, God puts you into something where you're sifted.

I think that my point is this, let's just have a different attitude about these things. Let's realize that this is God's way. We're not going to go run after it. We're not going to go get the pruning shears out on each other but, you know, let's recognize that this is God's way, this breaking, this pruning and sifting. It's a precious thing, and God is doing it in his people. He did it in Peter, and he's going to be doing it in us and in his church. And it's a necessary part of being a disciple.

I just want to close with one more paragraph, if I may, from this Release of the Spirit book. He's says, *Oh we must realize that all the experiences, troubles and trials which the Lord sends us are for our highest good. We cannot expect the Lord to give better things, for these are his best. Should one approach the Lord and pray saying, "Oh Lord, please let me choose the best." I believe the Lord would tell him, "What I have given you is the best. Your daily trials are for your greatest prophet. So the motive behind all the orderings of God is to destroy our outer man to break that outer man, and once this occurs the spirit can come forth.*

You know, I'm in awe sometimes when I think of some of the people in our midst that are so much further along in these things. I'm not sharing this as if I'm some kind of authority on it, but I am saying there's something here I've seen in God's Word. I thank the Lord that we have people who are far, far more advanced in this, and I just cherish them in that. It's a faith refined by fire and it's precious to the Lord, and us.

CLOSING PRAYER

Hallelujah! Lord Jesus, thank you for restoring Peter, and for this wonderful, wonderful chapter that you added to the gospel for our edification, for our instruction. We just really savor it, Lord. Write these things on human hearts by the Spirit of the Living God, I pray. And not just in some academic way, but Lord through our experiencing it, through our going with you in these things.

By the way, in the last words with Peter in this chapter, this restoration of Peter chapter, Jesus ends with the very same words to him that he began with: "*Follow me!*"

So Lord, here are these things. They're all up to you; they're your business lord, they're yours. You are the Master Gardener. We are the clay and you're the Potter. Lord, our hope is in you and we want to just keep following you and trusting you as you are building your church. It's not about all the rot in the soft spot in the floor, and all that. That's just a little sidebar to what you're building. You're making us into a holy Temple. So, just continue that work in us Lord. Thank you for your word this morning, for your Spirit that makes it alive and helps us take it in. May we take it into our hearts, Lord.

In your holy name, amen.

