

Sermon Text: John 21:1-19

Each week after Easter, we've been focusing on different accounts of people that who have come into contact with the risen Christ. Each week, we've seen that when someone comes into contact with Jesus, they are never the same. Last week, we looked at doubting Thomas and saw his encounter with Jesus and how that changed him. This week, we're going to look at Peter, the apostle Peter, and see how he encountered Christ and what that did for his life. A great story! So we're going to be looking at John, Chapter 21 so I want to encourage you to pick up your Bibles and follow along because we're kind of going to be camping out there.

We're going to look at this topic under three headings, and we're going to learn three things about the Gospel of Christ. One is that the Gospel is all exposing. The Gospel is all exposing. Secondly, the Gospel is absolutely free, and thirdly, the Gospel is all together changing. The Gospel is all exposing, absolutely free, and all together changing.

Now, back in our Scripture, John, Chapter 21, we see that the disciples had already come into contact with the risen Christ and they're excited and so, naturally they go fishing. I don't know why. They just decided to do it. So they're fishing, and they see a man on the shore. They've been fishing. They had not caught a thing. They finally realize it's Jesus, and Jesus says, "Drop your nets now, and you'll catch a huge catch." They catch 153 fish. They come to shore. Peter is so excited that it's Jesus. He hops out of the boat, swims for shore, and then we see they gather by a fire, and he and Jesus converse a little bit. That's the passage. What John wants us to see from this is this is a very similar situation that happened in the life of Peter much earlier.

If you go back to Luke, Chapter 5, the calling of the first disciples, we see almost an exact same situation. The disciples are fishing. They've been fishing all night. They have not caught anything. Jesus comes and says, "Drop your nets." They say, look, Jesus, we're fishermen. We've been fishing all night. There's nothing here. You go back to making your whittling statue or whatever. We know what we are doing. There's no fish here. There's nothing. Jesus said to do it anyway. Drop your nets. They drop nets, and we know the story. They catch the biggest catch they've probably ever had, and are basically set for life at that point. They do that, and then Simon Peter, this is in verse 8, when Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' feet and said, "Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man."

Peter saw his own life. He saw that he doubted Jesus. He saw his faults, and then he looked at the perfect life of Jesus, and he was exposed. Who he really was was exposed. The sins that he was hiding were pushed to the front. He was exposed. He had encountered Christ, and he had been exposed.

Kind of a practical example. I ran track in high school, and I was a distance runner, and our main event was the mile. If any of you have run track, you know that that's kind of the main event for distance runners. I was an average runner. I was not great. I was not horrible, somewhere in the middle. On these really big meets that we went to on the weekends, they had so many people competing in the mile that what they had to do was they had to break it

up into heats so the first heat would be the slower runners. The second heat would be the runners that were pretty good. They were kind of fast. That was usually where I was. Then you had the last heat, which was the fastest people in the state were there, and they would run in that heat. We were approaching the mile. We were approaching my race. I'm there. I'm ready. I'm in the second heat. You know, I'm probably going to do pretty good. My coach comes up to me and says, “Jack, I've got great news.” I said, “What?” He says, “I got you in the first heat. You're going to run with all the fast guys!” I just sank. Oh no! I said, “Okay. Are you sure it's a good idea? I'm happy. I'll run the second heat. That's great. I'm there.” He said, “No, we pulled some strings, and got you in the first heat.” So I ran the first heat, ran probably the fastest race I had ever run to the point, and got last by a lot. It wasn't even close. I was crushed. What happened? I was exposed. If I was in the second heat, I probably could have won it. I could have come down that straightaway and the cameras would have been flashing, and it would have been high fives for Jack, but I wasn't in the second heat. I was in the first heat with all the fast runners, and it exposed me for who I was – a decent runner, not a great runner. I was exposed by people that were faster and quicker than me.

This theme is all throughout the Bible, and if you look in Isaiah, Chapter 6, Isaiah, a prophet of God, Isaiah, Chapter 6, Verse 1, says, “In the year the king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne.” So Isaiah is there. King Uzziah has just died, and then Isaiah sees the Lord seated on a throne, and it says in Verse 2, “Above Him were seraphs, or angels, and they were singing.” In Verse 3, it says, “They were calling to one another, holy, holy, holy Lord, holy is the Lord almighty, the whole earth is full of His glory.”

That's just a great picture. You've got God seated on His throne. You've got angels, holy, holy, holy, singing His praises to Him, and then Isaiah sees it. He sees the Lord. His reaction is a little bit astonishing. Was it, this is great, I saw God, this is great! My life's really going to get better now! This is exciting! I've seen God! This is good times! This is what we would expect, but look at Verse 5. He says, “Woe to me, I cried, I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Isaiah saw a clear picture of who God was and that God is holy and perfect. He saw that and he saw his own life, and he said woe to me. Other translations say, “I am doomed.” He sees his own life. He sees he is a man of unclean lips. He's not perfect. He has flaws. He says not only that, “I live among a people of unclean lips.” He encountered the King and saw His life, and he saw his own, and he wasn't able to stand. Woe to me, I am a man of unclean lips. He was exposed. Who he really was was exposed.

The Sermon on the Mount is probably the most famous passage in the Bible, and Virginia Stem Owen is a college professor and author as well. She decided that her students in her class, most of them had heard of the Sermon on the Mount, but they probably had never read it so one of her assignments was for them to go home, read the Sermon on the Mount, come back, and write a response paper to that. Here's what some of her students said in a response to the Sermon on the Mount. The first one said, “I did not like the Sermon on the Mount. It made me feel like I had to be perfect, and no one is.” The second student said, “The things this Sermon asks for are stupid.” Interesting! So what she found out from this is, she said, basically the Sermon asks for four things, and number one is Jesus does not require that we

give most of our money away, but He requires that we also do it joyfully. Two, Jesus does not just forbid killing people, but He forbids disdain people, feeling superior to people, and even treating someone with coldness or indifference. Not only does Jesus say that I can't revenge myself on someone persecuting me, but I have to love them and care for them. Jesus does not just forbid worry, but says I have to live gratefully and happily with whatever situation I have. Her students didn't like that. What happened? They were exposed. They saw the commands of Jesus and they saw their own lives, and they knew that they couldn't live up to those commands.

We all fall short. They saw God's love. They saw what Jesus required and they saw that it was impossible. The requirements are impossible yet it's exactly what God requires of us, to follow them. They were exposed. We're exposed. What is our response to what God is saying to me from the Sermon on the Mount? I can't do it! I've been exposed. My true self has come out.

Now, we get to the point where we see Jesus. He's perfect, and we see that we're not perfect. I think we all admit that. I'm not perfect. I do things sometimes that I'm not proud of, little things here and there that I do that are probably wrong, but we usually don't feel the weight of that.

Look in Verse 15 of our passage, and we will see a conversation that Jesus has with Peter, and it's kind of strange. You notice three separate times Jesus says, “Peter, do you love me?” Peter says, “Yes, I love you.” Second time, Peter, do you love me? Peter says yes. This happens three times. What this passage is pointing to is if you remember just a few verses earlier was when Jesus was arrested, and Peter was one of the most committed followers of Christ, and Jesus is arrested, and Peter is cornered. The crowd says, “Peter, you're with Him, aren't you? You know Him?” Peter says, “No, I don't know Him.” He denies Jesus three times. What Jesus is doing is He is pointing Peter back to that moment. Peter remember, you love me now, but you remember when you denied me three times just a few days earlier? What we learn from Peter's denial is that when Peter denied Jesus, he was rejecting who Jesus was and everything about Jesus. It was a direct rejection of Jesus when Peter denied Him those three times.

What we need to kind of come to grips with is that every time we sin is that we do the exact same thing. That's kind of strong, but just bare with me.

Martin Luther wrote a little section about the Ten Commandments. The first Commandment we know is thou shall have no other gods before me. Commandments two through ten follow after that. We read the first Commandment, and we say, okay, well, that's probably okay. I don't wake up and worship the sun god. I don't have a shrine to Apollo in my basement so we're good on the first Commandment, but that's not what the first Commandment says. The first Commandment says God needs to be number one in our lives all the time. Any time he's not, you've broken the First Commandment. What Martin Luther says is that Commandments two through ten are never broken unless Commandment one is broken.

Let's look at an example. Take a lie. I think we would all agree that lying is not good. We shouldn't lie, but I think it's something that we all do from time to time, proud of it or not. Have you guys ever been in this situation? Jack, did you get to that thing that I was telling you about? You know, it was next on my list. I haven't gotten to it yet, but you know, I'm going down my bullet points. It's right there. Yeah, I'm on it. Of course, I had totally forgotten anything about the request he had made of me, and so what happens? We lie. We say oh yeah I remember that, yeah, it was just next on my list when in reality I had totally forgotten about the request, so I lie. Why do I do that? I'm concerned about my reputation. I want to be looked at as Jack, you ask him to do something, and he'll get it done. Jack, you can depend on him, he'll do it for you. You ask something of Jack Carmody, he's all over it. That's not always true so I blunt the reputation. I say, oh yeah, I'll get that done. In that moment, I say that God is number one in my life, but for that moment, when I choose to lie, God goes from being up here to over here, and in place of God, I put my reputation. For that moment I choose to lie, my reputation and what people think of me is more important than God. In that moment, I have rejected God. I've rejected Him.

Another example is gossip. We do this all the time. We talk about people behind their backs. We gossip, and why do we do that? There's a lot of reasons, but one, we do it to feel good about ourselves because we see other people doing things that we would never do! We do it to feel good about ourselves. We also do it to just put them down, to make it where they don't look so hot anymore. Those are the motives, so the minute I decide to gossip and talk about someone behind their back, I go from having God at number one. I say, no, God, I know gossiping is wrong. I know it's wrong, but for this moment, I'm going to dethrone you, and instead I'm going to have the satisfaction that I get from talking bad about someone. In that moment, I know it's wrong, but I'm going to push you aside, and instead of you, I'm going to have X, whatever it is. It's different. Every sin is different. We do it every time we sin. We take God out of the number one place in our lives, and instead, we put something else. That is a direct rejection of who God is and His very being.

Jonathan Edwards was a pastor during the Great Awakening in New England, and he says that sin is basically cosmic treason. That's kind of a weird phrase. It is treason against God. We have betrayed God. If you look at the history of our country, you'll see that treason was the worst crime of which you could be convicted. Some of the worst punishments ever dealt out in our nation's history are from people who have committed treason, who have betrayed the loyalties to our nation. What Edwards is saying is that every time we sin, every time we say God you're no longer number one, this is, we have betrayed God, the very God who created us and sustains us. We have betrayed God by the way we live. This is serious. This is very serious.

That brings us to our second point, which is that the Gospel is absolutely free. Go back to verse 15, and once again we see how three times Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” and Peter says yes. Peter, do you love me? Yes. Why does Jesus do that? Have you guys ever been in a situation where you do something wrong to someone else, and that person just holds it over your head? Like ten years later they say, well, yeah, do you remember ten years ago when you did that? I hate that. It's like let it go. Is that what Jesus is doing? No. Obviously

not. Jesus wanted Peter to remember that he had denied Jesus, but He wanted Peter to get to a point of repentance. Peter needed to own his sin before God personally, not make excuses. Could Peter have made excuses when he denied Jesus? Absolutely. Jesus, man, I'm right with you, but these guys were coming at me. This one guard was like 7' tall. He had this huge sword, and he was coming after me, and he said, do you know Him? It just slipped out. I said no. I didn't mean it. I wasn't thinking. It just happened. I really do love you so I didn't really mean that I denied you. No. Jesus says, "Peter own your sin. Own it before God. Admit that you have fallen short."

That's exactly what God is calling us to do. Own our sin. Own our failures. Own things that we do of which we're not proud. Don't make excuses. We do it all the time. Well, yeah, I did that, but at least I didn't do that! I mean that's kind of bad, but that, that's really bad. We make excuses. We do it all the time. See, you didn't know this whole circumstance. Yeah, I did that, and that's kind of wrong, but you don't know all these other things that were going on in my life. All these other things forced me to do that, and it's bad, but all these other things were going on. That's why I did it. Jesus says no, no more excuses. Own your sin for Me. Own it. Don't make excuses. Admit that we have not followed God.

So, not only do we need to see our brokenness and own it before God, but also we need to realize that God does not accept us because of what we have done. God accepts us because of what Christ has done. God doesn't accept us based upon what we've done. He accepts us based upon what Christ has done.

Philippians II, starting in verse 5, says Jesus Christ, who being in very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped or held onto. They made themselves nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Jesus was in Heaven, was sitting at God's right hand, and said He needed to come down, and He came down to earth, took the nature of a servant, lived the perfect life, and we crucified Him for it. On the cross, on the cross, Jesus took the penalty for our rebellion.

It says cosmic treason. Treason, in a lot of cases, is punishable by death. There is a punishment in our court system for those who commit treason, and the same holds true for us. There is a punishment. We've strayed. We've been exposed. Our sins have been brought forth, and there is a punishment for that. On the cross, Jesus took the punishment that we deserved. Instead of getting punished, we get the blessings of the life that Jesus lived. He lived a perfect life. We get those blessings.

We see that Peter knew this. Peter, if you remember in Luke 5, Jesus gives them all the fish, and Peter's reaction was, "Depart from me. I'm a sinful man." Look in this passage. Look in John 21. Same situation, Jesus gives them the fish, and instead of shying away, Peter jumps out of a boat. They're close enough to shore where it's two more seconds, Peter, and we're there, man, you don't have to jump out of the boat. He jumps out, starts swimming, and takes off for Jesus. He's so excited to see Him. What's happened? Grace has taken hold of Peter's life. Peter knows he's done some things he's not proud of. He's denied Jesus. He knows

that. He's owned it before God. He has accepted God's grace in his life. That grace is free for us though it cost Jesus His life.

You see, the Gospel of Christ exposes our sin, exposes who we really are, and we've also seen that that sin is a direct rejection of God and who He is. We've also seen that forgiveness is offered. It's free.

Our third point is that the Gospel is altogether changing, and we see that it really changed Peter. Now, did it ever cross your mind why Jesus took Peter to lead the church? If you look at the first part of Acts, Peter is all over the place. He's starting churches. He's doing all these things. Why does Jesus pick Peter? What you may not know is in Matthew 26, before all this had happened, Jesus is talking with the disciples, and He says, you know what, you guys are all going to fall away. Peter says oh, no, no. I'm not going to fall away. Even if all these other disciples fall away, I'm not going to. So Peter really puts himself out there. He says look, these guys are going to nail you, but even if they do, I'm going to be with you the whole time. He had that with him. We see Peter's failure was the greatest. Not only did he fall away, but also he said he wasn't going to, and he did anyway. Would you want Peter running your company? If we're picking CEO's, we say oh yeah, Peter, he's the most disloyal, and he's the biggest failure of our company. Let's put him in charge. Great plan! That makes no sense, but it's exactly what Jesus does. It's very astonishing.

Jesus chose Peter because he had experienced the death of God's grace in his life. Peter's failure was the greatest, but by that failure, he had allowed God's grace to sink deep in his heart. Luke 7 says, "He who has been forgiven much, loves much." The more we're forgiven, the more we love God because the more we see when Jesus died on the cross, and He died for a lot. The more our sins are exposed, the more we see them, the more we thank God, because Jesus really did die for my sins, and I have a lot of sins. God's grace had transformed Peter from the coward we see in Luke 5 to the rock we see at the end of John 11. So what this passage is saying is the more we see our failures, the more we're exposed, the more we let God's grace into our lives, the greater a person we're going to be. Peter was the leader he was, he was the great man that he was because he had failed, because he had done things he was not proud of, because he had repented of those things, and let God's grace into his life. That is what made Peter the great man he was, the great shepherd, the great leader, the great preacher, all those things were because he had seen his failure. He had been exposed. He had let God's free grace into his heart. That was what made him who he was, the great leader that we see in the Scriptures.

So I'll challenge you with this. Don't run from your faults, and don't hide from your flaws. Don't make excuses when you mess up; instead, own your sin before God, really own it. Accept His grace in your heart, and watch what God will do with your life. Amen.