

He Threw Himself into the Sea

The Resurrection of Christ and a Dream Come True

Introduction

The Text

In our text here Jesus has already risen from the dead. John doesn't tell us how long it's been—maybe a few days, a few weeks. He's already appeared to the disciples twice. And our text now for this morning describes yet a third time. It comes to us in the last chapter of John's gospel and, in many ways, brings his whole account of Jesus' earthly life and ministry to a close.

¹ After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias [aka Sea of Galilee], and he revealed himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off." (John 21:1–8)

Fully Known & Deeply Loved

- A. It seems to me that the great longing within the heart of every human being is to be both fully known and deeply loved. If you have just one or the other of these, it will not do. But when you bring both of these things together, it's a dream come true. Let's think about this together for a moment here.
- B. I've heard it said that to be deeply loved but not fully known is superficial and fundamentally dissatisfying. And I think we would agree.
 - 1. Here, as an example, we might think of the celebrity. Where fans swoon and "deeply love" these people whom they don't really know.
 - a. I imagine for the celebrity such love is at first a bit invigorating and intoxicating, but, no doubt, after time, this twin longing surfaces again: "I don't just want to be deeply loved, I want to be fully known. I know full well that if I put out a bad album, if I make a bad movie, if I lose these curves, or this smile, or this money, all their so-called "love" will dissipate. They don't truly know me. Therefore, they don't truly love me."

- C. And, to a lesser degree, surely we all know what this is like. In our own relationships, is it not true that we often underplay our losses and overemphasize our wins. We try to “put our best foot forward” as the saying goes. “That other foot of mine is ugly. But this one here is nice. I’m going to put that one out so you see it first.” We try to present ourselves in the most lost endearing light because we so desperately want people to accept and love us.
1. But even if the person buys the line we’re selling, isn’t there still something fundamentally superficial and dissatisfying about it to us? We have to keep the image going, or we fear their love will stop.
 - a. We live anxious, like a used car salesman, praying that the customer doesn’t ask to see what’s under the hood. “If you see what’s under there, you won’t buy the car! Sure, I polished it up, but there’s hoses missing, there’s belts coming undone.” This is how so many of us live!
 - i. In the end, to be deeply loved but not fully known is superficial and dissatisfying. And you feel it.
- D. But, on the other hand, it is perhaps better to the alternative. Is there anything worse, is there anything we dread more, than being fully known . . . and being rejected?
1. Letting someone in, finally dropping your guard; letting them see your face without makeup, your emotions without composure; letting them see you—scars, sins, and all. And when they see it, the person you entrusted yourself to in those moments turns and betrays you. They mock you. They reject you. They push away from you. They know you all right, but they don’t love you.
- E. Doesn’t this sort of thing account for so much of our own relational and emotional turmoil? We open up to someone—a significant other, a spouse, a friend, a pastor, a parent—and we get abused, rejected, belittled, wounded. So we retreat behind our own castle walls and vow never to let a person in again.
1. Nothing hurts the human heart more than being fully known and rejected. “So if that’s what I get when I’m fully known, I will never let a person truly know me that way again. I may not have what I long for. But at least I’ll be safe.” (So many are there right now in this room. I’m certain of it!)

Good News!

- A. So to be deeply loved but not fully known is superficial and unsatisfying. And to be fully known but not deeply loved is our worst nightmare.
1. But what if you could be both—fully known and deeply loved—scars and all, ugly foot and all, missing pistons and all? Well, that would be a dream come true. That would be good news. That would be gospel.

- B. This is precisely what Christ is offering you here this morning. And that’s what makes Christianity so compelling, so beautiful. That’s what makes the cross and the resurrection, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, such good news, such gospel to the world.
- C. The message of Christianity is:
 - 1. On the one hand . . . God knows. Everything we try to hide . . . God knows. “I know about your mess. I know the way you lie to your coworkers to make yourself seem more put together than you really are. I know about that addiction that you secretly nurse in the night. I know about the way you treat your spouse behind closed doors. I know about the stuff you feel most ashamed of, most worried about, most troubled by; I know the insecurities, and the fears, the doubts, and the denials; I know you fully—the good . . . and the bad.”
 - 2. But (and here’s the most amazing thing), though He knows all of that . . . He loves us deeply still. That’s why Jesus goes to the cross. To clean up our mess, to pay for our sin, to remove our guilt, to cover our shame, to overcome our fears, to give us a future and a hope. And the resurrection means, He’s done it. “I know you more fully than you even know yourself, and I love you.”
- D. This is the offering of Easter. This is what Christ rose from the dead to deliver. This is what He’s holding out to you this morning, if you would have it.

“[He] Threw Himself Into the Sea”

- A. “Now, hold up, Nick?! Maybe all of that’s true, but what in the world does that have to do with this text back in John?” I’m glad you asked. The rest of this message will be my attempt to show you.
- B. But let me clue in here a bit right away at the beginning. Of all that could be drawn out of this text, there’s really just one little detail there at the end of [v. 7](#) that has captivated me, and I want it to captivate you. We read there that when Peter realized it was the Lord on the shore, he quickly put on his outer garment . . . [“and threw himself into the sea” \(v. 7b\)](#).
- C. Now, why do I find this response so moving? Why am I drawing out this idea of being fully known and deeply loved from this?
 - 1. Well, when you locate Peter’s response here in the context of the gospel narrative, I think you’ll start to see what I’m getting at. Peter, we recall, is the very one who, just days before, vehemently, embarrassingly, denied that he ever knew Jesus, to save his own skin.
 - a. Now, I’m thinking, if that Jesus—who I just threw under the bus to save myself (He even called down a curse on himself—“Let me be cursed if I’m lying!”)—if that Jesus shows up again, I’m not jumping off the boat and swimming towards Him. I may still jump off the boat, but I’m swimming in the opposite direction. The guilt, the shame is heavy. “The curse is coming for me. I’m out of here!”
- D. But that’s not what he does! When He hears that the man on the shore is Jesus, he puts on his outer garment and throws himself into the sea so that he can be the first to get to Him!

1. Now I'm going to argue that's the kind of response a person has when you're known to the full—all your junk, all your sin—and yet still you are forgiven, accepted, delighted in . . . loved. Peter experienced this. I want you to as well.
- E. To get us there, I want to quickly look at three things in particular with regard to Peter's relationship with Jesus: (1) The Denial; (2) The Pursuit; and (3) The Response. We'll go get some of the backstory and then trace our way towards his response here in our text.

(1) The Denial

Walking with Him

- A. If we are to be captivated by Peter's response here in [John 21](#), we need first to make sure we have an understanding of the nature of his sin against Christ. As far as I can see, Peter's betrayal of Jesus is second only to Judas' in the Scriptures. It is a grievous thing he does when we really stop to think about it.
- B. Think of all that Peter had seen of Jesus through the years of walking alongside Him. The compassion, the power, the glory of Christ were all made unmistakably evident to Him.
1. When Peter's own mother-in-law ill with a high fever, do you remember? Peter appeals to Jesus to heal, and so He enters the house and does so with a word ([Luke 4:38-39](#)).
 2. When the waves were threatening to topple the boat that Peter and the other disciples were in, they wake Christ up in a panic, and he watched Him again with just a word bring the sea to silence ([Luke 8:22-25](#)).
 3. And when Jesus takes Peter up on the Mount of Transfiguration, He saw Jesus radiant in glory ([Luke 9:28-36](#)).

Denying Him

- A. Jesus walked with him, talked with him, ate with him, ministered to him, entrusted Himself to him, would give His very life for him . . . and yet, Peter, in spite of all of this, when his own life is on the line, he denies ever even knowing Him!
- A. On the night Jesus was betrayed, He's dragged before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court. And they're all falsely accusing Him, mocking Him, spitting on Him, striking Him, slapping Him.
1. Meanwhile outside, as if to put a little more salt in our Savior's wounds, Peter, His close friend, and beloved disciple...is denying Him!
 - a. A little servant girl comes up to him: *"You also were with Jesus the Galilean." . . . 'I do not know what you mean'"* ([Mat 26:69-70](#)).
 - b. Another little servant girl sees him. This time he denies it with an oath: *"I do not know the man"* (v. 72).
 - c. Some other bystanders come up to him. This time he invokes a curse on himself and swears: *"I do not know the man"* (v. 74).

- i. And then, immediately, the rooster crows, “and he went out and wept bitterly” (v. 75).
- B. Have you been there? You know better. And yet there you go. Again . . . and again . . . and again. Is there any hope for people like us, for sinners like us? Yes!

(2) The Pursuit

Before . . .

- A. It’s important that we remember again that Peter’s denials here, while surely they broke the heart of our Lord, they did not come as a surprise to Him. He knew. He called it before it ever happened. And He was committed to pursuing and loving Peter through it.
 - 1. Do you remember what Jesus tells Peter around the table of the last supper? “³¹Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31–32). He goes on to speak plainly: “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me” (v. 34).
 - a. So: “Satan’s after you . . . you’re going to deny even knowing Me . . . but I’m praying for you . . . and I will get you through!”
- B. Now, I’m sorry, but if you’re about to throw me under the bus, if you’re about to betray our friendship to save your neck, I’m struggling to pray for you. I might be praying more like James and John wanted to as we saw last week: “Lord, do you want [me] to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume [him]?” (Luke 9:54).
 - 1. But that’s not how Christ responds. He knows the darkness in us, and He loves us anyways.

After . . .

- A. But there’s even more to this pursuit I want to bring out at this point. Jesus doesn’t just pursue Peter in love before the denials. He pursues him after the denials as well. I wonder if you’ve ever noticed how the Scriptures go out of their way to highlight how Jesus appears to Peter in particular after His resurrection.
- B. Consider [Mark 16:6-7](#). The two Marys have come to the tomb and find that Jesus is gone. And then an angel delivers this message to them: “⁶Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee.”
 - 1. The thing to notice here is that Peter is singled out among all the disciples. And we might ask, “Why was this necessary? Would not the expression ‘his disciples’ be enough?” Perhaps because of his denials, the other disciples were questioning whether he really even should be considered a disciple at all.

- a. So, it seems to me, the Lord singles out Peter here because it is Peter who above all would need reassurance of His love! Isn't that beautiful?!
- B. And we see this very same detail emphasized elsewhere as well.
1. In [Luke 24:34](#), we learn from the two that Jesus appeared to on the road to Emmaus that sometime before He ever appeared to the other disciples, He specifically sought out Peter! ["The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"](#)
 2. Paul tells us in [1 Cor 15:5](#) that ["he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."](#)
- C. Now, to be clear, we do not know what Jesus said to Peter when He appeared to him here at first. But, as we come now to consider his response to seeing Jesus again later in [John 21](#), we can only assume that Christ's words to him were of the sort that assured Peter of His forgiveness and love and acceptance.
1. Perhaps it was it was at this point that the cross finally started making sense to him. Perhaps it was here that Peter first started to get what he would write of later in his first epistle: ["He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree . . . By his wounds you have been healed"](#) ([1 Pet 2:24](#)).
 - a. I think Jesus preached the gospel to Him. "I know your conscience is condemning you Peter. But I bore your sins on that cross. My wounds were for your healing! Of course I know all about the denials, the dark stuff in your heart, but I love you still!"
- D. No doubt, Jesus is pursuing some of us in this room right now, just like this. No doubt, some of you up to this point have been certain that you are beyond hope: "If it's true that God fully knows me, there's no way He could also love me." But He does. And He's ready to forgive and heal.

(3) The Response

- A. When you get that—when you get that He sees it all, but He's not turned off by it, He's moving towards you in it—doesn't Peter's response here make a lot sense?! Don't you get why he ["threw himself into the sea"](#) not to get away from Jesus but to get near Him?!

Luke 5

- A. As I read this account in John, I couldn't help but see the parallels it has with something that happened much earlier in Jesus' relationship with Peter. And when you compare the two, the development is striking and insightful.
- B. Back in [Luke 5](#), Jesus is just beginning to reveal Himself to Peter. It's when He first calls him to be a disciple. And do you want to know how it happens?
1. Again, Peter, James, and John have been out fishing all night on the Sea of Galilee. And, again, they catch nothing. And, again, Jesus tells them to let down their nets one more time. And, again, when they do, their nets fill with fish.

- C. It's the same sea, the same men, the same activity, the same command, the same miracle . . . but note the difference in Peter's response: "[W]hen Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).
 - 1. Before the death and resurrection of Jesus, before Peter understood what Jesus was up to—"Get away from me, I am a sinner!" After the death and resurrection of Jesus, after Peter understood all that Jesus accomplished for him—"He threw himself into the sea!" "I am a sinner, but I am so loved!"
- D. This is where God is wanting to take all of us. Stop hiding, stop running. Bring it out in the open to Christ!

A Final Illustration

- A. I'll leave you with a final illustration. There's a show Megan and I just finished. I'll leave it unnamed, but it was yet another profound study in what guilt does to a man when you try to cover it up.
- B. These cops had gone a bit crooked and were trying to cover their tracks and it led them to do some horrible things.
 - 1. There's this haunting scene where one of the guys is just walking around at night: "I can't sleep, I want to tell somebody, I keep seeing her face . . ."
- C. Well, things escalate, and all their junk is about to come out it seems, in the courtroom, where they're told one of their fellow cops is going to rat them out. But the guy takes the stand and he takes the fall for them, he doesn't even mention them.
 - 1. And now here's the intriguing thing. As the camera pans to these guilty cops, you would expect to see relief on their faces. "He didn't turn on us! We're getting away free!" But you don't see relief. Instead, you see what seems to be greater burden.
 - a. And I think the idea is: "Yes we get to go "free", but we're not really free. We may be "loved", in a sense, by our spouses or our department, or the media, or our country, we're innocent, but they don't truly know us. If they knew the truth, it'd be over. So we have to keep up the act. We have to keep hiding. We're not free. We're enslaved to this thing now."
- D. But now in the gospel, with Jesus, what we see with Peter is . . . we don't have to keep up the act anymore. We can come out into the open with our stuff and know that we'll find love and healing. God's not going to turn His back on us, or throw us in prison for our sins. He turned His back on His Son. He made His Son do time in our place.
 - 1. So you confess, thinking you're going to find a backhand, instead you find an open arm. You find true freedom. You find joy inexpressible. You find a dream come true.
 - a. Have you come to Christ? Do you know this love? I pray you would.