

COME HOME

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Date: 21-02-2021

Scripture: John 21: 1-7

John 21:1-7

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and He manifested Himself in this way. There was together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am 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 when the day was not breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord."

Heavenly Father, send Your Spirit upon me for everyone who listens, that our hearts at this point will be completely aligned with Your heart and that we would know exactly what You want from us, want to do in us. We offer our wills to you, pliant, ready to be molded. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

You all know this familiar story, preached often. Yet today, I felt that rather than deal with this whole chapter which is so full of wonderful truths and promises that can help us in our walk with the Lord, the Lord was leading me to just these six verses and inviting us to think about it.

THE CONTEXT:

Jesus has appeared to the disciples after the resurrection. But the one thing that He hasn't addressed, especially for Peter, is the denial that he made three times before Jesus was crucified. I'm sure that it was playing on his mind that, even though he met Jesus, this area still had not been dealt with. Then John 21 catches them at a place where the disciples are all together – Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, a couple of other disciples. Then in the midst of all this Peter says, "I'm going fishing." And the other disciples also say, "Well, we'll go with you." And so they go fishing.

The bible tells us that they fished through the night and they caught nothing. And the next day as dawn was breaking, Jesus was there on the beach and He asks them this question. Rather, He must have shouted out to them. "Children, you haven't caught any fish, have you?" And they replied, not realizing it was Jesus, "No, we haven't." Then Jesus adds, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." They do so; they listen and then there's so much of fish.

John then tells Peter, "It's the Lord!" there's a realization when they see what has happened – through a night that was completely barren and a dawn that is filled with fish that they can't even hold – that the one who made the difference is Jesus.

That's Peter; that's the disciples; that's the encounter they had with Jesus and the aftermath of that. I want us to vary carefully withdraw from that time and begin to look at some of the principles that are in this narrative.

THE PRINCIPLES:

BARRENNESS.

The one principle that jumps out is the lack of fish that they had through the night. There's a sense of barrenness about their activity and their endeavor. I want us to take that place of barrenness and turn it upon our own lives and maybe ask the question: Is there a sense of futility in the things that I'm doing? Am I putting in hard labor and not seeing any benefit from it? Is my life barren as well?

The moment we begin to start talking of things like that, we need to be a little more specific. We need to ask the question: What does that kind of barrenness look like? I would say that that kind of barrenness would be to the exclusion of God's Spirit, where there's a break in fellowship with Him, and we are continuing to do the things that we think we ought to do and yet we see no fruit, as it were.

Maybe there's no joy in our lives; that disappeared a long time ago.

Maybe there's no peace; there's just a constant turmoil or upheaval.

No love, maybe – constant infighting, bickering, goading, taunting going on.

Maybe you're impatient with everyone and with everything – unkind to people, harsh words, seeing the bad in people, seeing yourself being more harsh, not only in terms of words but in demeanor, in attitude.

Maybe no self-control – whatever beckons, gets you.

Why? Because in this state that we may find ourselves in, we want to assuage ourselves. When we are removed from fellowship with the Lord, then our self is on the throne to the exclusion of all these beautiful things that come with fellowship with the Lord, which are now absent. And in that place of barrenness, we tell ourselves, or we fill our lives with things that say, "You're okay; you're fine. Don't worry about anything." And the things that we fill ourselves with are all the things that we indulge in, isn't it? Old patterns – overeating, binge watching, if pornography is in your past, then back to watching porn. Even excessive shopping. Whatever it is that assuages your feelings and says, "Why don't you just do this? You'll be fine."

But it's a place of labor with no rest; a place of toil with no reward; a place of investment with no returns; and it's a big black hole with no light. This is the place of barrenness for a Christian, for one who has known what it is to walk hand-in-hand with the Master. Somehow it has got unclasped and you're on your own. Suddenly there's this barrenness that fills your life.

How does one get there?

It's a slippery slope; and very subtle. We don't recognize it at first. It always takes an act of the will that says: I want to do something like this. I don't want to be obedient.

I remember many years ago, I was at a camp where I talked about living a life of purity and doing what the bible told us to do, and living by those principles. A young man came up to me in the break and he said, "Can we talk?" I said, "Sure!" We started walking down a trail and he said, "I agree with everything you said, and I think it's the right thing. But I can't do it." I asked him, "Why? If you know it's the right thing, why can't you do it?" He said, "Because if I do it, then I feel I will lose the things that I have." He was on a wonderful trajectory in the work that he was doing, and he felt he would lose that. And I said, "You never need to fear that God will give you the second best. He always has the best for you." I remember speaking with him for a couple of hours, but there was just an obstinate sense of disobedience that says: I know this is the right thing, but I'm not going to do it.

And maybe that's how you've moved away from Him, left Him, living on your own. Maybe you thought He would come through for you in a particular situation and it didn't pan out the way you

thought; and you've never forgiven God for it. You've been angry and resentful of Him; never gone back to Him and said, "Explain this to me. Why? How do I navigate through life now? You've just harbored that anger and it's turned to bitterness and moved you away from Him.

Maybe it's unanswered prayer. You've been praying for something specific for a long time and it hasn't happened. You're tired, you're weary, you're worn, and you're saying, "Okay God, I'm done. I'm just going to carry on with life and I'm disengaging.

Maybe you've been too busy; got caught up with work or some activity and slowly you've read the word less, prayed less, until finally you're not doing it anymore. And there's this fellowship that has gone out. Whatever way that has happened, you recognize as I am speaking that that is the place where you are. It's not a very joyful place. Yet, you're going through the motions.

But beloved, in that place of barrenness where Peter was, in that place with no fish, Jesus calls out to them: Children, you don't have any fish, do you? Even in this place that you are in today, He is calling you: "Little children, haven't caught any fish, have you? I know what's going on with you. I know you're not doing well. I know that you're in a place of barrenness. I know that you're empty, you're angry, you're frustrated, you're resentful. I know that you're lonely. I know exactly where you are. Throw the net on the other side." Always beloved, a solution; a solution for where we are. He knows and He longs to have that fellowship back again with us. If we turn to Him, He has a solution for the place that you are in this morning, an answer, a way out of that barren place. All through the layers of loneliness that we've covered ourselves with, maybe through the bright lights, the loud music or the addictive patterns, through our fears, our loneliness, our busyness, our helplessness, through all of that we hear His voice calling out to us, calling our name. "I've got you."

And yet, there's always another voice at this point saying, "Remember the anger; remember your hurt; remember what happened to you." When you start giving excuses, rationalizations – Satan begins to milk this and he says, "Don't listen. You've listened before and it didn't help. He says He's here for you and will take care of you. But you're in this place because of Him. He didn't care for you. Here's something to play with, something to take your mind off that. Let me hold my hands over your ears and shut out the voice of one who loves you desperately. Come with me. Don't listen!" That is the voice that brought you to the place of barrenness. That is the voice that has fueled resentment and anger and bitterness, taking you away from a God who loves you with all of His heart, who wants you back.

He calls to you, "I'm here for you. I've got My eye on you. I haven't left you." And then He reminds us when He says, "I came so that you may have abundant life. Not this; not this barrenness, not this emptiness. I said that I will never leave you, I'll never forsake you. You'll never be alone; and you're not, with Me. I love you child, with an everlasting love." Through all the myriad voices that are calling you away, His voice comes to you saying, "Come home. Let's start afresh."

The wilderness, the far-off country, this lonely place that you may be in, must bring to mind the prodigal son. The place where he's sitting with the pigs, envying the food that they have, craving the husks that they are eating; and then he thinks about home and he thinks about the servants that are in his father's house. Then he says, "I will arise and go. I need to get out of this place. This place is not the place where I belong." He realized, and his will came into play. "I will arise, get up and go."

Beloved, maybe right now you're thinking – My goodness! How did I ever get into this place? How have I reached this point in my life? Maybe like the prodigal, as you hear His voice calling out to you, you need to say, "I will arise and go." "Child, come unto Me," He says. "You who are weary, heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Throw the net on the other side. I've got a solution for your life, where

you are. I can help you navigate this place. Beloved, through the layers of loneliness that you've covered yourself with, He's calling you; through all of that. And it's decision time. I will arise. Stubbornness and pride, to stay where you are will lead you down a path of destruction. But remorse and contriteness, taking responsibility for what has been done, the decisions that you've made, the disobedient acts that you've allowed, lead to confession to forgiveness and a path of righteousness, a cleansing of unrighteousness, running into the arms of the Father, experiencing the deep, deep love of Jesus for you.

Do you hear Him calling, beloved? Come home, come home. All who are weary come home. Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling. Come home. Come to that place where He is. Come to that place of restoration. Come to that place of restored fellowship. Come to that place where your will gets refashioned into His will, and the Potter works your clay into a delightful presentation. Come!

I want to say something a little seriously here. Sometimes, or most times, our rebellion of God is not an open one that everyone knows. It's not like we have an issue and we said, "Okay, I'm done with that." And then we live the kind of lifestyle that everybody who knows us knows that we've walked away. Oftentimes, our rebellion is known only to us. We walk away; it's unseen by the vast majority of people. We keep it silent and don't share it. We go about the motions like everything is okay. That is a greater burden to have to live a lie; on the outside to be able to say, "Yeah, I'm fine with the Lord," and yet inside of us to know that we are not. Because if we make it known, then there are people who would pray for us, who'll say, "Yeah, they wandered away. Let's have a prayer meeting. Let's go and talk to them. Let's share a word in prayer." All of that is missing when nobody knows and you're on your own. That lie, day in and day out, can be exhausting.

The writer of Hebrews says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden yourself as you did when you rebelled. This beautiful song written by William Kirkpatrick goes like this:

I've wandered far away from God,
Now I'm coming home;
The paths of sin too long I've trod,
Lord, I'm coming home.

Coming home, coming home,
Nevermore to roam;
Open wide Thine arms of love;
Lord, I'm coming home.

I've wasted many precious years,
Now I'm coming home;
I now repent with bitter tears,
Lord, I'm coming home.

I'm tired of sin and straying, Lord,
Now I'm coming home;
I'll trust Thy love, believe Thy word;
Lord, I'm coming home.

My soul is sick, my heart is sore,
Now I'm coming home;
My strength renew, my hope restored;

Lord, I'm coming home.

Beloved, Jesus is calling out to you, "Come home, come home." What does He offer to you? Peter had breakfast. But He welcomes you with open arms. He will not condemn you for what has been done. Instead He will ask you whether you still have love for Him. That's all He really wants to know. Do you love Me? Then beloved, He recommissions you and says, "Let's draw a line in the sand. The past is over; look ahead and follow this path that I have for you." Jesus is calling. Today if you've heard His voice, don't harden your heart. Don't rebel. Respond to Him. If you're one who has accepted him, you know that the life you've been living has been a hard life without His joy, His peace, His fellowship. Jesus calls you back to Him today. Will you respond as I pray for us at this time?

Lord Jesus, Your heart is longing for us to respond. Your hand is on our heart's door, knocking. Lord, for those who are in a far place, who are living a lie, finding it so difficult being out of fellowship with You. O Lord, may Your Spirit ruffle the waters of their hearts. And as they respond to You today, Lord, open Your hands and welcome each one back to You. Restore fellowship and may the joy of our salvation once again flourish. We ask this in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.