

# THE BREAKFAST OF CLEANSING

*SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST*

by Ron Ritchie

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Every two years PBC's elders undertake a series of personal evaluations of the staff, beginning with themselves and following with the pastoral and support staff. These evaluations are necessary because none of us can really see ourselves as well as we think we do. They are times of encouraging, strengthening, and spiritual cleansing. I was recently evaluated by my brothers, and I was greatly encouraged by their love for me. They were able to point out many of my strengths and weaknesses. I was thankful to the Lord for my strengths, because they bring a lot of encouragement to other people and because most of them grow out of the spiritual gifts the Lord has given me. It's exciting to know not only that you are given spiritual gifts, but that your life is being used with those gifts by the strength of the Lord. After my fellow elders helped me see my weaknesses, they encouraged me to go to the Lord and others within the body of Christ for help in dealing with them.

For example, I have had a passion for the Lord and for ministry that they helped me evaluate, and some of that passion amounts to being a "workaholic." They wanted me to think through the motive behind my drivenness to see if it was of the Spirit or of the flesh. They also pointed out that my past brokenness has motivated many of my ministries, but at times it has also held me emotionally captive, causing me to break out in anger and impatience toward others. They felt that this impatience might indicate times when I was not trusting the Lord for my life or your lives, and because of it I hurt myself as well as some of you. (If I have hurt you in some manner, please come and see me personally and give me the opportunity to ask for your forgiveness.) As a result of this personal evaluation by my brothers I have presented their encouragements as well as their insight into my weaknesses to our risen Lord and good Shepherd, and I have been praying in the spirit of David:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;  
And see if there be any hurtful way in me,  
And lead me in the everlasting way."  
(Psalm 139:23-24.)

Well, what I and my fellow under-shepherds are going through is a season of spiritual cleansing initiated by our risen Lord and good Shepherd in order that his flock be tenderly cared for until he comes again. In John 21:1-19 we will see how he gathered his disciples around a charcoal fire and served them breakfast in a time of spiritual cleansing and restoration of ministry for them. Not only did he encourage Peter and the other disciples, but in this passage he will challenge our own love for him and the motives of our own hearts. This story takes place between the events of Luke 24:43 and 44.

## **Preparation for cleansing**

John 21:1-6

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias [or the Sea of Galilee], 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 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 now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus therefore 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." They cast therefore, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

According to *A Harmony of the Gospel* (Moody Press), Jesus made eleven post-resurrection appearances over a period of forty days before he ascended to his Father ten days before the Feast of Pentecost. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then to the women who had been to the garden and had reported the good news of the empty tomb to the disciples. He told them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me." (Matthew 28:9-10.) (This was the same word he had given his disciples as he approached the garden of Gethsemane after the Passover meal: "...after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.") (Matthew 26:32.) He then appeared privately to Peter on Easter morning (see Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5), followed by an appearance to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. On Easter evening he appeared to all the disciples except Thomas, and then eight days later he appeared to all of them including Thomas. Now our story opens with Jesus' seventh appearance on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which was the third appearance to a group of disciples together.

Our risen Lord was preparing the disciples for another "teachable moment" by asking them to meet him on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was in this very same area that Jesus had walked along the shoreline in his humanity some three years earlier and saw Peter and Andrew. "And Jesus said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.' And they immediately left the nets and followed Him. And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee...to follow Him." (Mark 1:17-20.)

Now Peter and the other six disciples had been sitting on the shore until sunset, waiting for their risen Lord to show up. Finally Peter said in what appears to be a bit of impatience, "I'm going fishing." Peter was still in the "process of becoming a fisher of men," but he was not a finished product at this moment. He had lots of emotional struggles that he would have to deal with in the days ahead. It was the arrogant Peter who rebuked the Lord for saying he was going to suffer and die only to have Jesus tell him, "Get behind me Stan, for you don't know the mind of God." And it was the prideful Peter who said to Jesus in the upper room, "Never shall you wash my feet," and the boastful Peter who told the Lord, "even though all may fall away because of you I will never fall away." And finally it was the frightened Peter who cut off the ear of the servant of the High priest in the garden the night the emotional struggles that still needed to be dealt with for you recall that it was the soldiers who came to arrest Jesus. yet, within hours after our lord's arrest he had denied he knew Jesus during his trial. However, on that first Easter morning I believe that our Risen Lord appeared to Peter, broken and full of shame and offered him the opportunity to confess his sins and be restored to fellowship with Jesus (Luke 24:34) But having his sins forgiven and eliminating his emotional characteristics are two different subjects. However, the sin issue had been real but now our Lord wanted to bring some "*cleansing*" to Peter's heart when it came to their relationship. The Lord was going to solve that problem on the shores of Galilee.

I am sure that while Peter was waiting for the Lord to appear he was doing some personal evaluation of himself and dealing with his internal reality that "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." He certainly was still feeling the humiliation of being the one who had denied his master at his trial. Now he had come back to where their relationship had begun, back to his roots...fishing in the Sea of Galilee.

If you walk along the shore of the Sea of Galilee today, you can still see fishermen in almost the same kind of boats, casting the same kind of nets into the water, letting them sink to the bottom of the lake, and then drawing them in, hopeful that they will be filled with what they now call Peter's fish. The disciples knew what they were doing; they had been fishing since they were children. They knew the lake, the tides, and the seasons; but for some reason that particular night they caught nothing. They were a hundred yards off shore at dawn when a stranger walked to the water's edge. He looked at the boat filled with seven of the eleven disciples and called out, his voice carrying clearly across the still waters of the morning: "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered, "No!" Then Jesus said, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will find a catch." In obedience, still not knowing it was Jesus, but in humility accepting any help they could get, the disciples "...cast therefore, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish."

The Lord Jesus was reviewing some spiritual principles for them here: (1) Our risen Lord wanted to remind his

disciples once again of the same spiritual principle he had taught them on their walk through a vineyard on the way to the garden of Gethsemane: "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5.) (2) Our risen Lord loved them just the same as he had loved them in his humanity, even though all of them had fled from him in the garden at the time of his arrest, and one of them had denied him at his trial. He was demonstrating his eternal love once again by providing for their daily needs (see Luke 5:1-7). (3) The full net of fish was a symbol of the ministry they would have once the Holy Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost. When they were willing to submit to him (even though they thought he was a stranger) their nets were filled with fish. This physical experience would become a spiritual symbol for each of them after the coming of the Holy Spirit; they would find themselves throwing their spiritual nets into the sea of humanity and having their risen Lord fill them up with the lives of men, women, and children who would place their faith in him as their Lord and Savior.

Our risen Lord was gently but firmly preparing the way so that he could search the heart of Peter in such a way that this disciple would see clearly his weaknesses, confess them, and be restored to ministry as a shepherd of God's flock.

## **Preparation for truth**

John 21:7-14

That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." And so when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. And so when they got out upon the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid, and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread, and gave them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

John, the "disciple whom Jesus loved," recognized it was the Lord in the same way that Mary Magdalene recognized the risen Lord in the garden after his resurrection. His body and facial features had changed to a glorified state (as on the Mount of Transfiguration, Luke 9:29) so that he was not recognizable by sight, but when Jesus said, "Mary," his personality and the inflection of his voice were the same, and she recognized him as her Rabboni (Teacher). When John heard the Lord's voice over the water; there was something in his tone that clicked in John's heart, and in time he realized, "It's the Lord!" The second thing that clicked for John was that he had not only seen the movie *Empty Nets---Full Nets*, but he as well as some of the other disciples had also starred in that movie some three years earlier when they had first met Jesus on these shores (see Luke 5:1-11).

Our risen Lord prepared breakfast for them: one having denied him at his trial, the others having fled, and all having doubted his resurrection when the women told them he had risen. But Peter, who had tried to hide from him after the trial, now swam toward him knowing that he had been forgiven and that forgiveness was about to be confirmed around this breakfast time. As the boat came to shore dragging the net full of fish, they saw that Jesus had already built a charcoal fire and had placed a fish that they did not catch on it, and he had also provided some bread. Then Jesus asked them to bring some of the fish out of their catch and put them on the fire also. Peter dragged the net with one hundred fifty-three large fish onto the beach, took a few, and handed them to Jesus. (It strikes me as humorous that in the excitement of that profound moment someone still took time to count those fish. Some things never change!) Then our risen Lord said to the seven disciples, who were weary from the night of empty nets, "Come and have breakfast." This beautiful Servant who had once washed their feet in the upper room not only provided a full net of fish for them, but then he also took time to build a fire, provide his own fish and bread, and serve each one of them. And they looked at him, knowing that the outer body was different but everything else was the same: the love as he cared for them, and the

servant heart as he said, "Come and have breakfast," offering them renewed fellowship and encouragement.

Our risen Lord so loved Peter that now he gently and firmly moved in on his heart with truth so that cleansing would result in...

## **Preparation for ministry**

John 21:15-19

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow me!"

Peter and the other six disciples were sitting around the charcoal fire eating the fish and bread and looking at Jesus. As I have already mentioned, I believe Peter confessed his sin of denial to Jesus during their first private encounter after our Lord's resurrection. And Jesus had dealt with Thomas' sin of doubt during his sixth appearance, which was in the upper room in the presence of the other ten disciples eight days after the resurrection. So the forgiveness of Peter's sins was not the issue at this moment, but rather the cleansing of his heart concerning the degree of love he had for the Lord. The disciples understood the "Royal Law" as recorded in Deuteronomy 6, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind..." Jesus wanted his followers to be willing to begin the process of loving him with their whole heart, mind and soul before he would trust them to shepherd his flock. The bottom line between Jesus and Peter was "Peter when you say you love me just exactly what is your definition of "love?"

Peter's love for his Lord had been tested around charcoal fires and found wanting during the trial of Jesus: (1) He had been standing by a charcoal fire in Annas' courtyard (see John 18:17-18) when he first denied Jesus. (2) Then when Jesus was taken to stand before Caiaphas the high priest, Peter was sitting at a charcoal fire warming himself when one of the servant girls pointed him out to the others as a follower of Jesus, and he responded, "Woman, I do not know Him" (Luke 22:57). (3) Then Peter went out on the porch, and once more the maid saw him and told the others that he was a follower of Jesus, but Peter "again...was denying it" (Mark 14:69-70). (4) And finally, a relative of the slave whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" And Peter denied it again, and immediately a cock crowed. (John 18:26-27; see Message No. 4277). "And he went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62).

Our Lord already knew the spiritual condition of Peter's heart, but he wanted Peter to be able to articulate his own heart before he would commission him for a lifelong responsibility of shepherding his spiritual flock.

When Jesus first met this disciple his name was Simon, but soon after their relationship grew Jesus called him Peter, which means a stone, signifying that he would become part of the foundation of the church (see Matthew 16:18). By calling Peter Simon again, he cut him to the quick, for that is who he was in the flesh. Our Lord may have been suggesting his actions at the trial were those of one who was not a true follower.

"...Do you love Me more than these?" Some Bible students think that Jesus may have been referring to Peter's loving him more than he loved the boats, nets, and occupation of a fisherman. But the Lord is speaking of Peter's loving him more than the other disciples loved him. He was saying, "Peter, there was a time when you said you loved me more than the other disciples loved me. You said in the power of your flesh that you would

even die for me [see Matthew 26:35], but you are the only one who denied me when the going got tough. Do you really love me more than the other disciples love me? Do you *agapas* me? Are you truly willing to give up your life for me? Do you have a self-sacrificing, wholehearted devotion to me? Can I depend on you to lead the new flock of believers into the age of the Spirit and remain faithful until I come again?"

Peter answered Jesus, "Lord, you know [*oidas*, you have divine or full knowledge] that I don't *agapao* you, but I have a heart filled with *philia*; I have tremendous affection for you. Peter knew that implicit in the word *agapao* was the willingness to lay down one's life for another, and he had already had to eat his words when he denied Christ at the trial. So he was saying, "Lord, I'm not going to put my foot in my mouth again." Jesus responded, "Then Peter, I am commissioning you to tend my spiritual lambs. Within a few days after the coming of the Holy Spirit there is going to be a large flock of new ones that I want you to protect and feed. They will be young, weak, and scared. Tend to their needs so that they will grow and become strong in my spiritual kingdom."

A second time Jesus asked, "Simon, son of John, do you love me? Do you *agapas* me?" Peter answered, "Lord, you know [*oidas*] that I *phileo* you; I have affection for you, and that is as much as I am willing to say after all my boasting." Jesus replied, "Then shepherd my sheep by guiding them into green pastures." The disciples all knew about the good Shepherd of Psalm 23, which would become their model as now seen in Jesus' relationship to them:

"The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside quiet waters.  
He restores my soul;  
He guides me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil; for Thou art with me;  
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
Thou hast anointed my head with oil;  
My cup overflows...."

Peter and the disciples also knew how God felt about wicked shepherds as recorded in Ezekiel 34:2-16: "Should not the shepherds feed the flock?...Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them...Behold I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out...I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,' declares the Lord God. 'I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick....'"

Finally, Peter and the disciples also remembered that Jesus had taught them that he was the good Shepherd, and that the good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep: "I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me." (John 10:14.)

Jesus had in effect said to Simon, "You're not willing to lay down your life for me, and now you're finally saying it. Now, Simon, son of John, do you love me?" And at this point Jesus used the Greek term for love that Simon had been using, *phileis*. "Do you *phileis* me? Do you really have a tender affection for me?" At this point Peter was grieved because the risen Lord and good Shepherd was even challenging Peter's *philia* love. He was humbled by this question and responded, "Lord, you know [*oidas*] all things; you know [*ginoskeis*, you understand completely] everything that is, and one of the things you know is my heart and the degree of my love as well as my motives. I can't hide anything from you, and I really don't want to." You can almost hear Peter quoting from Psalm 139:23-24, as I mentioned I myself have been praying:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;  
And see if there be any hurtful way in me,  
And lead me in the everlasting way."

"Lord, you fully understand that I *phileo* you, and that is as far as I am going to commit myself. I cannot at this moment say to you honestly, 'I *agapao* you.' I'm not ready to say that I have self-sacrificing love for you. I'm in the process of learning my lesson." Jesus said to Peter, based on that transparent statement, "Then tend my sheep."

But the final words of our Lord would also ring in Peter's ears: "'Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.' Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me!'" During the next thirty years, Peter continued in this process of humbling his heart and life to the good Shepherd. He struggled from time to time, as recorded in the book of Acts, yet he remained a faithful shepherd of the Lord's sheep until the end of his life. Under Nero's reign he was finally required to demonstrate his loyal *agape* love by giving up his life on a Roman cross because of his commitment to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our risen Lord lovingly and firmly moved in on the heart of Simon in order to cleanse the motives of his heart and to replace pride with humility. As a result of that painful but meaningful spiritual cleansing over breakfast, Peter was restored to ministry as an under-shepherd of our Lord's flock and proved faithful in his *agape* love by willingly laying down his life on behalf of Jesus and his sheep.

Two thousand years later our risen Lord continues to lovingly and firmly move in on the hearts of your under-shepherds here at PBC in order to cleanse the motives of our hearts and to replace our pride with humility, so that we can remain among you, faithfully ministering with hearts filled with *agape* love for each one of you, willing to daily lay down our lives so that you might have life.

The breakfast of cleansing should challenge all of us to allow our risen Lord to evaluate our motives in relationship to him. When we told him we were willing to follow him, were our hearts filled with *philia* love or *agape* love? We can know in a moment if we are willing to pray together this prayer of David, which we have already seen beautifully articulates a heart ready to be cleansed:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;  
And see if there be any hurtful way in me,  
And lead me in the everlasting way."  
(Psalm 139:23-24)

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