

Guest Preacher - Rev. Hugh Ferrier

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Preacher: Rev. Hugh Ferrier

[0 : 0 0] Well, friends, would you return with me, please, to the words that we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 21, John 21, reading again verses 1 to 3, where we read, after this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way.

A few months ago, I came across the following quote.

Quote, I was the biggest failure I knew.

A few months ago, a false failure I could use. That quote is from the bestselling author, J.M. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books, a woman whose net worth is now valued at over a billion dollars, or 800 million pounds.

but she's a woman who has known what it is to feel like an incredible failure. Today we're looking at this man Peter and we're looking at the way that the Lord goes about restoring him following his failure that we find in John chapter 18. We're looking at these verses then under three headings, a fruitless expedition, a friendly direction and then a free invitation.

[2 : 0 5] A fruitless expedition, a friendly direction, a free invitation. First a fruitless expedition. Look at verses 1 to 3. Here John focuses on the failure to catch any fish. The failure to catch any fish. Now John begins by giving us the context in verse 1. We can think about these events that were leading up to this verse. John 18 recorded the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. John 19 recorded the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. John 20 recorded the resurrection and the appearing of Jesus. And now John writes in verse 1, after this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias and he revealed himself in this way. This narrative is all about Jesus manifesting himself to his disciples, to his followers. This narrative is all about the revealing of the risen Lord of glory in time and time and space. And this revealing takes place by the Sea of Tiberias, the Sea of Galilee, the scene of so much of Jesus' early ministry. We can move from the context to the companions in verse 2.

John tells us who had gathered together. We have Simon Peter, this Galilean fisherman, the outspoken leader of the group of disciples, a man who had only just a few days earlier denied with curses that he even knew Jesus. We have Thomas, a man who loved Jesus. Maybe he loved Jesus more than any of the other disciples loved him. He was certainly willing to go to death with Jesus back in John chapter 11, but he's now struggling and wrestling to believe that Jesus had actually risen from the dead. We have Nathaniel, a man who hasn't been mentioned since John chapter 1. He's always there, but he's always in the background. We have the sons of Zebedee, James and John, those hot-tempered brothers whom Jesus affectionately nicknamed the sons of thunder. And finally, we have two unnamed disciples who had fled into the night when Jesus was betrayed and arrested. Now, in looking at these men, we can note something that's very significant about them, something that they all have in common. They had all been followers of Jesus and each had failed him. Some had denied him. Others had doubted him. Others had deserted him, but all had failed him in one way or another. We can move from the companions to the catch in verse 3.

Peter speaks and he tells the group that he's going fishing for three years. He had followed Jesus and had engaged in the work of ministry and mission, but now Peter decides that he's going back to Galilee, back to his old stamping ground, and he decides that he will go back to fishing, back to his old job, and he tells his companions about the decision that he has come to. His mind is made up, and you know that yourself, that you can have all manner of ideas in your head, and that's all very well and good, but it's when you start telling other people about what's on your mind, that's when you're beginning to act. I have lots of ideas in my head, but I don't speak about them often to people because I know that if I start speaking about them, then I'll be held accountable and have to start acting on them, and that's Peter. Peter has this idea that he is going to walk away from the ministry, walk away from the mission that Jesus had called him to, that he is going to go back to his hometown, back to fishing, and he's telling the other disciples about it, and the rest of the group tell Peter that they will go with him. Perhaps they were all former fishermen. We know that James and John had been part of the

Zebraean son fishing business before Jesus had called them, and now they decide that they will accompany Peter as he returns to Galilee and as he returns to his fishing boat. That is the effect, that is the influence that Peter is having on these men, and can I just ask as a quick aside, what kind of effect, what kind of influence are you having on those round about you?

What kind of effect, what kind of impact, what kind of influence are you having on the Lord's people today? Maybe some of you are elders. What kind of influence are you having? Maybe some of you are deacons. What kind of influence are you having? Maybe some of you are members. What kind of influence are you having? Is it an influence for good, where you're a positive role model within this congregation, or is it maybe an influence for bad, where you're a poor role model in this congregation? What kind of influence are you having? But the fishing trip proves to be fruitless. It's a dismal failure.

[7 : 04] We read that they go out, they get into the boat, and they catch nothing. Now put yourself in Peter's shoes or sandals for a brief moment. He has failed as a disciple, as a follower of Jesus, and he's now trying to prove that at least he can still catch some fish, and he fails in this.

Well friends, as we consider these verses, we have been given a clear picture of failure. A clear picture of failure. That's what we see in John 21. Peter and those with him have failed as followers of Jesus, and they have also just failed as fishermen. If you were to ask them to sum themselves up using just one word, they would probably all admit to being failures. And that passage, friends, is given for every single person who has ever failed. And it's not just for those who have failed in some task, those who failed in a work assignment, those who failed in a sporting event, those who failed in a relationship, those who failed in an exam. It's for people who have failed when it comes to following Jesus. It's for people who have professed their loyalty and promised their commitment to Jesus, and then they let him down through something that they said, something that they thought, something that they did. It's for people who feel like they have blown it and that there is no way back for them. It's for people who are burdened and who are crippled by that unrelenting sense of guilt and shame. It's for people who get up each morning and there's that little voice in the back of their head saying, you've failed your Lord. In fact, is he even your Lord? It's for people who, when they close their eyes at night, can remember that moment when they fell and when they failed as if it were only yesterday, when maybe it was weeks ago, maybe it was months ago, maybe it was years ago, maybe it was decades ago. It's for people who have written themselves off, people who feel like they can never move on. My friend, if you are here tonight and you feel like an incredible failure, this passage is for you. If you feel like a failure as a Christian, as a follower of Jesus, this passage is for you. And if you're holding back from making a commitment to Jesus because you feel like such a failure or you feel like you'll fail him in the future, this passage is for you.

This passage isn't for people who have got their lives all together. It's for people who have failed. People who are failing and people who will fail. A fruitless expedition.

And then we have a friendly direction. Look at verses 4 down to 8, where John now focuses on the miraculous catch of fish. Verses 4 down to 6, John records the appearance of Jesus. We're told that day was breaking and that Jesus stood on the shore. Verse 4, the night of failure gives way to a new dawn. And on this new day, Jesus comes to his disciples. In his book, *When We Get It Wrong*, Dominic Smart writes, Jesus goes to meet Peter where he is. He gets down with him when he is down, not standing over him and sticking in the spiritual boot, not crowing over him saying, I told you so.

The devil does that. The devil will make you squirm. The devil will kick you when you're down. The devil will pile up guilt upon guilt, reminding you of past failings that you know are forgiven, dredging up old sins that you had forgotten about because they were dealt with and you had moved on.

[10:52] But God never will. If the story of Peter teaches us anything at all, it should teach us for our reassurance and the comfort of our souls that when we are down in the depths, even when God has placed us there, he goes down into the mire with us to lift us out. Isn't that a comforting thought?

Jesus goes down into the pit to lift his people up. That's the gospel. The gospel isn't good advice where Jesus is a cheerleader saying, come on, get yourself together, sort yourself out. The gospel is good news.

Where Jesus stoops down, steps into the pit to lift his people out. He stoops into the messiness, the brokenness, the sinfulness of their lives to rescue them, to restore them, to bring them out.

But the disciples don't know that it's Jesus who's standing on the shore. We are then given the conversation between Jesus and the disciples in verse 5. Jesus opens with a question, children, do you have any fish? Literally, guys, you don't have any fish, do you? He's expecting a negative answer because he knows all things. And the disciples reply with just one word, no. There's nothing more to say. Nothing more that needs to be said. And so we come to the response of Jesus in verse 6. He gives a friendly instruction, cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. The disciples do so and the net fills with so many fish that they're unable to haul it into the boat. It's a miraculous event. It's a supernatural event. It's an event that can only be explained by appeal to the sovereignty, the supremacy, the divinity, the deity of Jesus. Then in verses 7 and 8,

John records the reaction of the disciples. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, is the first to react at the beginning of verse 7. He's the one who had entered the empty tomb of Jesus. He's the one who had believed that Jesus was risen from the dead. And he now gasps to Peter, it's the Lord. He's got that level of spiritual perception. Maybe that's why he was the one whom Jesus loved especially. John was the kind of person who just got it. John was a man who had maybe a little more spiritual perception than the other disciples. And upon hearing this, Peter bursts into action. Look at verse 7 again. John might be a man of spiritual perception. Peter's a man of action. He puts on his outer garment, throws himself into the sea to get to the sea. He puts on his inner garment, throws himself into the sea. He puts on his outer hand. He had already met there isn't Jesus in the upper room. He had already seen there isn't Jesus' nail-pierced hands inside. He had already heard there isn't Jesus' priestly word of blessing, peace.

[14 : 03] And now nothing and no one will keep him back from Jesus. The wind and the waves of the sea won't keep him back. And the words of the other disciples won't keep him back. You know, how many people don't go near Jesus because they're afraid of what other people might say, afraid of what other people might think? I grow weary of hearing people saying that they won't go to the prayer meeting or they won't go to church or they won't make a profession of their faith because they're afraid of what other people will say, what other people will think. Not Peter. The wind might be between him and Jesus. The waves might be between him and Jesus. The words of the disciples might be between him and Jesus.

But none of that matters. He just leaps in to get to Jesus. And the rest of the disciples make their way to Jesus in verse 8. John tells us that they were in the boat. John tells us that they were dragging the net that was full of fish. And John tells us that they were about a hundred yards from land. A little eyewitness detail. Well, friends, as we consider these verses, we're being shown the indispensability of Jesus, the indispensability of Jesus. That's what we see in John 21.

Peter and those with him have failed as followers of Jesus. And maybe that was to be expected. But they have also failed as fishermen. Failed in the very skills that they had known from childhood.

And Jesus enters their situation and he blesses them with this huge catch of fish. It's a clear illustration of the truth that Jesus had told them back in John chapter 15 a few weeks earlier in the upper room. Apart from me, you can do nothing. Even the best skills that these men possessed, the ability to catch fish, would amount to nothing without Jesus. Jesus is showing Peter and those with him that the power, the effectiveness of their future ministries that he will call them to will come from him and from him alone. And friends, that is very important for us to remember today.

Without Jesus, we can do nothing. Nothing as individuals and nothing as a congregation. Bruce Milne writes, the church in the Western world has never had such an array of helps, resources, and methodologies as at present. The psychological and sociological sciences, as well as the fruits of the technological and communications revolution, have been plundered for secrets of successful mission. Sadly, although much time and money are often spent acquiring these tools or attending the inevitable conferences and seminars where they're unveiled, the long-term results are commonly meagre. One recent responsible survey of the evangelical churches in Canada show that after the dust had settled on the often frenetic struggle to employ successful strategies of evangelism, these congregations reach only, now listen to this, they reach only on average 1.9 genuine outsiders for Christ every year. Without Jesus, we can do nothing. He is indispensable and he is essential when it comes to us when it comes to us when it comes to us when it comes to us when it comes to us.

[17 : 40] All your plans, all your programs, all your projects, but friends, you need Jesus. It doesn't matter if you've got a lovely building like this and a great YouTube platform and a good name in the community, you need Jesus.

Jesus. He is indispensable and he is essential when it comes to us living the Christian life and seeking to share the Christian gospel, that message of salvation with our friends, with our family, with our neighbors. We need Jesus. I was at the assembly last week and I look at these church planters, I look at these, you think I'm a young minister, well I've been in the ministry 11 years now so I'm no longer a young minister, no longer an old minister. I look at the young ministers now and I think I wish I was more like them. I wish I had their abilities. I wish I had their confidence. I wish I had so much of what they have. But at the end of the day, friends, without Jesus, we have nothing. We need Jesus when it comes to our witnessing. I need Jesus. You need Jesus when it comes to your witnessing. And he is indispensable and he is essential when it comes to our daily business. Our business in the home. Our business in the workplace. Our business in the school. We need Jesus. You can't do your work without Jesus. You cannot get out of bed without Jesus. Without Jesus we can do nothing, friends, but with Jesus we can do anything. And I hope that that is an encouragement to you tonight. If you are feeling empty and inadequate, these verses are reminding you that you're the kind of person whom the Lord loves to use.

Or if you are feeling empty and inadequate as a congregation, these verses are reminding you that you're the kind of congregation whom the Lord loves to use. People who are empty. Congregations who are empty of anything but Jesus. One of my favorite preachers is an American, Ray Ortlund.

One of the most encouraging preachers I've ever heard. And he says this, Jesus says you feel overwhelmed. You feel frightened. You feel threatened. But don't worry. When you're defeated, I am victorious for you. When you're confused, I'm clear-headed for you. When you're fearful, I am brave for you. My glory is upon you now. Give your weakness to me and I promise to give you my power. Friends, let's not be ashamed to go to Jesus with our weaknesses, with our inadequacies, with our frailties, knowing that when we are weak, he's the one who's strong. And when we are at a complete loss and don't know what to do, he is more than able. In fact, he is not just more than able, he is indispensable. You can survive without a lot of things in the Christian life, but you can't survive without Jesus. And you can survive without many things as a congregation, but you can't survive without Jesus. Apart from him, we can do nothing.

And then third and finally, we have a free invitation. A free invitation. Look at verses 9 down to 14, where John now focuses on the aftermath of the catch of fish, the aftermath of the catch of fish.

[21 : 40] Verses 9 down to 11, we see the provision. We can begin by noting the provision of a meal in verse 9. We're told that the disciples got out on land and that there was a charcoal fire. We're also told that there was bread and fish on the fire. Now, doesn't that seem to your heart good? As Jesus provides these tired, hungry failures with a hot breakfast. Right now, they don't need a sermon. Right now, they don't need a Bible study. Right now, they don't need a seminar. Right now, they just need a little practical kindness. It was actually reminded a wee bit of this at the assembly this week. Bob Ackroyd, our moderator, very warm man, a man who just loves people. And one of the ways he wanted to show his love for all the ministers and elders at the assembly this year was he provided each of us with donuts. You think that's a bit ridiculous, really. But it was just a token gesture that he loved those commissioners, those elders, those deacons, and he got donuts for them from Krispy

Cream. And if you know what Krispy Cream's like, you're thinking these are good donuts. And there's Jesus. Just a little bit of practical kindness to show his affection, his love for these men. And we can also note the provision of fish. Look at verses 10 and 11. Jesus then instructs the disciples to bring some of the fish that they have just caught. Once again, quoting Dominic Smart, by asking them for some of their fish, he is reminding them that what they were called into was partnership.

Jesus could have impressed them with a virtuoso display of fishmongering, dazzled them with culinary master. Jesus could have had a barbecue with a full breakfast at the mere snap of a finger, but he doesn't. Instead, he puts some fish there and then he says, I'd like your fish too. It's a delicate, deft, and beautiful reminder from Jesus that he wants them to be partners, co-workers, and the task of fishing for more disciples. Do you think that Jesus couldn't do spectacular things all on its own in your town, among your colleagues and neighbors, with your friends?

Couldn't he turn on a virtuoso display of evangelism? Of course he could, but he wants your partnership. And Peter, again, is the first to act. I've met so many Christians over the years who have failed the Lord in some way, and they feel like they're now disqualified. They're now written off from doing anything more for him. But when the Lord says here, bring some of the fish that you have just caught, Peter springs into action. And the Lord doesn't stop him. The Lord doesn't say, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute, Peter. I think John should do this. I think Nathaniel should do this. I think Thomas should do this. No. Peter, maybe the biggest failure of the lot, goes and gets the fish and Jesus receives it. And John records some details about these fish, tells us that there were 153 large fish, and he tells us that somehow the net holding them wasn't torn. Verses 12 to 14, we move from the provision to the invitation. Jesus gives the disciples an invitation in verse 12. The first words that Jesus speaks are simple. Come and have breakfast. It's an invitation to eat together. An invitation to have some fellowship together. An invitation to men who've denied him, doubted him, deserted him, to spend some time with him. But there's a hesitation on the part of the disciples. They don't ask who it is. They know that if they ask the question, who are you? They will hear the answer, I am. They know that this is

Jesus. But they're nervous. They're uneasy. And so Jesus now lovingly and graciously takes the initiative. Look at verse 13. He comes, bridging the gap between them and him, just as he bridges the gap between heaven and earth, just as he bridges the gap between God and man. He then takes the bread and he gives it to them. And he does the same with the fish. He has prepared this meal for them. And having prepared the meal for them, he serves it to them. And John closes this section by saying that this was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

[26 : 21] Now, as we consider these verses, friends, we are being reminded that Jesus is the Savior who issues invitations. Jesus is the Savior who issues invitations. That's what we see in John 21.

He looks at these tired and hungry men and he says, come and have breakfast. Let's spend some time together. But even more, he looks at these men who've doubted him, denied him, deserted him.

He says, come and have breakfast. Let's spend some time together. And friends, that is so important for us to remember today. Jesus is the Savior who issues invitations. The Savior who goes to those who are fickle, those who have failed, those who have fallen, those who have been faithless. And he says to them, come. He's the Savior who goes to people who have baggage, people who have a background. And he says to them, come. That is his invitation if you're here tonight and you're not yet a Christian. Jesus says, come. He doesn't say, come and embrace an idea, a creed, or a formula. He doesn't say, come and adopt a certain behavior or lifestyle choice. He doesn't say, come on and sort your life out, sort yourself out. Jesus invites you to simply come to him and to receive all that he has purchased, all that he has prepared, all that he has procured for his people in the gospel. He says, come. You know, just imagine for a moment Peter standing there on the shore. He's tired, he's hungry, and he's failed. And just imagine

Jesus standing beside him, standing in front of him, holding out the bread and the fish in his nail pierced hands saying, come on Peter. Let's spend some time together. Let's have breakfast together.

And just imagine Peter turning away and saying, I don't need or want you or your miserable breakfast. I'm fine without you. Can I say this to you tonight, friend? That is what you are doing every time you hear Jesus' invitation in the gospel to come. And you refuse it, you reject it, you ridicule it, you resent it. You are saying to Jesus, I don't need you or want you.

[29 : 22] Your minister Myrdo, I know, preaches his heart out Sunday by Sunday. He preaches to his unconverted friend Sunday by Sunday. And yet there are people I know in this congregation who hear the gospel invitation and they say, not for me.

And I hope that tonight, friend, you might see this even if you've never seen it before. And that today would be the day when you finally say, Lord, I am coming. I've got nowhere else to go.

I've got no one else to go to. I'm coming. But this is also his invitation to you if you're here tonight and you are a Christian. You are one of his followers. Maybe you're sitting here knowing that you've failed him in some way. And maybe nobody else knows that you've failed him, but you know that you've failed him. Or maybe you're sitting here knowing that you've just grown cold toward him. Or maybe you're sitting here knowing that you've been deliberately and defiantly wandering away from him. Or maybe you're sitting here today knowing that you've grown weary in his service. Maybe there was a time when you were passionate about magnifying him, passionate about making much of him. And tonight you're sitting in this building and you're thinking to yourself, I'm just going through the motions. I'm just going through the motions.

And today Jesus is calling out to you to come. To come once again to him. And receive all that he has purchased, all that he has prepared, all that he has procured for his people in the gospel. He's saying to you tonight, I have grace added to grace for you. Come.

Won't you come once again to me? And so in the light of these words, coming of breakfast, I want to close by asking the question, what are we going to do with the risen Savior's free invitation?

[31 : 41] My Christian brother, my Christian sister, what are you going to do with the risen Savior's free invitation? What he says to you, come. Don't stay where you are in a backslidden rut.

Don't stay where you are in a cold place. Don't stay where you are growing indifferent to me. Come. What are you going to do with that invitation?

And my friend, if you're here tonight and you're not yet a Christian, if you're here tonight and you are Myrtle Campbell's unconverted friend, and you hear Jesus saying to you, come.

Come to me. Come. Don't stay in that place where you are any longer. Come. What are you going to do with that full, free invitation?

Amen. Well, let's close by singing the words of Psalm 51. Psalm 51, the Scottish Psalter version, singing verses 8 down to 13. Psalm 51, singing verses 8 to 13. Of gladness and of joyfulness, make me to hear the voice that so these very bones which thou hast broken made a joy.

[33 : 14] All mine iniquities, blood out thy face, hide from my sin. Create a clean heart. Lord, renew a right spirit me within. Psalm 51, singing verses 8 to 13 on page 281. And if you're able to stand for this singing, please do so.

Psalm 51, singing verses 8 to 13.

Psalm 51, singing verses 8 to 13.

Psalm 51, singing verses 9 to 13.

Psalm 51, singing verses 9 to 13.

[35 : 28] Psalm 51, singing verses 9 to 13. Just one thing, friends. Just one thing, friends. We have COVID in our house in Stornoway. I'm COVID free, but Natalie's COVID positive.

So I will not be shaking hands or hugging anyone at the door. I'll just stand outside and I'll nod and I'll smile. Please talk to me. I do love you all very much. Well, I certainly know some of you very well and it's lovely to be with you.

But I certainly won't shake hands with you or hug you tonight just because of Natalie's COVID result this week. So let's pray.

Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God be with each and every one of us now to the end of the age as we pray in Jesus' name.
Amen.