VICTORY IN JESUS’ LOVE

John 21:1-19

Key Verse: 16

Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

Last year, I received some compliments: "you cook very well", "you are a great dentist", "you got chubby", "you are the best husband". But the best compliment for me was: "*Dani's character shows that she feels very loved*". This comment made me very happy. I believe that in the same way, God the Father and Jesus want us, as children of God, to be convinced that we are very loved by Him. But this love is not just to make us feel better. When we know and believe in this unfailing love of God, we have victory over all our problems and challenges. Romans 8:37 testifies: "*in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*". Through this passage, I pray that we may renew the grace of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that in this year, we may be more than conquerors through him who loved us. Amen.

1. Peter wanted to give up on Jesus (1-14)

 Let's look at verses 1-2. Certainly, the disciples were facing one of the most intense situations of their lives. They had witnessed the death of their beloved master on the cross. But after 3 days, the Risen Jesus Christ appeared to them. John 20:20 says that they rejoiced greatly at seeing the Lord Jesus. But it also caused bitter pain in their hearts, for it reminded them of how cowardly they had abandoned Him to die in the cross. Seeing his pierced hands and putting their finger on Jesus' open side, they were confronted of their infidelity; of their empty words and unfulfilled promises; of their total failure as disciples of Christ. However, Peter was the most affected of all. Mark 16:7, the angel delivers a message from Jesus, "*But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.*" Why did Jesus specifically ask for Peter? Because Jesus knew exactly how his heart was. Jesus knew that Peter was so defeated, so broken, that he no longer considered himself worthy to be called a disciple of Jesus. Peter betrayed Jesus and even denied Him three times, cursing and blaspheming against Him. Peter started to think that he wouldn’t be able to be an apostle anymore; and he was already thinking of giving up on Jesus. But Jesus would not give up on Peter.

 Let's look at verse 3. When the Risen Jesus appeared to the disciples previously, He did not speak to Peter. So, on the trip from Jerusalem to Galilee, 100 km walking, Peter must have been wondering about Jesus' reactions. “Jesus will be very disappointed at me”. “Jesus will rebuke and punish me”. “Jesus will say that this time I had gone too far, that I crossed the line.” Every step closer to meet Jesus was like a sting in his soul. But when they arrive in Galilee, Jesus was not there. In this vulnerable situation, Peter makes a decision: “*I’m going out to fish*”. But this was a decision to return to his old life, to his old job, to return to his small-scale, lonely, irrelevant life, to put an end to Jesus' calling, of which he was no longer worthy. Peter was saying: it's over for me. So, when, Peter decided to go fishing, the other disciples also followed him.

And they fished all night long. They cast their nets in several areas in the Sea of Tiberias. They knew that sea very well and many times they filled their nets, but that night they didn't catch any fish. They probably thought: maybe we are not even able to fish anymore; now we’re suffering God's punishment for our sins.

 But let's look at verse 4-6. At dawn, Jesus, appeared on the beach. And Jesus asks them, "*Friends, haven’t you any fish?*". In Greek, Jesus addressed them as: Children. Only on one other occasion in the Bible Jesus used this expression. It was for the woman suffering from a bleeding for 12 years. Jesus said: "*Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace and be free from your affliction*." Jesus called her "daughter," the woman who was ashamed to approach Him, to confess her uncleanness. And to His beloved disciples, who were defeated and broken, Jesus called them, "Children....". So, to Jesus' answer, the disciples said no. They had totally failed. But Jesus told them to cast their nets to the right side of the boat and they would find fish. When they obeyed, they could no longer pull the nets, because there were too many fish.

Let's look at verses 7-8. Then, John, realizing that they were witnessing a miracle, remembering his first encounter with Jesus, said to Peter, "*It's the Lord!*" The moment that he heard that it was Jesus, Peter immediately got dressed and launched himself into the sea. He no longer cared about fish, boat or his friends. He didn't have a plan or anything to say to Him, but he needed to see Jesus as soon as possible. His heart was pounding. It was the time to face it, to address that painful wound between them. He couldn’t forget how Jesus looked him in the eye when the rooster crowed.

Let's look at verses 9-12. But when they came to the beach, they saw coals, fish and bread. Jesus asked them to bring some fish they had caught and said to them, "*Come and have breakfast*." The disciples were tired and very hungry, for they had worked all night. They used to fight over food. But at that moment, not one of the them could touch the food. The feeling of guilt and shame was taking away their appetite. Let us look at verse 13. Jesus knew how they felt. Jesus took the bread and the fish and gave it to each one of them. They felt like they didn’t deserve Jesus, they couldn’t approach him like before. But like the first time, Jesus intentionally took initiative and fed them. I think that maybe, Jesus distributed the food according to each one's preference, as only He knew. (Peter: toast, John: sushi, Thomas: Thomas, I deboned your tillapia) Eating that delicious breakfast and warming themselves over the fire, the disciples felt welcomed again by Jesus. At that time, eating together symbolized intimacy. So, even without words, they could feel the warm love and forgiveness of Jesus. They could be sure that it was Jesus, who was the only one who truly accepted and loved them when they were ordinary fishermen, forgotten and ignored by society. But Jesus loved them just the same. Jesus’s love is unique, because He loved us first. We were enemies of God, but Jesus loved us first, expecting nothing in return. Jesus’ love doesn’t change. And although they didn't ask Him, they knew it was Jesus. It was difficult to swallow the food, because they had a lump in their throats. They had found the Risen Jesus, but Peter and the disciples were to be restored.

2. Victory through Jesus’ love (15-19)

 Let's read verse 15 together. After they ate, Jesus asked Peter, "*Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?*" Who are these? The other disciples, his companions. In reality, this is an impossible question to answer. Who here could have the audacity to say that loves Jesus more than all the others? Only God knows this answer. So why did Jesus ask this? This is because, on the day of Jesus' arrest, Peter said, "*Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."* This actually meant that for Peter, it was very likely that the other disciples would abandon Jesus, but he would not. In one word, Peter was saying that he was better than the others. He was the best disciple, the most faithful, the strongest and the bravest, number 1.

 But Jesus' first question confronts this heart of Peter. Peter, do you still think that you are the best? After your betrayal, blasphemy and failure, do you still think that you are number 1, worthy to follow me? It was painful, but, Jesus was starting to restore him. God's restoration is only possible when we understand and remember who we really are, from where we were saved. There is no salvation, without full confession and acknowledgement of our sins. Before God, among His saints and angels, at His final judgment, there is no way to hide our sins. We need to be totally undressed so that God's grace can totally cover us. May we always come to Jesus Christ with a humble and repentant heart, so that His grace may fully cover us. Amen. Then Jesus answered Peter, "*Feed my lambs*."

Let's look at verse 16. Then, for the second time, Jesus asked Peter, *"Simon, son of John, do you love me?*" This question was much more personal, just between Peter and Jesus. On the day of Jesus’ arrest, He declared to Peter: “*Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times*.” But Peter ignored him. He said: “*Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!*”. Peter was implying that Jesus didn’t know his heart, He didn’t know how much he was willing to do for Him. But now, Peter said: “*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you*.” He realized that his love was imperfect and that Jesus knew it all along, but He loved him the same, despite his weakness. Jesus said to him, "*Take care of my sheep*".

Let's look at verse 17. For the third time, Jesus asked him, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*" But this time, this question pierced his heart. Peter was very sad and answered, "*Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you*." Why did Jesus ask the same question three times? Wouldn't once be enough? But Jesus didn’t intend to humiliate Peter. Then why? Peter had denied Jesus 3 times. But Jesus was giving him the opportunity, to confess his love 3 times, for each time he had denied. This was Jesus' final lesson: to teach him and us that for every failure, His grace will be able to lift him up and lift us up again. It doesn’t matter how many times our flesh weakens and fails, every time, Jesus’ love is powerful to lift us up again and again.

 Sometimes we feel that our mistakes and failures have no end. Sometimes we are embarrassed to pray for forgiveness for the same sins. We make decisions and promises to God, but often, we fall again and again. And this succession of failures, can bring us the feeling of defeat and despair and we start thinking: I cannot change; I cannot be healed; am I real believer, I cannot be restored, there is no hope for me, I have failed. But Jesus Christ wants us to believe, today, that His grace is greater than our failures. Where we have fallen, that’s where Jesus will pick us up. It is where you have wept, that Jesus will give you joy. It is where I have been defeated, that He will give victory. It is where I have been useless, that He will make me fruitful. His final teaching is that there is no failure or defeat for those who are in Jesus Christ. Paul said that where sin increased, grace increased all the more. “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*”. This is the gospel that we believe. The gospel is the most powerful gift we have. "*Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Amen.

 Then Jesus answered for the third time, "*Feed my sheep*." Jesus' sheep are precious to Him. They belong to Christ. But that doesn’t mean they are perfect sheep. Actually, it is so hard to take care of His lambs. Sheep are very demanding. They cannot see properly; they cannot defend themselves and they cannot find food and water. Without a loving and committed shepherd, they will get lost. If they are alone, they will die. It seems like we need a PHD to serve sheep: strategies, knowledge, experience. But in the end, what is the only requirement that Jesus asks in order to feed them? *“Do you love me?*” We must remember that it is only the love of Christ that gives us the true shepherd heart for his sheep. Only the love of Christ can change us and change those who are in darkness. It is only the love of Christ that has true hope and break down barriers of sins and unbelief. Sometimes we end up focusing on the work and on ourselves, on our fruits, more than on Jesus. Then we suffer, we get tired, because actually there is no hope in us and in our work. Sometimes, we also just want to rest, to get our old life back, to our fishing nets. But Jesus gives us the staff. He renews our love relationship and calls us to show our love to Him feeding His flock. I pray that this year we may serve one sheep faithfully and sacrificially only with the love of Christ. Amen.

 I received this word for the first time in a message on the last day of the Latin America Conference in 2015, in Argentina. At that time, a bible student that I served with all my heart during 2 years, had bought the airline ticket and paid for the Conference, but on the day of the flight, he didn't answer his calls. I went to his house and even though he was there, he wouldn't open the door. I waited for 1 hour and I almost missed my flight. During the Conference, he sent me a message saying that he had cancelled his ticket 1 week before because he was having second thoughts. During the conference, not a single word penetrated my heart. I was broken and tired. I decided that I would not suffer from this anymore. I didn't need to serve anyone. But as I heard Jesus ask, "Joshua, do you love me more than these? Then, take care of my sheep", I repented with many tears and remembered that it is for the love of Jesus that I live. This was 8 years ago, but since then, I have experienced and learned that there is good fruit when I die to myself.

Let's look at verses 18-19. Jesus prophesied that Peter would die glorifying God. This may have come as a shock, but I have full conviction that Peter rejoiced. Because now he had assurance that he would not let fail his Lord again when he would face death. He would not deny Him but glorify Him and honor His love with his life. The life of a disciple of Jesus is a call to die. It is a life that learns to die each day to ourselves, so that our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified. I pray that we may follow Jesus, accepting His call, living to die, shepherding His sheep with the love of Christ. May we be more than conquerors through Jesus who loved us. Amen.

 This year was exhausting for me. The work was intense and I became a father. I really wanted to rest in the few hours that I had left in the day. But I had bible studies and meetings. I really wanted to rest when I came here too. During this year, God entrusted me with 2 Bible students, who have a spiritual desire. But, the Bible studies during the week ended up becoming a big burden. And I began to feel a great fatalism in my heart about their growth and about my life. I started to have a lot of complaints and grumblings about the meetings and about the structure of my church. I began to ask myself: why am I living like this? Why am I in such a difficult ministry? I felt defeated and tired because I thought that my ministry would not change, my Bible students would not change, but most of all, I would not change. But this word teaches me again the power of the love of Jesus Christ. The love that saved and changed me, the love that has true hope. The love of Jesus Christ has the power to give perseverance to victory and to change anyone and any situation. There is no defeat nor failure for those who are in Christ Jesus. I repent before the Lord again, for I have failed as a husband, father, coworker. But in the name of Jesus Christ, I believe that in all my failures, Christ's grace and love will restore me again and I will see the fruits of victory. I pray earnestly that the Lord may use me and my house church for His glory. I pray for brothers Diogenes and Rayner, that they may be transformed day by day by the power of Christ's love. I pray that I can be a blessing in the ministry of Sao Paulo, beginning the change through my own repentance. Amen.

 "*Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*.”. When we fall, Jesus’ grace, love and forgiveness will always pick us up, because Jesus never gives up on us. This unconditional love is worth living and dying for. Jesus is worthy of our love and life. I pray that we may feed His lambs truly with the love of Christ, with hope and perseverance. I pray that this year we may be more than conquerors through him who loved us.