

## **PSALM 27 verses 1 - 6, 13 and 14**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?

<sup>2</sup> When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall.

<sup>3</sup> Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.

<sup>4</sup> One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

<sup>5</sup> For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.

<sup>6</sup> Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

<sup>13</sup> I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

<sup>14</sup> Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

## **JOHN 21 verses 15 - 25**

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'

'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'

<sup>16</sup> 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.'

<sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'

Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!'

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is going to betray you?') <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, 'Lord, what about him?'

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.' <sup>23</sup> Because of this, the rumour spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?'

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

<sup>25</sup> Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

## **“YOU ARE NEVER ALONE”**

### **6. God is with you when you need grace**

#### **READING: John 21 verses 15-25**

*Leonardo da Vinci's great work of art, "The Last Supper", began to deteriorate almost as soon as it was finished. The causes of this were numerous, with the artist being partly to blame. The Duke of Milan commissioned the wall painting around 1494 as part of the renovation of a convent refectory. Vinci was not used to painting in fresco, so the pigment did not adhere to the surface properly, and within 20 years, the paint began to flake. The environment did not help either. The refectory was situated in a low part of the city, prone to humidity, and the north wall Leonardo painted on was damp. It did not receive the best of care: unprotected from the steam coming from the kitchens; at one point a door was cut into the wall, slicing off Christ's feet; under Napoleon, the refectory was used as a stable for horses, and soldiers spent free time throwing bricks at the masterpiece; the refectory was flooded with 2 feet of water for 15 days, leaving the artwork covered with green mould; and in August 1943, the RAF bombed the convent, destroying some of the buildings. It is a wonder that the work of art ever survived. But, the fact that it has, is due in no small part to art restorationists over the years, the latest from 1977 until 1999. Art restorers are part chemist, part historian, as they try to figure out, armed with acetone, brushes, cotton swabs, and synthetic varnish, what the original intent of the artist was? Thanks to their work and skills, "The Last Supper" can be viewed and admired today.*

Thanks to the work of Jesus, his servants can be restored. The years and circumstances of life can take a heavy toll on even the purest of saints. We all need cleaning up.

In the Bible we only have to look at some of those held in esteem and deemed to be men and women of God. Abraham lied about his wife to protect himself. David committed adultery and was a conspirator in the death of her husband. Rahab was a madam in the world's oldest profession. Paul was instrumental in the arrest and death of the followers of Jesus. James and John were known as "Sons of Thunder" before they became apostles of peace. Even Jesus' disciples acted like a bunch of children as they squabbled amongst themselves as to who was the most important amongst them.

Then there is Peter. In **Matthew 26 verses 31-35**, we read ***"Then Jesus told them, 'This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.'*** Peter replied, ***'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.'*** Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, ***'this very night, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times.'*** But Peter declared, ***'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.'*** And all the other disciples said the same."

How wrong could he be. Asked by a servant girl. he denies it. Asked by another person. he denies it. Asked by a third person, he calls down curses upon himself and denies it. After the third denial this is what happens:- ***"The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times.'*** 62 ***And he went outside and wept bitterly."*** (Luke 22 verse 61-62)

Good old Peter. As you look at the accounts of his life throughout the Gospels we find someone who was quick to act, quick to speak, often left to regret. Like stepping out of the boat and ending up in the water. Saying things he wished he had not. Like telling Jesus he can't go to the cross and then finding Jesus say to him, "Get behind me Satan!". But his denial of Jesus must have weighed heavy on his heart. I wonder how many times he played that moment over and over in His head?

We all do that at times when something happens that we regret. Especially when that regret is related to the way that you live your Christian life. How many times, even in the past week, have you done something that you feel a sense of regret because you wanted to act differently in the eyes of God. Maybe it was words you used, or didn't use – sins of commission and sins of omission. That is the reality of the Christian life isn't it. It isn't always jumping around with our hands in the air. We aren't always on our knees in deep prayer. We are not always floating around on our saintly prayer clouds. We live in a sin-stained, broken, and draining world. There are responsibilities and commitments, bills to pay, debt, worry, sickness, death. Aren't there times when we know we need to be standing up for the cause of Christ and the outworking of the Gospel, but really there is life, and we say - well maybe not actually say, but by the way we act or react, we are basically saying "Jesus can you please just leave me alone for a moment. Not now. Go away." It isn't the end of your faith. It isn't that you are chucking it all in. It is usually just a moment in time. But it sits in the space where denial takes place, and it will be a moment that has regrets. When you are in that space it is then that you are in Peter's shoes. So, what does Jesus do with Peter.

Well that is how we end up on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in our reading from **John 21**. Seven disciples are out fishing, but catch nothing all night. Jesus comes at dawn on the shore and says, "Put the net on the other side." Now they have too many fish. Peter jumps into the water and swims to the shore because everyone realises it is Jesus. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. (**John 21 verse 9**).

Only twice in the New Testament is this specific word for fire used. In **John 18 verses 17-18** - **"You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter. He replied, "I am not. It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a charcoal fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself."** It is in the context of the denial of Jesus. Around the first fire Peter made His denial. Now here is another fire, and Jesus is cooking breakfast. Nothing happens by coincidence. The first fire was the fire of denial against Jesus. This fire is a fire of fellowship where Jesus is taking the initiative to restore Peter, to show grace. Because that is what Jesus does. He wants to restore us. Even when we are beating ourselves up over the past. Even when we are stuck in the guilt. Even when we feel undeserving. Even when we feel beyond forgiveness. No matter what we have done, restoration is available, grace is on offer.

So after the meal the conversation focuses on Peter. It is amazing the way Jesus deals with this. Jesus doesn't say, "Peter, why did you deny Me?" I told you it was going to happen. You should have resisted harder. I was so disappointed. Jesus doesn't do that because He knows all that will do is cause the guilt to beat Peter harder. Jesus doesn't want to pile on more guilt. Jesus wants to take the guilt away. So he asks the question in a different way. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" Something really significant is happening here. The last time in John's Gospel when Jesus used "Simon son of John" was in **John 1 verse 42**. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter, a rock). Ever since then it was Simon Peter, or just Peter. Now instead of being, Peter the rock, it is back to the original name, Simon son of John, the fisherman. By calling him "Simon, son of John" Jesus was bringing Peter back to the beginning. Back to where it all started, the beginning of the adventure. Now there is a new adventure. The adventure which will be the beginnings of the church, and Peter will be an important part of that. But first, he needs to be in the right relationship with Jesus. "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

Remember what Peter had said **"Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."** (**Matthew 26 verse 33**). So Jesus asks, three times, do you love me. After each of Peter's responses, Jesus gave him an assignment. Firstly he said, "Feed my lambs" - look after the young in the faith. After the second question he said, "Take care of my sheep" - my followers are to be your focus. The third time Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" - make sure you keep working for all as

they mature. In essence, Jesus is telling him "I have work for you to do. If you really love me feed my lambs and tend to my sheep. You are going to be the Rock, once again." It all sounds so encouraging, but there is more going on here. Many people say that Jesus asked the question three times because Peter denied Jesus three times. Quite correct. But something else is going on here. When Jesus asked Simon Peter if he loved Him, He was using a specific word denoting a specific type of love. The word Christ uses in the Greek text is "agapao" also known as agape, denoting a sacrificial love, a love of total commitment, a love with no strings attached. Jesus is basically saying to Peter, "Are you willing to give me your all? To make the complete sacrifice necessary?"

When Peter says, "Yes Lord you know that I love you." Peter uses a different word. In the Greek the word for love which Peter uses is "phileo." This word for love means fondness; to have affection for; a personal attachment; a friendship. It is still a strong word, but not as powerful as "agape". So if we look at what is happening here, it would be something like this: "Peter, do you love Me 100%, more than anything else?"

"Lord, you know I like you." Peter is actually starting to learn to be honest about the level of his relationship with Jesus. "Lord I want to love you – with agape love – but I know myself. I know that I don't have that character and strength. I know my weaknesses and my failings. I can't say that I will give 100% commitment, because I know I am not 100% committed." How many of us are aware that the desire for 100% commitment is just that, a desire. But the reality is so different isn't it. But Jesus is not giving up on Peter. Twice Jesus uses "agape" for love, and then on the third time Jesus changes his question, "Peter do you "phileo", me?" Peter responds "Lord you know everything, you know that I "phileo" you." Do you see how gracious Jesus is. All Peter can give at the moment is "phileo". So, instead of criticising Peter, Jesus lowers the bar. Even though you can't give me your all, I'll take what you can give.

Peter is not reinstated because he is a disciple of excellence. Peter is reinstated because Jesus is gracious. There are days when I am very conscious of my short-comings. There are days where I see and hear what is going on and it brings me to a place where I never feel like I am enough. But that is the point isn't it. I'm not enough. Only Jesus is – enough, but he still wants to use us in his work. All of us have an area of ministry, and not always for use inside the body of the church. We don't have to have the right past. We don't have to have it all together. But we are not thrown on the scrapheap of life. God is there just when we need grace. Grace to know that he hasn't given up on us. Despite our uncertainties, our faults and failings.

Lord here I am, with all my weaknesses, short-comings and failings. I'm not sure how good I will do, but I'm willing to help as best I can. I love you Lord, but sometimes it is more "phileo" than "agape". But what I am and who I am is yours. When we are in that place, Jesus in His grace says, "I'll take that!". I'll walk with you as we take the next step together.