

Mothers Day & God's Ordinary Means of Grace

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[0 : 00] And if you'll open your Bibles this morning to the book of John, we're in John chapter 21, the very last chapter in our series through John.

I will tell you straight up, we couldn't have asked for a more ideal passage to land on for Mother's Day. There are so many truths in this passage that will have a direct impact, not only on mothers, but on all of us.

At the end of the chapter, Jesus tells Peter, And of course, I immediately thought of the time when we had our little kids and my wife went from being an autonomous individual, could go to the bathroom by herself, to someone who no longer could do that, to someone who routinely drank her drinks free of backwash, to someone who was consistently drinking lots of backwash.

The truth is, is that this is a passage that I believe, total theory, I believe that John chooses to end his gospel this way because almost right away in the history of the church, Gnosticism had become a real problem.

It's really the oldest enemy of Christianity. And Gnosticism, if you're not familiar with it, essentially seeks to elevate the spiritual over the material.

[1 : 38] It has a very low view of materiality. And this leads to all sorts of problems and has led to many problems in the history of the church. And John was an early advocate, an early champion against Gnosticism, even in his ministry as an apostle.

And so what we see in this passage is a very emphatic use of physical and ordinary means of grace. Right?

What we see here is a group of men leaving all the weirdness of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is just weird in the Bible. It's an exceptional kind of place. And going back home, per the Lord's command, to their region in Galilee that was home to many of them and was home-based to all of them.

And so what you're going to see today is just this idea of Jesus revealing himself through ordinary means of grace, through ordinary life.

Let me read verse 1 through 14 to you, which encapsulates the majority of the story we'll cover this morning. And after this, Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias.

[2 : 49] And he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas, called the twin, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.

Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing. And they said to him, we will go with you. They went out and got into the boat. But that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore.

Yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, children, do you have any fish? They answered him, no. He said to them, cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.

So they cast it. And now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, it is the Lord. And when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.

The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. And when they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place with fish laid on it and bread.

[4 : 02] Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish that you have just caught. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore full of large fish, 153 of them.

Pause. This tells us that Peter was a unit. He carried that whole net by himself when everybody else was struggling to load it into the boat. So we have some sense of Peter's strength here.

And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. Now none of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? They knew it was the Lord.

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

So again, the main point of this passage is the revelation of Jesus Christ, something John specializes in all the way through the end of his life when he wrote the book, Revelation.

[5 : 01] John specializes in revealing Jesus in ways that we may not anticipate normally seeing him. And we see that John is emphatically saying, that's what I'm doing here.

I'm revealing Jesus to you. Verse 1. After this, Jesus revealed himself. Verse 14. Now this was the third time that Jesus revealed himself. So John is revealing Jesus to us in this passage.

And he's doing so through just average, ordinary things. That's important to understand. There is so much grace and so much God to be seen in just the average, ordinary things.

And I just have three points, and this will be a relatively short message for you this morning. And the first one is, is that work itself is portrayed in this passage as virtuous.

Work is virtuous. Look at verse 3. Simon Peter said to them, I am going fishing. They said to him, we will go with you. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

[6 : 08] This little passage, this little verse, is a minefield for bad takes across the commentaries. It is almost always the product of a group of men who secretly view Christian ministry as higher than regular work.

And so what you'll see amongst certain people that I would say have a Gnostic perspective on work is that they will say that Peter is walking out on Jesus by going to work.

That Peter is denying his calling by going to work. And the reality is, is that that's not what's happening here. What's happening here is a man who has some time on his hands and a lot of uncertainty, and he's at his home base with his boats and with his nets.

And in reality, this amazing catch that Jesus brought to fruition would fuel the disciples as they waited around in Jerusalem later on for the Holy Spirit. The point of this passage is, is that work is good.

And God reveals himself to us through ordinary work. Moms, I honestly don't know how it'd be possible to do momming with real joy unless you understood that God values hard, mundane work.

[7 : 26] Unless you understood that, I just don't know how you would do it with any kind of joy. If you constantly separated what you do from, say, what I do, you would, I don't know how you'd have any joy.

Anyway, the truth is, is that we're all just doing the work that God's called us to do. Now, I do have a few insights to you because I think that my work and your work as a mom is very similar.

And there are some insights into a specific kind of work that we see in this passage. I'm walking in with this idea. Pastoring, mothering, and fishing are all the kinds of works that include a high number of external variables that you cannot control.

That's what we would call a complex system. There are some jobs that are relatively input-output connected. And it's like, okay, I do X, I get Y.

And that's a great kind of job if that's what God's called you to. There are other jobs where if you do X, there's a thousand other variables at work external to you that create a level of complexity that doesn't allow for you to adequately predict success.

[8 : 42] And fishing is one of those things, especially commercial fishing. They're essentially doing their little bit of work engaged in a broad, complex ecosystem full of variables that they really don't necessarily understand and certainly can't completely control.

Now, I think this is very important, mothers, to understand that that's the kind of work you're doing. It's like fishing. It's like pastoring. Because for one thing, by the way, I'm rooting this in when it says they went out and fished all night and caught nothing.

And I would say to you, that would not have been a surprise to them. That just comes with the territory. Because of this relationship, they're working in a high-variable kind of industry.

Now, this is important to understand in part because high-variable work tends to crush high-expectation people. I was watching a talk given by Jensen Huang.

He's the CEO of NVIDIA and currently got a cap share or market share of \$3 trillion, one of the most valuable companies in the world by far. And he said something very interesting.

[9 : 48] He was talking about immigrating to America and his first job was cleaning bathrooms at a Denny's. And I can think of like 10 other restaurants I'd rather clean bathrooms in before I got to Denny's. His first job was cleaning bathrooms in a Denny's.

And he says during that interview, he says that people with high expectations tend to have very low resiliency. What does that mean? What he means is that the higher your expectations generally, especially if you're involved in the kind of work that a fisherman's involved in, the higher those expectations, the less reliable and predictable any sort of outcome is, you're going to wind up being frustrated and have low resiliency.

The world is full of people with high expectations who got swallowed up and consumed by engaging in vocations that are very complex.

If you want something more manageable, like there are jobs for that. But if you're doing a job like momming or pastoring or fishing, you need to understand that high expectations in those fields will lead to low resiliency.

What you should have, if anything, is a high expectation of your effort, but not of the outcomes. It's simply far too big of a world for you to really adequately predict.

[11 : 11] Today I'm going to win. You very likely are not going to win today. And that is not because of your effort necessarily. It's the system you're engaged in is actually quite complex.

So high expectation people can walk into jobs like this and really feel a gnawing sense of frustration and incompleteness.

And what you need to understand is, is that there is a, there's a downside to these complex system type jobs. And that is you really won't routinely feel like you've accomplished everything you want to accomplish.

You won't routinely feel like everything went as planned. And X, doing X doesn't usually lead to Y, at least not right away. But there's a benefit to it as well.

And that is, is that this kind of work tends to lead to great and clear praise. I'd say on the one hand, open systems, complex systems produce a kind of, like require a kind of patience from you.

[12 : 12] But they're also the kind of jobs that when they go right, produce a ton of praise. And that's because you understand that this going well is not clearly, simply anyway, a result of your effort.

You rarely find atheist farmers. Why is that? They're doing, they're doing the work they must do. But they're engaged in a system that is much bigger than what they can control.

And so they are constantly reminded of, well, I'm going to do what I can do, but ultimately the Lord brings the increase. And that's what we see here. We see men going out to do this kind of work that doesn't have reliable results.

And they patiently endure those, those, those lack of results. But then when Jesus blesses them, they instantly recognize that it was Jesus who blessed them.

Look at verse four. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, children, do you have any fish?

[13 : 20] They answered him, no. He said to them, cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of the fish.

That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, it is the Lord. When Peter heard this, he put on his garment and jumped into the sea to race toward Jesus on land.

So yeah, working in a system that has a lot of variables, it requires a lot of patience. It requires a lowering of expectations for outcomes. But when it goes well, it's the most glorious thing in the world because it's clear to you that it was God who did this thing.

And engaging in that kind of work is really good for your soul if you will get your ego out of the way. It is really a marvelous thing to engage in a kind of work that can't succeed unless God gives the increase.

And that's where you are as a mother. You're engaged in a kind of work that will not reliably produce the results you hope it will, not on the timeline you think it will or want it to. But when Jesus delivers the results, you'll know it was him.

[14 : 30] I look back at my years of parenting and it all feels like such a blur. However, I only think, and this is true of Angela as well, we only think of the efforts we made when someone asks us for advice.

Because obviously people want to know, like, what could I do? And so we only in those times do we ever really typically think about what we did, what we did right or what we did wrong.

These days, the story is just one sentence. God gave us great kids. The system itself was so complex.

There are so many things that went into it. I can't tell you exactly how this all worked. And because of that, I can tell you it was God who did the work. So, you know, on the one hand, some of you need to understand, like, high expectations will make you low in your resiliency.

But also, it will lead to great praise because when God does come through, it's just unmistakable that it was him who did it. Now, move on from there to verse 9.

[15 : 35] When they got out of land, they saw a charcoal fire in place. The last activity, last physical activity we see Jesus doing is cooking a meal. They saw a charcoal fire in place with fish laid on it and bread.

And Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish that you had just caught. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore full of large fish, 153. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.

And Jesus said, come have breakfast. And none of the disciples asked, who are you? For they knew it was the Lord. I don't have much time to get into this section. I just want you to know that meals are a common means of grace in the Bible.

Meals are actually a central means of grace in the Bible. And here's one thing I'd like you to meditate on. I think if you started thinking about meals in Scripture, you'd see two things. One, they're a central means of grace.

And two, they are commonly hijacked by the enemy. And I won't get into all that. But this is what I would just point, it's just a little thing for you to think about. You will routinely see a meal be the context in which great grace is communicated through the Lord.

[16 : 42] You will also routinely see, beginning in Genesis 3, meals getting hijacked by the enemy to serve another purpose. In a little while, we'll celebrate the table.

What is 1 Corinthians 11 telling us? What is Paul doing with 1 Corinthians 11? Well, that meal had been hijacked, hadn't it? It had been hijacked by carnality.

It had hijacked by, you know, individuality and so forth. And so I think if you started thinking about this, started thinking in your head about all the instances in the Bible where meals, you'll see some of those meals were like these ways that God communicated great grace.

But on the other hand, moms understand the meal is also the place where the hijacking can occur. And where something that is meant for good becomes something used for sin.

And so I don't quite have a lot of counsel for you about that. I just wanted to point out, one of the last things we see Jesus do is prepare a meal for his people. And it is that meal that serves as the context for the communication Jesus gives to, especially Peter, in the next section.

[17 : 47] So let's move on to the next section in verse 15. It says, Just look at the care of Jesus here. He is seeking Peter out.

Peter has sinned, and we'll talk about that. He's denied Jesus. This is a reconciliation kind of conversation. But he knows that Peter's been out all night fishing, not caught anything.

So before he even has the conversation, he makes sure that Peter's got some food in his belly. And he's just such a great God. But anyway, when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of God, do you love me more than these?

And he said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, Feed my lambs. He said to him 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, Tend my sheep. And 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 everything.

[18 : 49] You know that I love you. Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. So the broad message is that if you love Jesus, you will take care of his people.

Nothing matters more to Jesus than the people that he died to save. Friends, the meaning of life is super simple. Find the thing that Jesus loved so much that he was willing to bleed for it and shed your blood, sweat, and tears for that same thing.

And you will live a successful life. It's actually not complicated. Find the thing God absolutely loves and has demonstrated by shedding his own blood to save.

Lay down your own life to love that thing. You'll have a successful life. Now, related to parenting, there's some specific encouragements here. Firstly, Jesus is making it clear that caring for his lambs can be an act of worship, right?

If you love me, you will feed my sheep. He's making it clear that caring for his lambs, listen to this. We're almost done. Give me your utmost attention for seven minutes.

[19 : 58] Caring for his lambs can be an act of worship, can be an act of worship. I don't want to guilt trip anyone here, but I want to invite you to re-center the reasons for your parenting.

I want to invite you to re-center the motivations for why you're doing what you're doing. The thing about caring for people, especially needy people, is that you will find yourself in a situation where you're doing good things simply because they need to get done.

You can get detached from the proper why pretty quickly in parenting because the demands of the moment simply are the demands for the moment.

You're not going to walk away from those requirements, but boy, I really want to bring you back into the proper why. Parenting can be an act of worship, but it isn't always or automatically an act of worship.

I want to bring you back to the right why as we wrap up this message. The truth is that you can try to be a good mom out of a sense of pride, which would be, I love me, therefore I will feed my sheep.

[21 : 19] You want to be known either by yourself or your husband or your children or your community as a good mom. And that motivation will only get you so far, and it will eventually backfire on you.

Another possible reason that we do the right thing for the wrong reason is you can try to be a good mom because you love your children.

That's great. But if your love isn't flowing mostly out of your love for Christ, I promise you that love will become toxic in various ways, most likely through coddling.

I think that many mothers who are motivated by self-love when they parent will tend to be overly rigid. And mothers who are motivated by child love when they parent will tend to be overly coddling.

And it will be too late for you to realize that your wrong why is leading to an outcome you now regret. You can even try to parent in hopes of earning God's love.

[22 : 24] And so what we see here is not just this, like, if you love me, feed my sheep. But what we see here is that the only people we really trust to feed our sheep are people who do so out of a love for Jesus.

Not out of a love for their own reputation or success. Not even out of a love for the sheep. But out of a love for Jesus. And this is, again, this is not to guilt you.

I want to lure you in to see how even in your own parenting, you may have strayed from the right why.

And I just want to pull you back in to the proper motivation. And I do that as someone who has served God's people and parented for a long time.

And I will tell you straight up, and I hope you'll listen to me, that the reason you do something will ultimately affect the result you get. The reason you do something will ultimately affect the result you get.

[23 : 25] And so the big idea is that your why must be regularly attended to and recalibrated. It's just inevitable, guys. We're people. It's just inevitable that you'll still do good things for bad reasons or for inferior reasons.

And so I just want to pull you in back to the center of our service. And the center of our service is not to be known as faithful. And the center of our service is not to have a self-image of faithfulness.

And the center of our service is not even love for God's people. The center of our service is a love for Jesus. And if you have that reason for your service, the results will be right.

So sometimes we just need to hit reset and say, Lord, that's me. I'm doing good stuff for less than great reasons.

Lord, would you realign my heart so that I can do this out of a love for you and not all these other possible things? The truth is, is that God's plan for his people has always been to give them shepherds after whose heart?

[24 : 42] Jeremiah 3.15. And I will give you shepherds after my own heart. And it is only shepherds who are after my own heart that will be able to feed you with knowledge and understanding.

I don't think you can actually feed your sheep like you need to feed your sheep unless you're after God's own heart. Make sense? And so now we get close to communion and the question just lies like, okay, I want to do that.

I want to serve out of love for Jesus. How can I renew the joy of my salvation? This is all connected to the reality, the subtext of this conversation.

And that is simply this. Peter had just sinned greatly against the Lord Jesus. The call to love him and the call to serve him out of that love is flowing from the miracle of the gospel.

Ladies, do you know that Jesus died to forgive you of your many sins? Do you know that Jesus was nailed to a cross because of your stubbornness?

[25 : 57] Do you know that Jesus was lashed and beaten because of your pride? Ladies, do you understand that Jesus faced the wrath of God because of your judgmentalness and your fearfulness and your consumerism and your vanity and your impatience and your sensuality and your consumerism and your ingratitude?

Do you understand that Jesus Christ died to save you from going to hell for these and many other sins? Do you understand he didn't have to do that?

Do you understand that you weren't born into this world entitled to have a great savior? Do you understand that Jesus Christ died to save you from going to hell? Do you understand that you're not worth, in any kind of Katy Perry way, anything? And that it literally is the truth that God owes you nothing.

And that he sought you out from the beginning of time to sacrifice the thing he loved more than anything else to save you from going to hell. Not because you deserved it or were hashtag worth it.

But because he is compassionate and full of steadfast love. The question I'm trying to answer is, how do I start doing the stuff I'm supposed to do, mothering, pastoring, whatever, out of a real love for God?

[27 : 35] And I would say I just take you back to the cross. And it's crucial that you understand that the reason he was there was you. The reason he was there was you.

And until that clicks, I don't think you can love God. In fact, that's not a think statement. That's a biblical statement. We know love because he first loved us.

And it's the only way we know love. So how do we wind up back rooted in the right reason? We see that I am a sinner destined to hell, deserving of hell, whom Jesus Christ interposed his precious blood to save me from eternal hell.

So just to review, and guys, you can come up and start getting ready for communion. God meets us in ordinary things. Hard work is good, actually.

Certain jobs will frustrate high expectations. But those are also the jobs where God gets maximal glory when things go well. A successful life is simple.

[28 : 45] Love the things Jesus laid down his life for. Yes, parenting is an opportunity for us to feed lambs for Jesus' sake. But over time, the motivation tends to move away from loving Jesus.

So let's take today to recenter on our great why. Jesus died for your sins. Serve him with love accordingly. So this meal that we've set before you today, this Lord's Table, is Jesus' clear intention to consistently recenter our hearts on his love for us and our love for him.

So why don't you come, after I pray, and grab an element, grab the elements. If you're a follower of Jesus, come and grab these elements. Go back to your seat, and we will partake of them together.

Father God, I don't think there's anybody in this room who doesn't need to be reminded of the crucial centerpiece that our motivation has for what we do.

Lord, we are all carriers of spiritual ADD. We all, Lord, lose track of the real reason we do stuff.

[30 : 04] Through your Holy Spirit this morning, Lord God, would you recapture our hearts and help us to get grounded in the gospel once again so that all the things we do can have the proper motivation, which is to love you.

Thank you, Lord, so much for the mothers in this room. And I pray, God, for each one of them that you would bless them with insight into their deep need to be connected to you.

And, Lord, I also pray for women. I think this is just going to be a more common issue in our culture, at least for a season, for women who are unable right now to have a baby.

Father God, I lift them up to you. I praise your, Lord, I see their faithfulness firsthand. I see how they have consistently trusted you. And, Lord, I commend the story of the Egyptian midwives to you and to them as a reminder of how you care for these women.

Father, would you just bless us as we partake of this table, re-centering our hearts on the glory of the fact that Jesus came and died. Not only did he come and die to save us, but then when we walk away, he just chases us down at the lake and makes us breakfast and has a talk with us.

[31 : 24] You are faithful, O God. You have been faithful. You will always be faithful. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.