

The Famous, The Favorite And The Faithful

KEY TEXT

John 21:4–10 (NIV)

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When

they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

Have you ever felt like you were doing everything right... but still came up empty?

You prayed, you worked, you obeyed, and still — nothing seemed to work?

The disciples had walked with Jesus, witnessed the cross, heard the rumors of His resurrection, and yet, after everything — they went back to what was familiar.

Back to the boat.

Back to the nets

Back to what they could control.

That's where the disciples are in **John 21**.

They've gone back to fishing — back to the familiar — but all night long, their nets stay empty.

It's the dawn after disappointment.

The night has been long. Their hands are tired. Their hearts are unsure. And right there, when hope feels thin, Jesus stands on the shore.

They don't recognize Him yet. But He's already there — waiting, watching, speaking into their failure.

“Friends, haven't you any fish?”

They answer, “*No.*”

He says, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”

And suddenly, the nets are so full they can barely pull them in.

It's in this simple scene — at the water's edge — that we see three kinds of

disciples: the famous, the favorite, and the faithful.

And that's the title of my sermon this morning – 'THE FAMOUS, THE FAVORITE, AND THE FAITHFUL'.

Each one responds to Jesus in a different way — and each one teaches us something about what it really means to follow Him.

The outline of my sermon will be as follows:

- The Famous – Peter: The One Known by Men
- The Favorite – John: The One Who Knew He Was Loved

- The Faithful – The Others Who Stayed in the Boat
- The Revealing Christ

(I) THE FAMOUS – PETER: THE ONE KNOWN BY MEN

Among the disciples, Peter was the famous one.

Everyone knew Peter's name.

Peter is the loud one, the bold one, the leader.

If you asked the disciples who the "famous" one was, they'd all point to Peter.

He's the one who walked on water.



He's the one who declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

He's the one who promised, "Even if all fall away, I never will."

Peter had passion, but he also had pride.
He wanted to be strong for Jesus — but in
his strength, he fell.

He denied the Lord three times.

Lesson: Fame doesn't protect us from
FAILURE [E.g. Hillsong; world-famed
evangelists – Ravi Zacharias; Jimmy
Swaggart].



Peter denied the Lord three times – not in secret, but in front of all. He fell **publicly, painfully and shamefully.**

Now, in **John 21**, Peter is **BROKEN.**

He's back to his old boat, back to his old nets — the place he first met Jesus.

The fame, the spotlight, the confidence — all gone.

But when John says, **“It is the Lord,”** Peter doesn't hesitate. He grabs his garment, dives into the sea – messy, impulsive, repentant – but his heart is still swimming to Jesus.



That's the heart of the **FAMOUS TURNED FAITHFUL**

Lesson: Faithfulness begins where pride ends. Even the *famous* must come to a place of **HUMILITY AND SURRENDER**.

The one who once tried to prove his love, now simply **PURSUES** it.

See what grace does – it draws the fallen back to Jesus.

Lesson:

- Fame may give you attention, but only **humility** brings you close to Jesus.
- Even the boldest leader must come back to the **WATERS OF REPENTANCE**.
- The “*famous*” may have a **reputation** before men, but Jesus wants **RELATIONSHIP**.
- Public failure is no barrier to **divine restoration**.
- Sometimes God allows your nets to stay empty so your heart can be full again.

E.g. Ethan rose to fame almost overnight. He started a YouTube channel sharing motivational clips – clever editing, catchy music, perfect lighting. Within a year, he had millions of followers and brands begging for sponsorships. Every post got likes; every comment praised him. But over time, the pressure to stay relevant grew. He stopped spending quiet time with God, too busy tracking analytics and followers. He began compromising – promoting products he didn't believe in, exaggerating stories for clicks. One night, a hacker deleted his entire account – years of content and fame in an instant. In the silence that followed, Ethan realized: *He had become famous before he became faithful.* He built a platform but lost his purpose. He chased applause but forgot

the *Audience of One*. “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Peter teaches us:

**It's not how
loudly you start,
but how humbly
you return that
matters.**

Christ centric Link

Peter's story points us to the Cross. At the cross, the **FAMOUS CHRIST** became the

REJECTED ONE so that the rejected could be restored.

Jesus bore Peter's **DENIAL** so Peter could bear Jesus' **COMMISSION**.

At the empty tomb, God showed that our **SHAME** cannot bury **HIS PURPOSE**.



Christ became the **failure for the famous,**
the curse for the cursed, and the grace for
the guilty.

Peter's leap into the water is a picture of **BAPTISM** — of dying to the old and rising to meet the risen Lord.

Questions:

- Have I allowed my failure to keep me from running to Jesus?
- Do I still believe He can meet me on the same shore where I fell?
- Have I been busy doing things **FOR** Jesus but missing intimacy **WITH** Him?

(II) THE FAVORITE – JOHN: THE ONE WHO RECOGNIZED HIS LOVE

John is described as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He wasn’t called that because Jesus loved him *more* [not because he was God’s pet] —but because John **never forgot** that he was loved. He understood God’s love. **He defined himself not by what he did for Jesus, but by what Jesus felt for him.**

He didn’t just work of Jesus – he **rested** in Jesus.

He didn’t just serve – he **listened**.



He rested on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper. He stood at the foot of the cross when others ran away. And now, in this story, he's the **first to recognize Jesus** on the shore.

Before the miracle, before the catch, before anyone else understands, John whispers, "**It is the Lord.**" His heart knew that **presence**— his spirit knew that **voice**.

Why did John see Him first?

Because **LOVE GIVES YOU DISCERNMENT.**

When love anchors your **IDENTITY**, you discern Christ even in disguise.



Lesson: Familiarity with Jesus' heart helps you recognize His voice.

John wasn't chasing fame. He wasn't proving loyalty. He was simply **ABIDING IN LOVE**— and love **sharpens your spiritual vision.**

Lesson:

- The *favorite* knows they are loved not because they earned it, but because **THEY'VE RESTED LONG ENOUGH TO RECEIVE IT.**

- Favor is born from **RELATIONSHIP**, not **PERFORMANCE**
- When your heart stays close to Jesus, you'll recognize His presence even in ordinary moments. The closer you are to His heart, the quicker you'll recognize His presence.

John's strength was not in his **POSITION**, but in his **PROXIMITY**. He stayed close – at the cross, at the empty tomb and even at the dawn of the resurrection.

E.g. Mia grew up in church, gifted with an incredible voice. Everywhere she sang, people cried – not because of her technique, but because of the presence of

God. Everyone said, “*She’s anointed.*” But after a while, jealousy rose among her peers. They said she was prideful, or that she got too much attention. Even her closest friend betrayed her – spreading rumors that cost her a worship position. Mia wept, asking, “*God, why are you allowing this?*” Then she heard His whisper: “*I’m teaching you to sing even when no one listens – to worship Me, not the crowd.*”

So, she kept serving quietly. Years later, God opened new doors – not to fame, but to ministry that healed broken people through worship. She realized: *Favor is not for status; it’s for service.* The fire didn’t destroy her; it purified her heart.

“For those who love God, all things work together for good.” (Romans 8:28).

John teaches us:

**You don't have to
strive to be noticed
by God — you just
have to stay near
Him.**

Questions:

- Am I living from love, or still trying to earn it?
- Do I live striving for love, or do I live resting in it?

- Do I recognize Jesus in the quiet dawn moments of my life — in the ordinary places where He stands unseen?
- Have I let the love of Jesus define me the way it defined John?

(III) THE FAITHFUL - THE OTHERS WHO STAYED IN THE BOAT

Then there are the rest of the disciples — **the unnamed ones.**



They didn't run ahead like Peter. They didn't recognize Jesus first like John. But they **stayed in the boat**, hauling the net full of fish.

They represent the *faithful* — the ones who quietly obey even when they don't fully understand.

Jesus told them, **"Throw your net on the right side."**



They didn't argue. They didn't complain.
They simply obeyed — and the miracle
happened in their **obedience**.



No spotlight. No title. Just simple faithfulness.

Lesson:

- Faithfulness doesn't always look exciting.
- It is not glamorous but fruitful.
- It's showing up when you don't feel like it.

It's praying when you don't hear anything.
It's loving people when it's not returned.

The *famous* may start loud, the *favorite* may feel loved, but it's the *faithful* who keep rowing when the nets are heavy.

Jesus delights in the steady hands that keep rowing, praying, serving and trusting even when they see nothing yet.

Heaven keeps record of those who **STAY**, even when no one claps.

E.g. Ben worked as a night security guard in a small company. No one really noticed him. He cleaned up, checked doors and stayed awake when everyone else was asleep. But every night at 3 a.m., during his break, he read his Bible and prayed for his coworkers by name. When one of them fell sick, Ben visited and prayed for him in the hospital. When another went through divorce, Ben quietly helped with meals and care for his kids. He never preached on stage or led a ministry – but he *lived like*

Jesus every night. Years later, his boss, who had been an atheist, told others at Ben's funeral, "*I never believed in God..... until I met the man who guarded our office.*" Ben was never *famous* nor called *favorite*. But heaven called him *faithful*. "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:23).

The faithful teaches us:

**Miracles are
often caught by
those who obey
quietly.**

Christ centric Link:

Faithfulness mirrors the heart of Christ.

Jesus Himself was faithful — faithful unto death, faithful to the Father's will, faithful to His promise.

He didn't seek fame; He sought the cross.

When we remain faithful in the dark, we mirror the faithfulness of the Savior who endured the night of Gethsemane for us.

**Christ's crown
came through a
cross;
Our fruit comes
through
faithfulness.**

Questions:

- Am I content to be faithful when no one notices?
- Do I trust that Jesus sees the unseen obedience of my heart?

(IV) THE REVEALING CHRIST – ONE LORD, THREE RESPONSES

Here's the beauty:

Jesus loved all three kinds of disciples —
the famous, the favorite, and the faithful.

He didn't **reject** Peter for **failing**.

He didn't **elevate** John for being **close**.

He didn't **forget** the others who kept **working**.

He cooked breakfast for all of them.



Fish on the fire, bread on the shore —
grace served with tenderness.

The same Jesus who stood for the
confident, stood for the **broken**.

The same Jesus who loved the **discerning**,
loved the **obedient**.

**Because in His
kingdom, fame
fades, favor flows,
but faithfulness
endures.**

Notice:

Each disciple experiences Jesus differently, but the same Christ stands before them all.

- To Peter, He is the **Restorer** of the fallen.
- To John, He is the **Revelation** of love.

- To the others, He is the **Rewarder** of the faithful.

This is the **Christ centric center** of the story — **the unchanging Christ meeting different hearts in different ways.**

He is not waiting for **perfection**; He's waiting for **participation**.

He doesn't choose the **qualified**; He **qualifies the chosen.**

Jesus stands on every shore —the shore of our **guilt**, the shore of our **confusion**, the shore of our **ordinary lives** — calling us to throw our nets again in **faith**.

Application: WHO AM I IN THIS STORY?

▪ Am I Peter [passionate once but broken now], longing for restoration after failure?
Jesus says, “Come to Me — I can still use you.”

▪ Am I John [sensitive to God's presence, discerning His nearness], resting in the love that never leaves?

Jesus says, “Stay near My heart — I will show Myself to you.”

▪ Am I one of the faithful [unseen, unnoticed], still quietly obeying with no recognition?

Jesus says, “Keep casting — I see your obedience.”

Whatever our place, the goal is the same:
TO BEHOLD CHRIST.

He is the **CENTER** — not our **fame**, not our **feelings**, not even our **faithfulness** —but **HIS FAITHFULNESS TO US.**

When the dawn broke that morning, it wasn't about who caught the most fish, who saw Jesus first, or who jumped in first. It was about **WHO** waited on the shore.

And His name is **Jesus** —the One who still meets us at daybreak, still calls us **“friends,”** still fills our empty nets with **grace.**

The world celebrates the famous,

religion honors the favored, but Heaven crowns the faithful — because Christ Himself is faithful and true.

So whether your name is known or not,
Whether your gift is seen or hidden,
Whether your past is clean or broken –
Jesus is still calling you, saying,

**“Come and
have
breakfast
with Me.”**

The only fame that matters is **making Jesus known.**

The only favor that counts is **being found in His love.**

The only faithfulness that lasts is the one **anchored in His finished work.**

And when you reach the shore of Heaven one day, He'll say, **"Well done, good and faithful servant."**

For in Heaven's eyes, the crown is not for the famous or the favored —

but for the faithful.

MY TESTIMONY

Pastor Toh Nee and I were once upon a time The Famous and The Favorite of our sending Church. We were the first four missionaries to be sent out from Singapore. And I was the first female missionary. The tons of letters sent to me every month in the 1980s were astounding. Many members of our sending church sent so many letters to me, making my colleagues so envious. I was the famous one.

When the plan to plant 100 churches in the Philippines kicked in during the 1990s, Pastor Toh Nee became the favorite one among the 3 Singaporean couples. The amount of finance, trust and privileges given to Pastor Toh Nee and Iloilo City Church were also double and more than the rest. Pastor Toh Nee was even branded as the “blue-eye” boy of our ex Pastor.

But then what did all these position and status breed in us? Pride and arrogance like Peter. Applause and recognition from men eclipsed **THE AUDIENCE OF ONE** – Jesus Christ. And Jesus began to strip us of our **fame and “favored”** position. Like Peter, we were humbled, broken and

feeling hopeless until Jesus drew us back to the shore of repentance. We then realized Jesus emptied our reputation, finance and even ministry, so we could be full again, this time with **HIM, HIS GRACE, MERCY AND GOODNESS** and not men's applause or our own ego. As long as we were willing to dive into the sea of **"dying to ourselves and pride"**, Jesus would forgive and restore us and recommission us again, just like He did by letting us continue His ministry for another 14 years after our exit from our ex sending church. And this time, we are serving out of right motive – not for fame or favor..... but simply because we love Him and we want to continue to just be faithful to Him.

He is the **center**— not my **fame**, not my **feelings**, not even my **faithfulness** —but **HIS FAITHFULNESS TO ME**

My mantra now in serving and loving God is:

“We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” (2 Corinthians 6:8-10)

“We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. When reviled, we bless; when

persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world.” (2 Corinthians 4:10-13)

“We always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.” (2 Corinthians 4:10-12)

I just want to be the faithful one – unknown to the world and even if I am no more in the favor of man, it is okay as long as I can remain in the boat (in the ministry) to haul in the net and row to the

shore with the harvest to meet Jesus. He is there still waiting for me – “Come have breakfast with me.”

End

