

May 26/27, 2007

No Perfect People Series

Recalled

John 21:1-23

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Well this week brings our *No Perfect People Series* to a close. We've been reminding ourselves that there are no perfect people and that God has delighted Himself in using imperfect, struggling people to change the world. I would suggest to you this morning that the biggest barrier to God using you in a significant way is not your past; it's not your failures; it's not your struggles – it would just be your inability to believe that God can use you such as you are to change the world.

What makes that so hard to believe is because God's economy of grace is so different, so counter to the culture in which we live. We don't live in a culture of grace. We live in a culture of performance, and we know that. We live in an "American Idol" culture where the best survive and everybody else is voted off. And we understand that we work our way to the top, and only the most talented, only the most gifted make it to the top. Everybody else settles somewhere along the way. We understand this is a culture of three strikes and you're out. That's just the way it works. And we know that. And that's why it's so hard to understand that God is other than that.

This morning we want to remind ourselves one more time of who Jesus is and who He calls to be part of His team to change the world. If you have a Bible, turn with me to John chapter 21 verse 1:

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. (John 21:1, *NASB)

I just want to talk about verse 1 for a moment. It's very important to understand what is meant by the words "**after these things.**" After what things? Well go back into chapter 20. Jesus was crucified on the cross, buried, is risen from the dead, and He has appeared to the disciples as a group at least twice. So it's important going into chapter 21 that we recognize that Peter and the others know that Jesus has risen from the dead. That sets the background for what we're going to talk about.

Second of all, the word "**manifested**" is used twice in verse 1. That's not a word that just means Jesus showed up. It's a word that John has used often in his Gospel. It means Jesus is revealing Himself. He's revealing who He is, what He's about, and in this final chapter, He's revealing again who He is as the God of grace that calls these disciples to be part of the team.

Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. (vs. 2-3)

It's very interesting – this group of disciples. You've got Peter and six others, seven altogether, so seven of the remaining eleven are now up at the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias. This is their home turf. In essence, they have gone home. And we would ask the question, "Why?" We know that they have seen the risen Christ at least twice. They know He's not still in the tomb. They know He's alive. Jerusalem had to be buzzing with the reality that Jesus was alive, and He was going to change the world. At one time these men believed that they would be with Jesus to change the world. Their hearts were filled with those hopes and dreams.

But they also recognized that in their hour of testing, they had failed miserably. And no one had failed more miserably than Peter himself. Peter was absolutely sure, and he had declared such, that when push came to shove, when the pressure was on, even though everybody else would fall away, he would stand strong. But hours after he made that declaration, three times he denied that he knew Jesus his Savior. The Gospel writers even tell us that after the third denial, Peter looked up and Jesus was looking right at him. They made eye-to-eye contact, and Peter knew that Jesus knew that he had denied Him. And the text says that Peter went out and wept bitterly—clearly the greatest failure of his life.

So now while there is such excitement over the risen Savior in Jerusalem, this group of seven goes home. And Peter makes the statement, **“I am going fishing.”** It seems like just an ordinary, everyday statement, but it is packed with meaning because what Peter is saying is, “I recognize now I’m off the team. I know Jesus is alive, and I believe He’s going to change the world. But it will be without me because in my greatest hour when Jesus needed His followers to take their stand, I failed miserably. And I understand with that level of failure, I’m off the team.”

So while Jerusalem was buzzing with excitement, Peter and his companions went home. They would never realize those hopes and dreams. Peter understood the only thing he knew how to do really was fish. He must have wondered, *What was I thinking? I’ve always been a fisherman. It’s all I’ll ever amount to. What was I thinking that I could be part of this movement to change the world?* The only thing he knew how to do was fish, so it’s back to fishing. And that night they fished all night.

Have you ever noticed how infectious failure is? You fail in one area of your life and pretty soon it affects another area of your life and another area of your life. And it just seems to kind of spread like an infection into every area of life until those things that you thought you could do well, those things you had a level of confidence in, now suddenly it seems like you’re even shaky there. And this feeling of failure just starts to send you on a downward spiral.

That’s exactly where Peter and the others were. The one thing they could do was fish. But they get to the end of the night and they hadn’t caught one single fish. And they must have thought, *Failed again—Losers with a capital ‘L’.* Verse 4:

But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. (vs. 4-8)

This should all sound vaguely familiar. The disciples are fishing all night. They don’t catch a single fish. In the morning as the sun is rising, there’s a figure standing on the beach about 100 yards away. He asks them a question with an implied “no” answer. “Hey you guys haven’t caught any fish have you?” “No.” “Throw the net on the other side of the boat.” They did and suddenly the net was so full of fish, they couldn’t even pull it into the boat. And immediately that clicked with John. They had been there before.

All the way back into the early chapters of the Gospel was the day that these men received their call. They had been fishing all night. They didn't catch a single fish. Jesus stepped up and said, "Throw your nets on the other side of the boat." And their nets became so filled with fish they couldn't pull them in the boat. And that was the first time they really recognized the extraordinary power of Jesus. And it was in that moment that Jesus said, "I'll tell you what, if you follow Me I will make you fishers of men." And the text says they dropped everything and they followed. That was the moment of their call. And they believed with Jesus they would change the world.

Now they had been through their greatest failure in their lives. And in their hour of need, Jesus shows up on the beach again. And He goes through the same basic story to remind them again of who He is. Immediately John recognizes it's Jesus. Peter, impulsive as he is, jumps into the water, swims to shore, and the rest of them bring the boat to shore.

All the way back in the early part of the Gospel, the first time this story occurred, Jesus used what happened as a metaphor for their calling. When Jesus said, "You know, if you follow Me, I will make you fishers of men," there was implied in that that "No matter how hard you fish, your net is going to come back empty unless I fill the net." There was this sense in which they understood that Jesus wasn't calling them because they were highly gifted, because of their résumé, because they had worked their way to the top of the heap, all Jesus was asking is, "Would you be a net-holder and trust Me to fill the net with My power?" And they had agreed to become followers of Jesus, but now with their great failure, they were sure they were off the team. Years before they had received a calling, now Jesus would have to give them a recall back onto the team.

This text reminds us of a big problem I think that we all have and that is when Jesus calls us to be part of His team to change the world, the first thing we do is we look in the mirror. We look in the mirror and we see our failures, we see our unworthiness, we see our struggles, and we see our résumé. And we think, *You know, Jesus, there are a lot of people far more gifted and talented and qualified than I am. Why don't You call them?*

The problem is that we're thinking on the basis of a performance-driven culture, and that's not how God operates at all. God operates on the basis of the economy of grace. So rather than looking into the mirror and being discouraged, we need to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith and recognize He's not asking us because of our great talent. He's not asking us because of our résumé. He's not asking us because we're really something. He's asking us—struggles and failures all along the way—to be a net-holder. And with His power, He'll take care of filling the net. So Jesus meets them there on the beach to give them a recall.

So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. (vs. 9-14)

They get out of the boat and Jesus already has breakfast cooking and invites them to gather around and to have breakfast with Him. We've reminded ourselves several times through this study that eating together in the near East was not just eating together. There was great symbolism to it. It had to do with identification. It had to do with relationship. Clearly what Jesus was saying in this

moment was it was time to sit down and restore the relationship. My guess would be that since the moment Peter denied Jesus, Peter had struggled to look Jesus in the eye. I would just guess on the other two encounters in chapter 20 when Jesus met with the disciples, it was hard for Peter to look Jesus in the eye knowing what he had done.

And the first step in experiencing a recall is to restore the relationship. What often happens when we fail miserably is we are so ashamed of what we've done that we in essence are unwilling to make eye contact with God. We kind of pull back from the relationship. And then what we tend to do is we tend to work really hard—if I do enough, if I do, do, do—somehow I'll prove to God how sorry I am. And God will be impressed with that and maybe in some way then I'm deserving of His forgiveness.

And we need to understand that doesn't impress God. And that's not what God wants. God doesn't want us for what we can do. God wants the relationship. And a calling always flows out of relationship. When we have failed miserably, the first thing Jesus says is, "I want you to come and sit down with Me and have breakfast together. I want you to know I still love you. I want you to know I'm still for you. I want you to know that I knew when I called you that this would happen, and I'm committed to you. In the midst of your struggles and failures, you need to sit at the table, you need to look Me in the eye and realize I love you. And I promise I'm going to finish what I started with you and you have to trust Me with that." Jesus in essence wanted Peter to look Him in the eye and to recognize Jesus still loved him and he was still on the team and that there was a job to do.

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again 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, "Shepherd My sheep." 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 all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." (vs. 15-17)

There are a couple of things to notice here. One is that even though John has consistently been referring to Peter as Simon Peter, Jesus now calls him just by his given name, Simon. It was Jesus who gave him the name Peter, which means "rock". Jesus was in essence saying, "Peter, if you follow Me I'll make you into a rock. And I'll use you to change the world." But in some ways they were going back to the beginning. Peter was acting like he was before he ever met Jesus. And this was time for Peter's recall. So Jesus in essence is saying, "Peter, you're acting like you were when we first met." So He's calling him Simon, but He's calling him back to be Peter again.

He says, **"Simon, do you love Me more than these?"** Theologians argue about what "these" is in reference to. I think most likely it's in reference to the other disciples. You remember in the upper room just hours before Jesus was arrested, Jesus said, "Before this night is over, all of you will fall away. None of you will stand." And Peter took great exception to that. He was the one that clearly verbalized, "Lord, no matter what happens – even if all of these losers fall away (kind of a loose paraphrase, but that's the essence of it), I will stand."

And of course we know it was only hours later that Peter three times denied Jesus his Savior. Peter in that moment in the upper room was filled with self-sufficiency. He was filled with arrogance. He

was filled with this thinking that God had chosen him because his performance was so good. And he was determined to prove it.

Now Jesus in essence is calling him on it in saying, “Peter, do you really love Me more than these? Are you really that much of a big shot?” And Peter has to recognize he did not come through any better than anybody else.

You know it’s an interesting dynamic how God often has to break us before we’re useful to Him. Another way of saying that, it’s often not until our greatest failures that we are useful to the Master. When He breaks us of that arrogance, of that self-sufficiency, of that sense that, *I can do this*, and we recognize apart from the power of God we can’t do it at all.

The discussion between Jesus and Peter was in Aramaic, which was the language of the day, but it’s recorded in the text in Greek. The Greek text would properly reflect the basic tone of the Aramaic discussion. It uses two interesting Greek words to do that. There are two different Greek words for “love” that show up in the New Testament. One is the word “agape”, which is the highest form of love. Second is a word called phileo which is still a very high form of love, but different and lesser than agape. I think oftentimes people over-exaggerate the differences, but in this text there’s kind of a play on words.

It basically goes like this:

“Peter, do you agape Me?” “Yes, Lord; You know that I phileo You.” “Peter, do you agape Me?” “Yes, Lord; I phileo You.” “Peter, do you phileo Me?” “Yes, Lord; You know that I phileo You.”

To put it into English and exaggerating it just a little bit, it would sound like this:

“Peter, do you love Me?” “Yes, Lord; I like You a lot.” “Peter, do you love Me?” “Yes, Lord; I like You a lot.” “Peter, do you even like Me a lot?” And Peter was grieved, “Yes, Lord; You know that I like You a lot.”

I don’t think the problem was that Peter didn’t love Jesus enough. I don’t think that’s the point. The point is, given what Peter had done in denying his Lord, and knowing that Jesus knew that he had denied Him, he was simply unable to say, “I love You” with the highest form of love because his behavior gave evidence otherwise. It would be like a husband standing before his wife right after he’s committed adultery and saying, “Honey, I love you more than anything else in the world.” It just doesn’t ring true.

And so no matter what Peter said, he really wasn’t able to say, “Lord, I don’t love You nearly as much as I thought I did. But I love You.” And in essence, that’s his excuse for why he’s going back to fishing because he has failed to love Jesus like he knows he should have.

With each one of those statements, it’s followed with a command. “Peter, if you love Me, then feed My sheep.” “Peter, if you love Me, then tend My lambs.” In other words, “Peter, if you love Me, get with it. Peter, do you really love Me?” “Lord, I like You a lot.” “Then get to work Peter.” But even when Jesus comes down to Peter’s level and says, “Peter, even if you just like Me a lot, I’m calling you. I need you to get back in the game. I need you to feed My sheep.”

See the problem is this: Oftentimes when we experience these failures, these struggles along the way, we pull ourselves out of the game. We bench ourselves. We think, *You know, if I was God, I’d throw me off the team*. I mean that it is the way it works—three strikes and you’re out. And so

we sit on the sidelines because we feel unworthy, because we feel miserable, because we're losers and failures, but we also tend to wallow in our stuff and think, *You know, if I sit here on the sideline and am miserable long enough, God will know how truly sorry I am.* And so weeks turn into months, and months turn into years. And we don't realize that that doesn't impress God at all.

God doesn't want us to wallow in our stuff to try and prove to Him somehow how sorry we are. That isn't the basis by which God called you in the first place. God didn't call you because you had a great résumé. God didn't call you because you are a great performer. God didn't call you because you had all the right stuff. That's the way this world works, not God's. God called you because He called you such as you are—struggles and failures and all.

And then He stands before Peter saying, "Peter, do you love Me and if you love Me then get in the game; if you love Me then fulfill your calling; if you love Me then do what I've asked you to do." That evening in the upper room just hours before Jesus was to be arrested, Jesus said to His disciples, "If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments. If you love Me, you obey Me." And that's what He's saying here again. "You may not understand why I'm calling you. You may not understand why I'm recalling you. All I'm saying is, if you love Me, then get in the game. If you love Me, then let's change the world together. I love you, and I'm committed to you and I've called you—struggles and failures and all. Quit sitting on the sidelines, and let's get with it."

"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" (vs. 18-19)

Jesus prophesied what kind of a death Peter would die. In the ancient world they sometimes crucified people by nailing them to a cross, sometimes by tying them to a cross—and that's reflected in the wording here. In essence, Peter is being told that he will be executed on a cross.

Now we have to ask the question, "What's the point of that in the train of thought—in the flow of the text?" And I think the point is this: God is not calling Peter to a secondary role. He's not calling him to be the water boy. He's not saying, "Peter, I know that you're a miserable failure but you're still on the team and you can carry the water bucket." He's saying just the opposite. "Peter, I want you to know that I am recalling you back to service. And together, we're going to change the world. And I'm going to make you such a player that the world will have to crucify you to stop you—just like they did Me." He's saying, "Peter, I'm going to make you such a significant player in changing the world that the only way to stop you is that they will have to kill you." Which helps Peter understand this is a high and holy calling—followed with the words, "You got that Peter? Now follow Me!" Peter has been recalled.

Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?" (vs. 20-23)

Peter kind of reverts back here a little bit and after hearing how he will die, he looks to John and says, "Okay, if that's the deal, what about that guy? If I'm going to be strung up on a cross, what

about that guy?” And Jesus’ answer is, “Peter, what difference does that make? It’s none of your business. All you need to know is this is what I’ve called you to. And I’m free to call anybody I want, to anything I want, and that’s really My call, not yours.”

You see, this is the problem living in a world that is based on our performance—we tend to always compare. We tend to always compete. And we understand how the system works and we think that’s fair. We don’t know what to do in an economy of grace where God is free to choose anybody He wants. He’s free to choose any sinner, misfit or loser He wants to change the world. And we tend to look at that and say, “God, what are You doing?” And God says, “What business is it of yours? I’m free to call anybody I want. What difference does that make? You just need to be true to your calling.”

See God comes knocking and He calls us to change the world, and we look around the auditorium and we say, “You know, there are so many people with better résumés, so many people with more talent, so many people with a better track record, so many people who aren’t miserable failures. God, You probably should choose somebody else. Really, I’m just kind of a loser.” And God says, “You know, what difference does that make? What business is that of yours? I’m calling you. And I know your history and I know your past and I know your failures and I’m calling you—not because of your résumé, not because of your great talents, but because I’m calling you. And if you love Me, then get in the game. If you love Me, then keep My commandments. If you love Me, then hold a net and be part of changing the world.” He’s just asking us to hold a net and trusting that in His power, He’ll fill it. That’s His call; that’s His choice.

You know it’s also true on the other end of the scale. We look down the row, and we see someone who according to our definition is kind of a misfit or a loser. And yet, God is using that person to change the world. And we say, “God, what’s up with that? I mean what about me? I’ve had my quiet time everyday this week. I’m a really good person. I’m clean shaven. I obey all the rules. I mean, come on God, if You’re going to do *that* with that loser, what about me?” And we fill ourselves with this spiritual arrogance. God says, “Hey, what business is that of yours? I’m free to do whatever I want with whomever I want.” That’s the economy of grace. We just don’t know what to do with that.

I had to wrestle with this when I first got out of seminary. I went to seminary in southern California. All my friends were going to LA, to San Francisco, to San Diego. “So Bryan, where are you going?” “Well, I’m going to Broken Bow, Nebraska.” You know, I’ve got to tell you, they weren’t impressed. And that is the problem with grad school. You tend to come out with a certain level of arrogance that isn’t healthy.

Sometimes coming out of seminary, you forgot why you went to seminary. I remember when I landed in Broken Bow, I said, “God, are You mad at me? Have I done something wrong?” And I remember God clearly dealing with my heart and saying, “Bryan, is this going to be about you or is it going to be about Me? And is this going to be about you trying to make some sort of a name for yourself, or is this going to be you willing to be obedient to the call no matter where it is?” I remember wrestling with that and finally concluding in my own heart, *If I’m going to stay in this vocation, it has to be about God.* And I can say with integrity in my heart that I was able to say to God, “God, if you want me in the Sandhills for the next fifty years, it’s fine. Just tell me what You’ve called me to. I want to be faithful.”

I was there for ten years, and when this church called and asked me if I was interested, I wasn’t looking anywhere else. I was content with staying. I was fine there. It’s a beautiful community. I

also understand I'm here today just because I was called here. This isn't like the corporate world where I'm working my way to the top. It doesn't have anything to do with that. I know that there are pastors out there that are godlier and more talented than I am, and they will spend their entire ministry in a church of fifty people. I know that. It's just their calling. And this is my calling. It's no basis for arrogance and pride. It's just my calling. I just need to be faithful to what God has called me to do regardless of what He's called anybody else to do.

We have to come to grips with the reality that there are no perfect people. And before God, there are no impressive résumés. I mean, really, what do we have to impress God with? We're just a gathering of sinners, misfits, and losers. But God has always delighted in using imperfect people to change the world.

I'm sure in this audience there are those of you who have failed miserably. At one time you felt called by God, and you and God were going to change the world. And then you've really messed things up. You've messed it up so badly that you've pulled yourself out of the game and you're sitting on the sidelines. You're wallowing in your failures and your struggles. And you're convinced that God could never use you.

And maybe you've even convinced yourself, if you sit on the sidelines long enough and feel badly long enough that somehow that's going to convince God you're really sorry. But you need to know that doesn't impress God at all. That isn't what He wants. He invites you back to the breakfast table, and He wants you to know He's *for* you. He's committed to you. He always has been. He knew when He called you to the team that He was calling a loser and a misfit, a sinner—that's part of the deal. But what He's saying to you this morning is, "Do you love Me? If you love Me, then get in the game." "Well, you know, my failures and my struggles and all these talented people..." "Do you love Me? Then get in the game." You may at one time have had a call. Maybe this morning you need a recall. All He's asking is for you to hold a net. By His power, He'll fill it up. He might call you to change the world. He's free to call anybody to do whatever He likes.

One thing you'll notice, if you choose to get back in the game, is as you're heading into the locker room, there's a sign over the locker room—it says, "No Perfect People Allowed." And when you walk through and meet the team, you're going to find, *Wow, this team's a bunch of sinners, misfits, losers.* People called by God, by His power to change the world. You just have to believe that. You have to believe by faith that God can use you, such as you are, to change the world.

Our Father we are thankful that You do not call us because of our performance; You do not call us because of our résumé. Lord, we're not impressive to You. There isn't a person in this auditorium that impresses You. Lord, it's hard to understand Your economy of grace. It's so different from everything in this world. Lord, it's hard to realize You have the right to call anybody You want to serve in any role that You desire to change the world. Lord, it really doesn't have anything to do with how we compare with anybody else; it just has to do with our obedience. Lord, there have got to be those here who because of their struggles and failures have pulled themselves out of the game—they're sitting on the bench convinced that they are of no value to You. Lord, I pray this morning that they might have the faith to believe that You've given them a recall. And if they love You, You're asking them to get back in the game, to hold a net, to be part of changing the world. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Video Clip - Pat

I like what C.S. Lewis says—that he was dragged kicking and screaming into the Christian faith. And that is exactly how I felt. From the moment I walked in the door here, I was looking for something to get away from. I was looking for a way out. And I didn't even want to come. I didn't want to come to church. I didn't want to think about God. I didn't want any of this. I really just wanted to be left alone, and I wanted whatever nagging sensation I had going on to just leave me be. I was really quite content with my life for the most part, and I didn't want to be here. I didn't want to be a Christian. I didn't want to be one of those God people. I didn't want to be cheesy and happy. I didn't want to love my neighbor—I didn't want any of that. I really just wanted to be left alone.

Over the years I think I've looked into just about everything to find some sense of identification, some sense of fulfillment. I've had every hobby that I could ever imagine. I tried to fit in with all these different groups. Nothing really worked until I found alcohol, and alcohol was beautiful—it was really like the missing piece. It just seemed like over time the consequences of my lifestyle got to a point where they outweighed the benefits. But that wasn't enough to stop me. I loved it. I loved what I was doing, and if all I got was eight minutes of peace in 24 hours of pain, that's fine. I was content with that.

And there were some life things that happened that made it really, really painful to just be around. And the God that I was familiar with—this spirit of the universe—really wasn't helping out much. It became pertinent for me to know what God is about and whether or not I could get access to that power so desperately needed just to get out of bed. And my old beliefs were no longer holding any water; they weren't working for me. And I thought, *I'll give it one last shot. I'll go to a respectable, reputable church and I'll give it an honest, fair shot. And maybe this little voice will leave me be and I can go on with the rest of my life in peace feeling that I have covered the God-issue completely.*

And it was phenomenal—when I walked in the door, I just felt a sense of ease that I hadn't anticipated. And when Bryan spoke, when Bryan was preaching, it was so very pertinent to my life to what was going on that week. And so I came back again, and for months, the sermons were directly apropos—you know, they were just so pertinent, so applicable to what was going on in my life. And I just couldn't deny it. This is just *too* coincidental—week after week after week after week—it's just too coincidental.

So I sort of hit my knees, and it wasn't a miraculous prayer. It was like “Okay God, I'm in. Whatever, whatever you've got to do I'm in.” And I was always under the impression that I had to get good before I could step into the presence of God. And I had a complete misunderstanding about what this really is—that the work has been done, that I don't have to clean myself up to come before God. I had no idea that Christianity, that the cross, that Christ, that all of that was about: *I screwed up; I'm a big ole screw-up; the world knows it; and God definitely knows it; and He's done the work to get me here anyway. He did everything necessary to bring me home.* And to really know that is amazing.

People like me don't get very far in life. I don't want to cry on video, but we don't make it very far. I've met a lot of people—they're dead, and they were better people than me. And I didn't do anything—God has just brought me here, in spite of me. And I know that.

Video Clip – Matt

I've had a fear all my life. You know, I've been afraid of everything. I've been afraid of people. I've been afraid of God. I've been afraid of not fitting into the world. My parents separated when I was three, divorced when I was five, and I lived with my mom from the time I was 3-5 years old. Eventually after a couple of years, she decided she was going to move to Omaha. And she dropped me and my sister off with my dad. My dad was always busy, and my mom was in Omaha, so nobody was ever really around. My sister spent a lot of time raising me. So I grew up constantly with the feeling of not being wanted, and being alone, and really being afraid.

My mom got really depressed and started her round of trips to psych wards and was diagnosed as bipolar. She was depressed frequently, and she would get on this cycle of being depressed then being manic causing a bunch of problems, spending a lot of money, getting in trouble—she would wind up homeless usually. People would try to help her; she didn't want their help. And she'd wind up homeless and on the street and then she'd get arrested and wind up in jail, then wind up in a mental institution, wind up on medication, and then wind up back home again. And she did this routine for fifteen years probably. And I hated God. If God was so loving and kind and generous as they say He is, then why is all this stuff happening?

And I came across drugs and alcohol, and that was it. I'll never forget the first time I drank and did drugs—it was a spiritual experience. All the pain I had felt was gone. All the uneasiness, all the tension in my chest was relieved. It was gone. I was okay. I was whole. I could function in life. I wasn't afraid of people. I wasn't afraid of the world. And from that point on, I never wanted to come down. But once I hit about the point of 21, stuff wasn't working anymore. Eventually that experience wasn't happening anymore. I never knew what was going to happen. It was causing a lot more problems. I'd wind up in mental institutions and in trouble frequently. Relationships were breaking and falling apart.

So I tried other avenues. I'd been living a really messed up life rebelling against the world and everything else for so long, I thought maybe it was time to grow up. And instead of using the old drugs and alcohol, I used everything else—all the “appropriate” things. I tried using work. I worked 60-80 hours a week for years. I got a nice house. I had nice cars. I had a beautiful wife. I had three dogs. I had everything that the American dream talks about—\$100,000 a year income. I didn't have to worry about much. I tried philosophy, and I wound up centering on Buddhism. And I think the thing that appealed to me about Buddhism was it touched on my selfishness. It touched on my ego and the idea that I could get somewhere on my own. That crap didn't cut it either. I've tried money. I've tried women. I've tried everything—success, and it just didn't cut it.

And eventually, when all those things started to fall apart, when all those things lost the allure that they once had, I was left with that same sinking hole that I've always had—that same fear. And my life would always fall apart again. And I was just to the point where I was like, *All right; I'm going to try this thing again for the umpteenth time.* So I went back to AA again. I remember deciding that if something didn't happen here, that was it. I was going to be done with it, and I'd just kill myself. I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't go two seconds without thinking about using or killing myself.

So I went to this meeting, and I hated it. And I was walking upstairs, and as I was walking out the door, I ran into Pat. I've known Pat for years. We've been around each other in AA for a long time. I've seen his life change. I know he's like me. And he related to me his story, and he listened to me. He understood the pain I was going through. He understood that my life was completely out of control and that I could not do anything to make it better.

And we sat and talked for about three hours. And really what he wound up doing was closing doors on me. I came to the understanding that there is nothing I can do about my life anymore. And that apparently, God had done this for him. I've known him. I knew his life was messed up. And now it's not. He's a decent guy. I hit my knees and confessed my life. I told Jesus everything I could come up with about my life, about me, and I confessed it. And I asked for Him. And I'll never forget breaking down, which I'd done so many times before, but instead of having a feeling of absolute despair and hopelessness, for the first time I had a feeling of hope. And I had a feeling in my heart like I was going to be okay and that there was Someone out there who loved me.

Bryan Clark:

Who would have thought five years ago that God would so radically change a life like Pat's, and that God would use someone like Pat to so radically change a life like Matt's, that today God would be using both Pat and Matt to change the world. Now come one, if God could use a loser like Pat and a loser like Matt and a loser like me, don't you think God could use a loser like you to change the world? You just have to believe that—you just have to believe that by faith.

Our Father, we are amazed at grace. Lord, we understand how this performance-based world works, we just don't understand grace. Lord, maybe we're a little bit more clever in how we disguise our insecurities and our fears and our emptiness, but at the end of the day, we're just sinners, misfits, and losers struggling to find some meaning in life. Lord, You have radically changed Pat; You have radically changed Matt. Lord, You're using them to change the world—people that our culture would have quickly dismissed as having nothing to offer. Lord, I pray that each one of us would understand that You have called us. It's not about our résumés, it's not about our performance, it's not about some great talents we have, You just call us because You call us, such as we are. Lord, I pray for each of us that we might hear those words of Jesus, "If you love Me, then feed My sheep. If you love Me, get in the game. If you love Me, trust Me; hold a net. Let's change the world together. Lord, help us to believe that. Lord, use us to change this world for Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Study Questions

No Perfect People Series

Recalled

John 21:1-23

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Has there ever been a time when you felt like you really let God down? How did that affect your Christian walk?

How did that affect your intimacy with God?

Was it hard to believe God might still want to use you in a significant way?

2. Why is it so hard to believe that God wants to use us in spite of our failures and shortcomings?

How is God's economy of grace different from the performance-driven economy of the culture in which we live?

3. Is it possible that our failures actually make us more useful to God? Why or why not?

Bible Study

1. Read John 21:1-14. Also read John 18:25-27. What has transpired in John 20 covered with the words, "After these things..."

2. Why do you think Peter and the others went back to fishing after they had twice seen the resurrected Jesus?

3. Compare the fishing story in John 21 with Luke 5:1-11. The text states Jesus "manifested" Himself in this story. What was Jesus manifesting about Himself?

Were the full nets just nets full of fish or was Jesus making a greater point?

4. Why does the John 21 text make such a point of Jesus inviting Peter and the others to breakfast around a charcoal fire?

What is the first step back after we have failed miserably?

5. What is Jesus trying to say to Peter in John 21:15-17? Compare John 14:18-25.

Often when we fail miserably we bench ourselves because we feel so unworthy or so inadequate to serve God. Perhaps sometimes we feel if we sulk enough we'll show God how truly sorry we are for our failures. Does that impress God? Are we ever worthy of our calling?

What is Jesus saying to Peter in his threefold repetition of his calling?

6. What is the significance of Jesus telling Peter how he will die?

Is Jesus calling Peter to a secondary role reserved for losers and failures?

7. Often our insecurities flow out of our comparisons with others. Why does the concept of grace demand that we let go of all comparisons and simply seek to be faithful to what God has called us to do?

Application

1. Is failure final? Are there any Christians who are benched because of their failures?

2. List three key principles you learned from this text?

3. What is the most significant lesson you've learned or been reminded of in the *No Perfect People Series*?