

Series: Unforgettable Halftime Moments
Halftime Love #4
John 21:15-19

INTRODUCTION: *Mark Richt is an American former college football coach, player, and current television analyst. He was the head football coach at the University of Georgia for 15 years and at the University of Miami, his alma mater, for three. His teams won two Southeastern Conference (SEC) championships, five SEC division titles, and one Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) division title. He was a two-time SEC Coach of the Year (2002, 2005), the 2017 ACC Coach of the Year. He and his wife have 2 children: and two children they adopted from Ukraine in 1999,[43] Zach (born May 15, 1996), and Anya.*

Richt is a devout Christian and credits his conversion to a locker room speech given by Bobby Bowden when Richt was a 26-year-old graduate assistant. In an interview in 2017, he said this about his faith and his coaching philosophy: 'We as people are searching for answers to life: 'I believe God created us, loves us, wants a relationship with us. He loved us enough to allow His Son to die for our sin. When your heart changes then you start doing things out of love rather than because you have to.'

I like that, '**when your heart changes then you start doing things out of love rather than because you have to.**' I wanted to share that because the title of today's message is, "**Halftime Love.**"

This is the fourth in a series of messages called, Unforgettable Halftime Moments. I'm preaching through a "half-time" passage in the Bible, based upon Jesus' appearance to the apostles by the Sea of Galilee recorded in John 21. This incident takes place at 'half-time' in a manner of speaking because it's in between the Old and New Testaments. It's in between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. It's in between the end of physical, national Israel and the beginning of "spiritual Israel" the church (Acts 2). It's in between the feast of Passover and the feast of Pentecost.

The purpose is for us to take a timeout and evaluate where we are personally and as a church in the areas that Jesus addresses in these verses. So far, we've looked at **halftime action**, **halftime service**, and **halftime fellowship**.

Recap the Story: It was an early morning on the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee.

A light haze of fog hung over the water making it hard to see much further than 100 yards out. The resurrected Jesus, who just eight days earlier lay dead in a sealed tomb, was now preparing a charcoal fire on the beach.

After placing some fish and bread over the fire, Jesus calls out to Peter and the disciples who were with him, “Hey friends, catch anything?” The disciples have no idea it’s Jesus. All night long they’ve been fishing, its daybreak, and it’s about time to call it a day. The guys on the boat reply, “We’ve caught nothing.”

Jesus says, “Hey, why don’t you throw your net on the right side of the boat and you’ll find some.” In desperation, they throw the net over the right side of the boat, and as they begin to retrieve it, suddenly the boat leans hard over to the right side and begins taking in water.

Peter yells out to the others in the boat, “Get over here and help me haul it in.” They couldn’t because of the large number of fish.

Suddenly, amid the chaos, something clicks to the Apostle John. Three years previously this same thing happened to Peter, James, and John were all fishing and catching nothing, when a popular young Rabbi named Jesus joined them on the boat and encouraged them to let their nets down into deeper water. And just like this early morning, they caught so many fish, their nets began to break, and the boats began to sink. Jesus told them, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people, come follow me.” And on this day, John immediately turns to Peter and says, ***“It is the Lord!”***

I love what happens next, because this is exactly what we expect Peter to do. Peter was a guy who leads from his heart. He’s intense, emotional, a person who many times acts before he thinks. Peter wraps his clothes around him, jumps into the water and swims ashore, leaving the others to bring in the fish.

What’s interesting about Peter’s response to that first miracle, three years ago was: ***“When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”*** (Luke 5:8)

And now Jesus has done that same miracle all over again, but now Peter feels he’s a failure, an empty, useless, and worthless disciple.

The cartoon “Dennis the Menace” once had a scene at bedtime prayers. He’s kneeling. He has his hands folded. He’s looking heavenward. He has on his pajamas, cowboy hat, cowboy boots, and his plastic six-shooter is strapped to his side. The caption under the cartoon reads: “**I’m here to turn myself in.**”

Peter feels like a **failure**. A few days before, Jesus has had a Passover meal with His disciples and we’re told that “when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”

Peter said to him, ‘Even though they all fall away, I will not.’ And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” But he said emphatically, ‘If I must die with you, I will not deny it.’ And they all said the same. (Mark 14:26-31)

Well, we all know the rest of that story. Jesus was arrested. Peter denied Jesus 3 times. AND all the disciples scatter like sheep. It’s not their finest moment!

Three days later Peter hears the tomb is empty, and he hears about the angels and that Jesus has risen from the dead... and he runs to see if it’s true. And it is!!! The tomb IS empty! But then we were told that that Peter ‘went away, wondering to himself what had happened.’ (Luke 24:12)

A singer/songwriter named Don Francisco wrote a song called ‘**He’s Alive**’ that tells us what Peter might have been thinking at this point:

*“...something strange had happened there, but just what, I did not know.
John believed a miracle, but I just turned to go.
Circumstance and speculation couldn’t lift me very high.
'Cause I'd seen them crucify Him and then I saw Him die.
Back inside the house again the guilt and anguish came.
Everything I'd promised Him just added to my shame.
When at last it came to choices - I denied I knew His name.
And even if He was alive... it wouldn't be the same.”*

It wasn’t that Peter would not be excited to see Jesus risen from the dead. It’s just

that he KNEW he'd betrayed Christ. He knew he'd failed. He knew that he'd made a promise and did exactly what he said he...WOULD NOT DO.

Just so you know, John 21 takes place after the disciples have already seen the resurrected Jesus. If you had a week-long series of encounters with the risen Christ, do you think you would ever go back to normal? When you've doubted, he has allowed you to touch his wounds. Do you think there's any going back to life as you knew it? You'd think not! But the disciples do just that.

If you've ever felt like Peter, a failure, then the first words of John 21 are good news: "**Afterward, Jesus appeared again to them.**" Don't you love the grace of God? You've had these amazing encounters with Christ, you've made vows, you struggle or fall back, only to find that **Jesus comes looking for Peter, because PETER needs "looking for".**

There's nothing more transforming than the moment you understand that the God of heaven and earth went to great lengths looking for you; to draw you back to himself because He so loved you, He sent Jesus to die for you.

John, the author of this gospel, 1,2 & 3 John, and Revelation was transformed from a "Son of Thunder" to the "Apostle of Love." Repeatedly, John describes himself as "the one Jesus loved."

John got it. Despite all his fallenness, all his folly, all his flaws, all his murderous thoughts towards Samaritans, all his desire for advantage, he got that Jesus Christ loved him.

Think of the apostle Paul. When he first shows up in the Book of Acts as Saul, it says in chapter 9 that he went from town to town, breathing murderous threats against the church. He was a man in the grip of hatred. But this is the same Paul who wrote 1 Corinthians 13—one of the definitive chapters on love. How did he get so turned inside-out?

In 2 Corinthians 5, he tells us: "**God's love has been spread abroad in our heart.**" In other words, God's love has landed deep in our souls, and it overflows. **I want to tell YOU something: You are also the one Jesus loves.**

When he looks at you, it's like when he encounters that woman at the well in John 4. "Come meet the man who told me everything I ever did," she says to the townspeople. He pointed out her broken life. But what really blew away was: "Come meet the guy who knows all about me—and still loves me."

In 1 John 3:1, the apostle of love, writes: "***Behold what manner of love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God.***"

The word "behold" doesn't convey the idea of, "Oh look! God loves us!" No. It is an emphatic word that says, "Would you take a look at that! Hey, everybody, check out this Niagara Falls of love—from God to you!"

Jesus once said to his disciples: "***Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends.***"

Back to the Story...Jesus not only shows up, but he invites them all to have breakfast with him. This was the first Easter brunch. It would be easy to gloss over their meal, but I think it's deeply significant and even spiritual.

By providing a net full of fish and a warm meal, Jesus reminds us that he knows our needs. He always goes ahead of us and provides for us. God loves to feed people physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, and spiritually. That's the purpose of the church. **We are a community of followers of Jesus getting fed by Him so that we can feed others.**

Turn with me to John 21:15-19, I'm going to read this in the Amplified version.

15So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these others do [i.e. with total commitment and devotion]?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You [with a deep, personal affection, as for a close friend]." Jesus said to him, "Feed My lambs." **16**Again He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me [with total commitment and devotion]?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You [with a deep, personal affection, as for a close friend]." Jesus said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." **17**He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me [with a deep, personal affection for Me, as for a close friend]?" Peter was grieved that He asked him the third time, "Do you [really]

love Me [with a deep, personal affection, as for a close friend]?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You [with a deep, personal affection, as for a close friend]." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep.

18 I assure you and most solemnly say to you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and walked wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and arms, and someone else will dress you, and carry you where you do not wish to go." 19Now He said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And after saying this, He said to him, "Follow Me [walk the same path of life that I have walked]!" [Amplified] **LET'S PRAY**

Both miracles take place by the lakeshore. **But there are some differences between Luke 5 and John 21 worth noting.**

In Luke 5, when Jesus first issues the call to his disciples, he uses a marine metaphor to get across his point. He basically says, "This fishing thing that you're all familiar with— I'm going to ask you to do something greater. I want you to tell the world the good news that there's a God who loves them; I want you to follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

When the scene is replayed here in John 21, the metaphor shifts from fishing to shepherding. The mandate shifts, too. It's no longer "Go win the lost world." Now the mandate is "Look after the people who are already found."

I want you to listen carefully: Jesus is not asking us to choose between Luke 5 and John 21. He's not asking us to choose between evangelism and discipleship. He's not asking us to choose whether we are going to win the lost or care for the found. With God it is not an either/or. **It's both/and situation.**

John includes the detail that Jesus has made a charcoal fire for their breakfast meeting. **Did you know that the sense most strongly associated with memory is the sense of SMELL?**

In John 18:18, we read of another fire made of charcoal. You remember the scene: A servant girl says to Peter, "I've seen you before, you're one of the followers of that guy that they're putting on trial." "No, no," Peter says. "That's not me." "No,"

the person presses. "I know you are who I think you are. You have right accent for it." "I said I don't know him!" Peter yells. "No, I know it's you. I've seen you before." "I don't know him!" Peter yells again. In fact, the text says he swears to prove his "innocence."

When Peter inhaled the charcoal smoke, the memories—and all the shame must have come rushing back. But what doesn't happen next is as important as what does. What doesn't happen is that Jesus doesn't bring up Peter's three denials in the courtyard. He doesn't say, "I told you so. You are a failure, and a disappointment to me." No! He does something else entirely.

How many times did Peter deny Jesus? Three. And how many times does Jesus ask Peter, "Do you love me?" Three! Peter later writes these words: "***Above all, love each other deeply, for love covers over a multitude of sins.***"

Do you see what Jesus is doing? In the most direct-yet-tender way, he lets Peter make a three-fold affirmation to cover over the three-fold denial. Jesus lovingly confronts Peter. He wants to do the same for you. ***Jesus will keep coming to you and asking you those hard questions, questions that need to be answered, not because he wants to hurt you, but because he loves you and wants to heal you.***

I. **Do I Love Jesus?**

Think about it for a minute. Have we ever asked ourselves that question? Have we asked ourselves recently? Do I love Jesus? I go to church every Sunday, I listen to sermons, I sing songs, I serve in a ministry, I give 10% of my money...but do I LOVE Jesus?

ILLUSTRATION: In the movie, Fiddler on the Roof, the Jewish father Tevye has five daughters and the oldest three get married during the movie. Instead of arranged marriages like his they were marrying for 'love'. So, he asks his wife of 25 years, Golda, 'Do you love me?'

(Tevye) **"Golde, I have decided to give Perchik permission to become engaged to our daughter, Hodel."**

(Golde) "What??? He's poor! He has nothing, absolutely nothing!"

(Tevye) "He's a good man, Golde. I like him. And what's more important, Hodel likes him. Hodel loves him. So what can we do? It's a new world... A new world. Golde..." **Do you love me?**

(Golde) Do I what?

(Tevye) **Do you love me?**

(Golde) Do I love you?

With our daughters getting married
And this trouble in the town
You're upset, you're worn out
Go inside, go lie down!
Maybe it's indigestion

(Tevye) **"Golde I'm asking you a question..." Do you love me?**

(Golde) You're a fool

(Tevye) **"I know..." But do you love me?**

(Golde) Do I love you? For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes. Cooked your meals, cleaned your house. Given you children, milked the cow. After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?

(Tevye) **Golde, the first time I met you was on our wedding day. I was scared**

(Golde) I was shy

(Tevye) **I was nervous**

(Golde) So was I

(Tevye) **But my father and my mother said we'd learn to love each other
And now I'm asking, Golde do you love me?**

(Golde) I'm your wife

(Tevye) "I know..." But do you love me?

(Golde) Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him, fought him, starved with him. Twenty-five years my bed is his, if that's not love, what is?

(Tevye) Then you love me?

(Golde) I suppose I do

(Tevye) And I suppose I love you too

Hear God asking you today, "Do you love me?"

It's interesting what Jesus didn't say to Peter. He could have said, "I counted on you. Out of all the disciples, you said you'd stand by me. But all of that is gone." It's also interesting to me that Jesus uses Peter's old name. Remember, Jesus had renamed him, Peter, which meant "rock." Now he's calling Peter by his given name, Simon, as if to emphasize his old way of life.

Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" Boy, that's wide open. What's he talking about? More than these fishing boats, his fish? More than the other disciples? I don't know the answer to that.

"Yes, Lord," Peter said, "you know truly that I love you."

Jesus said, "**Feed my lambs.**"

Verse 16: "Again Jesus said, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?' " He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "**Take care of my sheep.**"

Verse 17: A third time. That's Peter's favorite number. Remember the three denials. The third time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt, because Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?"

He said, "Lord, you know all things, and you intimately know that I love you."

Jesus said, "**Feed my sheep.** I tell you the truth. When you were younger, you dressed yourself, went where you wanted; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands."

Verse 19 is an editorial comment written by John after the fact: "**Now He said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And after saying this, He said to him, "Follow Me [walk the same path of life that I have walked]!"**

This is the eighteenth scene, the eighteenth cameo, the eighteenth Kodak moment between Jesus and Peter. It's all about coming back from failure. Can he? Can you? The blessed answer to this text is yes.

II. **If We Love Christ, we will Care about what He Cares about.**

In verses 15-17, Jesus engages the conversation this way: "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?" You'll notice Simon answers, "I love you."

Jesus says: Peter, do you **agape me [love me with total commitment and devotion]?**"

Peter replies: Yes, Lord, you know that I **phileo** you. **[love you with a deep, personal affection, as for a close friend].**"

Phileo is the word for brotherly love. I've heard it said that in this story, Jesus is trying to ratchet up Peter's level of commitment. But that theory falls apart with the third question that Jesus asks. Jesus now says: Peter, do you **phileo** me?

It is just like Jesus to lower the bar of commitment, right? **Wrong!** I've never known Jesus to lower the bar of commitment. Interestingly, **phileo and agape** are sometimes used interchangeably.

To be fair to Peter, he may be saying: Lord, we've been together for three years. We are bonded. You are like a brother to me. This goes deep with me, Lord.

Three different times, so we don't miss the point, Jesus is saying: If you love me, you will care about what I care about. That's how I'll know. Feed my lambs. I will

know that you love me when you care about people. When you care about what I care about, then I will know.

When Christ came, he didn't spend most of his time with religious folks. In fact, he had strong words about their hypocrisy, how their structures and rules oppressed people, and how they totally missed the point of caring for people. Instead, Jesus spent most of his time with the marginalized, the poor, the oppressed, and the disadvantaged.

We equate love for God as having strong feelings toward God or feeling strongly about God. Jesus defines love in terms of obedience.

If you come back from failure, you'll have to re-engage your love for God.

Jesus responds to him each time, ***“Feed my sheep,” “Tend my lambs,” “Take care of my people.”*** Feeding folks is part of what it means to come back from failure. Sin is always communal. Sin is never an isolated thing.

If sin and failure are communal, guess what? Restoration from failure is also communal. I don't find it odd that Jesus would say to him, “If you really love me, then you'll have to do something with other people.”

Do you love me more than these? Do you love me more than your life as a commercial fisherman? Do you love me more than you love other disciples? Do you love me more than they claim to love me? Jesus is probing Peter's heart, forcing him to think about and examine his own motives.

Three times Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” emphasizing and connecting to Peter's threefold denial of Jesus. Peter was hurt because of that. Despite all his failures, Peter says, “I love you, you of all people, know that I love you.”

In Peter's response, he's really asking, “Jesus, can you still use me?” In his mind he blew it. He's failed. What's left for him is a life of fishing.

Failure is a painfully powerful word. But could I put a more powerful word in front of you? It is the word forgiveness.

**Leslie Weatherhead, in the book Psychology, Religion and Healing, says this:
"The most therapeutic idea in the world is the forgiveness of sins."**

Like Peter, many of us live with a lingering wound that has left us hesitant about coming to church, engaging in ministry, and unsure if Jesus really loves us. **This story teaches us the resurrection of Jesus forgives our past and restores our future.**

III. **If we Love Christ, we will stay on Mission.**

"Jesus said 'Feed my lambs.'" Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Each time Peter answered in the affirmative. And each time Peter said yes, Jesus said some variation of this phrase. Jesus wanted Peter's love for Jesus to be expressed in his care for, and service to, Jesus other followers - in other words, the church. And Peter did feed Jesus' sheep.

I Peter 5:1-4 "And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. (Feed my sheep) Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly-not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. (Do you love me?)...And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor."

You've heard about the Last Supper; this is the last breakfast, and it's almost as important. I think Jesus is making this point: You thought you had to go off mission to care for your needs. But I carry the privilege of your provision.

The next time you think about going off mission, the next time you think about compromising your integrity, the next time you think about doing your own thing, please remember that you'll always end up with an empty net. **Jesus will provide for you. That's** the point he is making.

Once again, love is the key. Love precedes service. We've already talked about service as one of the fundamentals Jesus is calling us to, is challenging us to. But we can't get ahead of ourselves. Love comes first. Love motivates service. Love takes us out of the realm of 'I have to' and into the realm of 'I get to.' What else but love would motivate a man or woman to pay the price that's required to love God's people.

CONCLUSION: The good news about the life of Peter is it demonstrates that **failure is never fatal or final**. Far from being the end, failure can be the raw material for a whole new way of living. That's only because **Jesus' resurrection turns our failure into our greatest reason for joy**. The resurrected Jesus wants to feed you today. He's the Bread of Life and He's the Living Water.

A major question hangs over this scene: What will Jesus do with Peter now? Jesus gives Peter two powerful words he's heard before: "**Follow me.**" With these words, Jesus invites Peter to have a fresh start and a new life. He restores Peter's past littered with broken promises and failed devotion. These two words announce grace to Peter. Peter, who failed, is not a failure. His past is in the past because of the resurrected Jesus.

For those of you who are not yet followers of Jesus, the Resurrection is an invitation to follow him personally. John 3:16 says, "**For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**"

God the Father loved you so much that he sent his one and only Son to die in our place and for our sins. Love sent Jesus to the Cross. Love, not nails, held Jesus on the Cross. Love brought Jesus out of the grave. Love gives us new life now. Love wins because love has a name, Jesus.

For those of us who are new Christians, Peter's story is a powerful reminder that we often fail. We fall short. But, because of the Resurrection, we have the power to get back up and continue to follow him. Like Peter, Jesus continues to invite us to follow him. The church is not a gathering of perfect people doing great things. The church is a gathering of forgiven sinners, who out of their love for Jesus, serve him and follow him.

For those of us who have been Christians for a long time, do you still love Jesus the way you first loved him? Are you still excited about your relationship with him? Do you still have a deep passion for following him? If so, then like Peter, Jesus challenges us to feed and take care of the sheep.

Isn't it great that Jesus can use failures? If he waited for only perfect people to get

involved, he'd still be doing it all himself. Jesus asks, "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Then follow me."

If we love Christ, we will care about what he cares about.

If we love Christ, we will stay on mission.