

PART 6 — ON THE WESTERN BANKS OF
THE SEA OF GALILEE

THE SHORE

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Sea of Galilee

Most of Jesus' ministry took place around this sea in northern Israel, called Lake Tiberias by the Romans.



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Sea of Galilee

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to hundreds of people throughout this region over the course of 40 days.



ANCHOR TEXT: Please read John 21:1-19 as you begin this lesson.

THE SEA OF GALILEE

Many of us have come to love Simon Peter. We often see his passionate faith exploding off the pages of the Bible, like when he stepped out onto the surface of the **Sea of Galilee** with Jesus (Matthew 14:29), or at **Caesarea Philippi** when he boldly declared, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (16:16).

While Peter was passionate, he didn’t always stop to think about the consequences to his actions. Sometimes, after his more spirited moments, Peter didn’t follow through. Although he had the boldness to step onto the water with Christ, in his fear he began to sink (Matthew 14:30). Just after he announced Jesus’ identity as the Christ, Peter rebuked Jesus when Christ revealed His sacrificial death was approaching: “Never, Lord!... This shall never happen to you!” (16:22). In turn, Peter himself needed to be rebuked (16:23).

By the time the disciples shared their final Passover meal with Jesus in **Jerusalem**, it had been some time since Christ told them that He would lay down His life. But there at the meal, Jesus revealed something else, something that shook them: “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me” (Matthew 26:20).

In the shock of that moment, the disciples began to look around the table. Who could possibly betray Jesus, their Rabbi, the One they had followed every day for the past three years? In that moment, Peter’s heart overflowed with another passionate outburst: “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (Mark 14:31).

But surely enough, as Peter waited outside the high priest’s mansion where Jesus was put on trial that same night, Peter did the unthinkable (Matthew 26:57). As the high priest’s officials pressed in on Peter, he denied that he even knew Jesus—three times (26:72). Suddenly realizing what came out of his mouth, Peter was filled with remorse, and “he went outside and wept bitterly” (26:75).

After the world-shaking events that followed—Jesus’ death on the cross and His miraculous resurrection—it seemed like the perfect redeeming moment for Peter. Just as he made his bold declaration of Jesus in Caesarea Philippi, it was time for Peter to declare Jesus’ victory in Jerusalem. Sin and death were defeated; forgiveness and new life were available in Christ!

But Peter didn’t stay in Jerusalem. He and several of the other disciples made the 80-

mile trek back home to **Capernaum** on the Sea of Galilee. They decided to go fishing on the sea, but after trying all night, they caught nothing (John 21:3).

What was Peter doing out on the boat with his nets? The last time we saw him here, Jesus was calling Peter away from his fishing business to “fish for people” by making disciples (Luke 5:10). Peter’s old life was over—so, why did he come back?

Maybe Peter was still ashamed. Maybe he was convinced he’d blown his chance to serve his Rabbi and Lord. He still had faith in Jesus, but maybe he wondered if Jesus had any faith left in him. Now, even the nets were empty. Maybe Peter thought he had let Jesus down, and now he couldn’t even go back to his old way of life.

**WE SOMETIMES GET STUCK
AND WONDER IF WE’VE BLOWN
OUR CHANCE AT HOPE AND
REDEMPTION.**

One way or another, we’ve all found ourselves in that boat of shame. Because of the things we’ve done, or the things we’ve failed to do, or even because of the things that have been done to us, we sometimes get stuck and wonder if we’ve blown our chance at hope and redemption. *Maybe a new life in Christ is possible for someone else, we think, but it’s too late for me.*

However, there’s more to Peter’s story, and to our own.



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Leaving the Boat**

In Jesus’ day, the Galilean fishing industry was thriving. Fishermen could have a safe, comfortable life here—a privilege that was hard to leave behind.

**“THEN JESUS SAID TO SIMON, ‘DON’T BE
AFRAID; FROM NOW ON YOU WILL FISH
FOR PEOPLE.’ SO THEY PULLED THEIR
BOATS UP ON SHORE, LEFT EVERYTHING
AND FOLLOWED HIM.”**

MATTHEW 5:10-11

Early that morning, as the disciples were ready to give up on their catch, Jesus approached on the shore (John 21:4). “Friends,” He called out to them, “haven’t you any fish?” (21:5) At that distance, they didn’t recognize Him. “No,” they responded in discouragement. “Throw your net on the right side of the boat,” Jesus told them (21:6). Desperate, and maybe a little annoyed, they gave it a try. After all, what else were they going to do? Miraculously, the net was filled with fish, and they instantly realized it was Jesus (21:6-7).

Peter knew what he needed in that moment: a face-to-face encounter with Christ. Before they could even get their boat ashore, he leapt into the sea—but not before throwing on his cloak (John 21:7).

In Galilee, fishermen often wore layers because it could get cool and windy on the sea, especially overnight. But when they had to do the hard work of pulling in their nets, they would strip down to their work clothes for greater mobility. In his excitement, Peter wanted to reach Jesus as soon as possible. But he wasn’t going to approach his Lord wearing the work clothes of his old life. Peter put on the cloak of a disciple and swam out to Christ, ready to give anything for a second chance.

Jesus had a fire started and a meal prepared for the disciples when they met Him on the shore (John 21:9). Surely Peter must have thought back to the last meal he shared with Christ, when he so confidently announced that he would never leave Jesus’ side (Matthew 26:33). As he breathed in the smell of the charcoal fire, Peter must have remembered that dreadful night when he denied Jesus three



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Peter Meant Business

People in Galilee could use small castnets to fish in the shallows among the reeds. But those who were fishermen by trade would get in boats to use larger trammel nets for a more serious catch.

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**JESUS WASN'T DONE WITH
PETER, AND HE'S NOT DONE
WITH YOU.**

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times by the fireside. These are the only two instances in all the Bible that specifically refer to this kind of charcoal fire (John 18:18; 21:9).

With these vivid reminders, Peter may have wondered how this face-to-face moment with Jesus was going to play out. Would Christ criticize him for his broken promise? Chastise him for his lack of faith? Condemn him for his sin?

No. Beside the fire, Jesus asked Peter the same question three times: “Simon son of John, do you love me?” (John 21:16)

When Jesus repeated His question for the third time, Peter was hurt (John 21:17). Three questions for three denials. Peter may have assumed that Christ was punishing him after all. “Lord,” Peter responded, “you know all things; you know that I love you” (21:17). Christ looked with compassion into the eyes of His wayward disciple. “Feed my sheep,” He said.

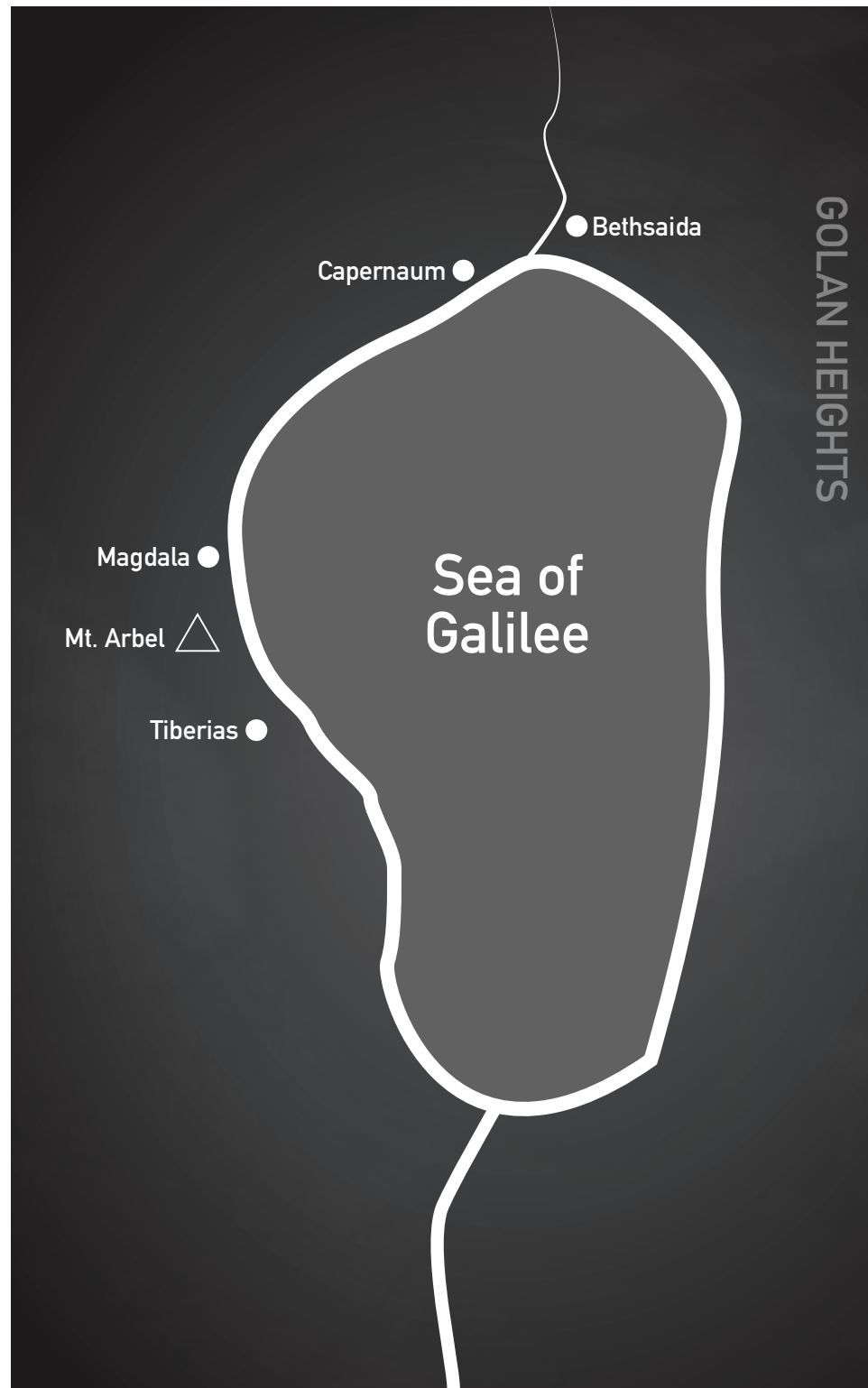
Jesus did not punish or belittle Peter. Christ reinstated him. Instead of holding Peter’s sin against him, He had borne it all on the cross and suffered its judgment and condemnation in His disciple’s place. All Peter’s sin—even his denials—was washed away by

Jesus’ blood. Now, Christ was inviting Peter to repentance and renewing him for ministry. He wasn’t done with Peter; His plans for this Galilean fisherman were only beginning to unfold.

Decades later, Peter would write these words of encouragement to struggling Christians (1 Peter 2:24-25): “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep gone astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

**BY HIS WOUNDS YOU HAVE
BEEN HEALED.**

Jesus wasn’t done with Peter, and He’s not done with us. Like us, Peter’s faith and his devotion were unstable. Unlike us, Jesus’ faithfulness is unfailing. He meets us in our sin, graciously restores our faith with forgiveness, and sends us out to tell others of His great love.



? DIVE DEEPER

- ¹ In Luke 5:1-11, Jesus called Peter out of the boat and said, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” Why did Peter return to the boat in John 21? What did his actions reveal about what he believed about Jesus?
- ² What are the places and rhythms of your past that you tend to run back to when you feel ashamed?
- ³ When Jesus offered Peter a meal beside the charcoal fire, He entered the place

of Peter’s shame and met His guilt with grace. What do you do when you’ve dropped the ball? Where do you turn to experience God’s forgiveness and grace?

- ⁴ What would it look like for you to have a face-to-face encounter with Jesus today?
- ⁵ Jesus wasn’t done with Peter, and He’s not done with you. What is Jesus calling you back into? How does Jesus’ relentless pursuit of you influence your future?

🕒 EXTRA INFO

The Sea of Galilee has many names in the Bible. In the Old Testament, its Hebrew name is the Sea of Kinnereth (Numbers 23:11). “Kinnereth” comes from the Hebrew word meaning “harp,” and the sea may have borne this name because its shoreline has a harp shape. The Romans also called it the Sea of Tiberias, named after the town of Tiberias on its southwestern shore (John 6:1). Some called it the Lake of Gennesaret, after the fertile area on its northwestern shore (Luke 5:1).

A general timeline of Simon Peter’s life (dates approximate):

- AD 30** – Simon leaves his career as a fisherman to follow Jesus.
- AD 30-33** – Simon becomes one of Jesus’ 12 disciples and follows him closely as He ministers in Galilee and Judea. During this time, Jesus gives Simon the name Peter.
- AD 33** – Jesus is crucified, rises from the dead, and ascends into Heaven.
- AD 33** – Peter preaches at Pentecost and 3,000 people profess faith in Christ and are baptized.
- AD 33-63** – Peter is a leader in the Jerusalem church and takes several missionary trips to other churches in the Mediterranean.
- AD 41-44** – Peter is imprisoned for preaching about Jesus.
- AD 63** – From the city of Rome, Peter writes 1 Peter to Roman provinces throughout the empire.
- AD 64-67** – From a prison in the city of Rome, Peter writes the book of 2 Peter. As indicated by Jesus’ words in John 21:18-19, and according to early church tradition, Peter is crucified in Rome for his faith in Jesus.

When Jesus first called Peter, He invited him to become a fisher of men (Luke 5:10). Later, when Christ reinstates Peter after his three denials, Jesus calls him to be a shepherd (John 21:16,17). Later in his life, as a leader in the early church, Peter passes on this calling, encouraging other pastors to “Be shepherds of God’s flock” (1 Peter 5:2).