

Lovest Thou Me  
John 21:15-25

INTRO: Just before the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter denied that he knew Him! Three times Peter denied Him (18:17, 25, 27); and now in the verses before us, Peter affirms His love for the Lord three times (21:15-17).

It was at a charcoal fire that Peter denied the Lord Jesus (18:18). Now at another charcoal fire (21:9), Peter confesses his love for the Lord Jesus his Master.

Was it coincidence that the Lord Jesus, by a charcoal fire, asked Peter three times the question: “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” No.

The circumstances recorded in John 21:15-17 reminded Peter of the night he denied his Lord. This reminder would be used by our Lord Jesus to create within Peter a spirit of true humility for service. How very merciful our Lord is in forgiveness. He gives Simon three opportunities to declare his love for the risen Savior. This night, with its lesson in forgiveness, would ignite within Simon Peter a fire that would burn for the rest of his life.

I. VSS 15-17, THE TRIPLE QUESTION, REPLY AND COMMISSION

A. Vs 15, After breakfast, Jesus says to Peter, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me.”

1. Notice that Jesus calls Peter by the name he had before he was saved.
  - a. On the night that Peter betrayed Jesus, Peter had used language that a Christian shouldn't use; not only that, he had lied, denying that he even knew the Lord.
  - b. Peter's actions that night exhibited his old nature, so Jesus called him by his old name; and that really hurt Old Peter. It stabbed his inner being.
    - 1- When Jesus first met Peter, he changed his name from Simon to Cephas, meaning stone.
    - 2- The Lord now goes back to Peter's old name.
    - 3- Jesus did not try to justify or minimize the seriousness of Peter's sin.
    - 4- By using Peter's old name, Simon, Jesus points to the source of Peter's sin– the old depraved nature.
    - 5- A guilty conscience is not healed by justifying and minimizing sin. The source of our sin is not the environment; it is our sinful old nature.

2. “Lovest thou me more than these?” There are three Greek words that are translated into the English word love. The English language is a beggar for words. The three Greek words for love are *eros*, a word for sensuality. It is never used in the Bible. The second word is *phileo* meaning friendship. It is a word that has to do with affections and emotions toward our fellow man. We get our words philanthropy and philadelphia from the Greek word *phileo*. The other word for love is *agapao* or agape. This is the highest and noblest word for love. It is a word of dignity. It is a divine word used to speak of the love of God (Jn 3:16).
  - a. When Jesus spoke to Peter, He passed over the words *eros* and *phileo* and used the word *agapao*.
  - b. “Simon Peter, do you love me with all of your heart?”
3. “More than these?” We cannot be sure who or what these are. Some say that the Lord is referring to the other disciples because Peter had once said that he would not deny the Lord even if all the others did (Mt 26:33, 35).
  - a. “Do you love me more than these fish, this boat, this equipment, this business. Enough to give up your career and a steady job so that you can give yourself to the ministry?
    - 1- Peter had gone back into the fishing business and had influenced others to join him.
    - 2- If Peter had wanted to get back into commercial fishing for good, he had plenty of fish to start with.
  - b. Do you love the Lord more than these? More than:
    - 1- Music,
    - 2- Clothes, boats, car
    - 3- Job
    - 4- Money
    - 5- Family.
4. “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.”
  - a. Simon Peter did not use the word *agapao*. He used the word *phileo*. He says: “You know I have an affection for you.”
  - b. Peter is not going to brag about his love for the Lord. He just can’t use the word *agapao*; he feels too unworthy.

5. Jesus said to Peter: "Feed my lambs."
  - a. The word for lambs is the Greek *arnion* meaning "little baby lambs."
  - b. Simon, feed the little immature lambs who need special tender loving care. Peter has a task to fulfill, that of loving others. This is how we prove we are true disciples.
  - c. The preacher can't always be deep because he has little lambs who need the milk of the word.
- B. Vs 16, The second question differs from the first. The Lord leaves off "more than these" this time.
  1. Simon no longer compares himself with the other disciples to say he's better than them.
  2. Peter gives the same answer as he did before. He does not dare to rise higher. He is afraid to make such a gesture.
  3. "Feed my sheep." The word for "feed" here is the Greek word *poimaino* meaning to "shepherd the sheep." The pastor is the under shepherd who is to lead the flock, to guide them, to oversee the work (Heb 13:7, 17).
- C. Vs 17, In this verse, Jesus does not use the word *agapao* for love when he asks Peter, "... lovest thou me." He uses the word *phileo*. He does not ask Peter if he has the highest kind of love for Him. He asks if Peter has an affection for Him. Does he even have brotherly love for Him. Jesus questions Peter's affection.
  1. Peter is grieved that the Lord would even question his affection for Him.
  2. Three times Peter denied the Lord. Now three times he is questioned about his love for the Lord.
  3. "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love [*phileo*] thee."
    - a. Peter is a man aware of his weakness. He knows his limitations, and he is afraid to boast (Prov 11:2; 16:18; 29:23).
    - b. Peter will not brag because he knows that Jesus knows his heart.
  4. "Feed my sheep." The word for feed is the Greek word *bosko*.
    - a. The sheep need to be led. Yes, but they must also be fed. The words that Peter wrote to the Elders in I Peter 5:2-3 show us that the lesson that Jesus was

teaching Peter by the seashore had taken root, and now he teaches it to others.

b. The under shepherd is to lead and feed the flock.

## II. VSS 18-19, PETER'S MARTYRDOM PREDICTED

A. Vs 18, The word translated "young" is the Greek word *neoteros* meaning "younger."

1. Peter was a middle-aged man at the time of Jesus' words to him. By the time John wrote the Gospel of John, Peter was dead.
2. Peter's uninhibited conduct would one day end. His freedom of movement would no longer be enjoyed.
3. The day was coming when Peter would have his hands stretched out, and he would be hung on a cross. "To stretch out the hands" is often an expression used by Greek authors and by early church fathers to indicate crucifixion.

B. Vs 19, The manner of Peter's death was crucifixion.

1. Eusebius: "But Peter seems to have preached in Pontus and Galatia and Bithynis and Cappadocia and Asia, to the Jews of the Dispersion, and at last, having come to Rome, he was crucified head downward, for so he himself had asked to suffer" (Hendriksen 490).
2. Tertulian: "At Rome Nero was the first who strained with blood this rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another when he is made fast to the cross" (Hendriksen 490).
3. "Follow me." Follow me in service, in suffering, and in death. This is a call to discipleship.

C. Ivor Powell says that through this question, "Simon Peter received three things: 1) Pardon for his soul. The Master had not cast him off. 2) Peace for his mind. Christ still trusted him. 3) Power for his service. The protection of the sheep necessitated the continuing interest of the Good Shepherd" (439).

## III. VSS 20-23, PETER'S INQUIRY ABOUT JOHN'S FUTURE

A. Vss 20-21, Peter knows that he does not have the blessed hope of rapture to look forward to but what about John? That's his question.

B. Vs 22, If John was alive when the rapture came, that was none of Peter's business. Peter would have plenty to do without prying into John's future.

- C. Vs 23, What Jesus said about this incident caused a rumor to start.
  - 1. This rumor persisted for years. John's great old age kept it going.
  - 2. Even after John's death and burial at Ephesus, there were those who claimed that John was alive in his tomb.

#### IV. VSS 24-25 JOHN'S TESTIMONY

- A. Vs 24, His testimony was credible because he had been with Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry. John could preach the Gospel because it was very real to Him.
- B. Vs 25, The story of Jesus is an inexhaustible one. It is the story of God come in the flesh, dying on the cross and rising again from the dead.

CONCLUSION: Do you know Jesus? Do you love Him? Jesus must be Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all.

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