

"Do You Love Me"
(John 21:15-19)
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¹⁵When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

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

¹⁷The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." ¹⁸Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Before we get into this passage, let me share with you some important background information.

A few chapters earlier in John 18:15-27, we read the account of Peter's denial of Jesus. Early hours of Friday morning, the day Jesus died, Peter and many others were around a warm fire in the courtyard of a high priest. He was asked, "*You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?*" Three times this question was asked and three times, Peter answered, "I am not". On the third denial, a rooster crowed just as was predicted the night before by Jesus in John 13:38,

Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!"

Now let's look at chapter 13. It is Thursday night, while eating their last dinner together, Jesus, knowing his death was before him, thought not of himself but his beloved disciples and washed their feet as an act of love for them, **a kind of love that relinquishes all self, all pride to serve the other**. Jesus did not pick and choose who he would wash but washed all their feet, including Judas, his betrayer, Peter, his denier and the rest of the disciples who would scatter, as it says in John 16:32,

"A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone."

Right after Judas left the group to betray Jesus, He shared with the rest in 13:33,

“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come....”

And in verse 36,

“Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”

To this, Peter said in verse 37, *“And why can’t I follow? I will lay down my life for you.”*

Jesus was talking about the death he must face to take away the sins of the world, a cruel and painful death that would leave him completely alone, abandoned and separated even from the Father. But Peter did not understand at this point the kind of going away Jesus was talking about. What he knew was that he couldn’t follow Jesus.

In his question of “why can’t I follow?” was a question of “why are you preventing me? I want to go with you!” **It’s as though he was saying, “does Jesus know my heart?”**

Peter wanted to make sure that Jesus knew this and so he said, “I will follow you wherever you go and if it requires my death, I will offer it!”

No doubt, no hesitation, no pause. Over flowing confidence, remarkable devotion, undying loyalty....quite a declaration!

However in verse 38,

Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!”

Something is amiss here. Do you see it? How is it that Jesus spoke of denial and Peter spoke of self-sacrifice? How is it that Jesus’ assessment of Peter is so far off from Peter’s own self-assessment?

In Matthew’s account of Peter’s denial, in chapter 26, we see that Jesus’ words left very little impact on Peter. In this chapter, Peter said,

³³*“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”*

³⁵*“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.*

Soon after, we find them in Gethsemane. The contrast between Jesus’ sorrow and trouble as he prayed, *“may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will”* in vs 39, 42 and 44 and Peter’ sleep and rest in spite of Jesus’ caution in verse 41, *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”*, is quite astonishing.

No concern, no worries, no reflection, no consideration of Jesus’ prediction. Sleep, sleep, sleep.

Peter did not consider or heed Jesus' warning. He did not listen to Jesus because Peter truly and sincerely believed in his own words. How pride veils the sinfulness of our hearts!

And we know that Jesus' prediction came to be. Peter said, "*I am not*", "*I am not*", "*I am not*". And then the rooster crowed.

Peter felt the shame of his denial. In Matt 26:75, it says,

And he went outside and wept bitterly.

And it was this denial that necessitated the conversation between Jesus and Peter in chapter 21. **Three denials by Peter. Three questions of love from Jesus.**

However, it was not a confession time for Peter about how he denied Jesus but about his reinstatement into public ministry.

According to Luke 24:34, Peter had a private time with the risen Christ,

"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon."

and confirmed by Paul in 1 Cor 15:4-5,

... that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

Perhaps it was during this meeting with Jesus that Peter had a time of confession, received forgiveness and reconciliation and reaffirmed his faith and love as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

It's important to note that the reinstatement was done in the presence of the other disciples after dinner. DA Carson wrote,

"Peter had boasted of his reliability in the presence of his fellow disciples, so this restoration to public ministry is effected in a similarly public environment."

Now that you have the background information, let's dive right into our passage.

As Jesus was restoring Peter's authority and responsibility into public ministry, Jesus shared with him again what it meant to follow Him. Jesus said in verse 19,

Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Peter missed it the first time, three years of being with Christ, so it deserved a repeating.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as much as Peter needed to hear from Jesus, we need to hear our Lord's words again and again to remind us the **kind of following He desires from His disciples.**

We don't decide how we will follow. We don't decide how often we will follow. We don't decide when we will follow. **We follow as Christ commands because we are His disciples, saved, redeemed, forgiven and reconciled. We were once enemies of God but now we are called sons and daughters of God.**

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to follow with:

- Love
- Humility
- Obedience

First, we follow Christ with love.

In verse 15, Jesus started his conversation with a question, in fact a stinging question, a question that pierced Peter's heart.

Jesus asked, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

In other words, Jesus was asking, "**Peter, do you love me more than these other disciples do?**"

Jesus identified the very sin that had crippled his discipleship.

It was not that Peter was insincere in his pledge to lay his life for Jesus if it came to it; nor was it Peter's overzealous and impulsive personality but it **was his unchecked heart of pride that deceived him to believe in his own heart-felt declaration in John 13:37,**

"I will lay down my life for you!"

This is why Jesus' assessment and Peter's assessment was so off. Jesus revealed to Peter his heart of pride.

As a disciple of Jesus, he was given opportunities to partake in things that the other disciples as a whole did not.

- Peter's first encounter with Jesus in John 1:42
Jesus looked at him and said, "*You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas*" (which, when translated, is Peter).

And the names, Cephas and Peter, when translated means "rock". Name changes were significant. Jesus called him "the Rock".

- In addition, Peter walked on water with the Lord in Matthew 14:29.
- He declared that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God in Matthew 16:16.
- He saw an incredible sight in Matthew 17:1. Jesus transfigured. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. But also, appeared Moses and Elijah.
- He also saw Jesus speak life into a dead girl in Luke 8:54.

These and other special experiences puffed up Peter to think that:

- he was better than others,
- would not fall like others,
- would not disappoint Jesus like others,
- but rather had a deeper love for Jesus than others,
- had more of a special connection with Jesus than others,
- had a truer faith than others,
- knew more than others....so I don't need to listen to Jesus as much as others....

Jesus said, "you cannot follow me now, but you will follow later" and Peter replied, "Lord, why can't I follow you? I will lay down my life for you."

This is pride. Peter over-estimated himself, considered himself above other people, including Jesus.

C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* about pride...

Pride is essentially competitive. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking, there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.

To ensure that you are on the winning side of the competition, pride grows:

- A certain level of contempt for others. Oswald Sander wrote in *Spiritual Maturity*, **"It relegates every other mortal to minor role in life. It uses other people as a backdrop to display its own brilliance. He pours contempt on others whom he esteems less worthy than himself."**
- An over-confidence in himself as he relies more and more on himself. He manipulates people, situations to garner praise, compliments and admiration.
- An independence from God. CS Lewis said, **"A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."**

Peter deceived himself to believe that he loved Jesus because he said it, he showed it **but his heart was still full of himself and his need to be more than others.** He considered himself above others. That is why he was so confident, so boastful, so quick to respond.

Pride deceives us again and again because we want to be deceived. **Pride makes us feel good about ourselves in spite** of the fact that we hurt, manipulate, use, judge people, and put people down.

It is an inward, willful and often a reflex calculation to secure that we soar, that we are more superior, that we look better, and that we receive more flattery and praise.

Oswald Sanders gives a list of questions to bring the subtlety of pride into the forefront of our hearts.

- **How do you react when another is honored and you are ignored? When another outshines you? Does it stimulate jealousy and ill will, or can you really rejoice in another's advancement or greater ability?**
- **You will say all kinds of bad things about yourself, but how do you feel when others say these same things of you?**
- **What is your reaction to criticism? Do you immediately justify yourself? Does it arouse hostility and resentment? Do you immediately begin to criticize your critic?**

Jesus asked Peter, do you love me?

Jesus modelled love to Peter in John 13 when Jesus washed the feet of all the disciples. Jesus showed that there ***was no room for pride when you love. When you love, you will sacrifice your need to be right, your need to win, your need for comfort and ease, your need for personal preferences, your need for recognition.***

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you love Jesus more than the pride in your heart?

- More than your desire to be right?
- More than your desire for comfort and ease?
- More than your need for recognition and acknowledgements?

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, we are to follow with love for Christ.

Second, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we follow with humility.

Peter's response to Jesus' question of, "do you love me more than these disciples do?" was *"yes, Lord, you know I love you."*

The proud and arrogant Peter is no longer present. When the rooster crowed after his third denial led him to a deep remorse and before the risen Christ, he confessed his sins and received forgiveness and reconciliation. **Having received such amazing grace, Peter humbled himself.**

In John 13:37, he questioned whether Jesus knew his heart and ***now he realized how much Jesus knew His proud heart yet still loved him and died for him.***

Brothers and sisters, have you realized this truth? Jesus knew how wicked and sinful you were and knew that you will continue to struggle with sin yet He still loved you and died for you.

Peter didn't look to his own understanding, knowledge or experience to answer the question and really, how he could he after his bitter failure!!

- There was nothing within him to rely on.
- He had no confidence in himself.
- He has no reason to boast.

But, Peter relied on Jesus' knowledge of who he is, he relied on Jesus's forgiveness, and said simply and trustingly "*you know that I love you.*"

In Ps 51:17 says,

"My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

The third time Jesus asked, "Do you love me?" Peter was hurt, deeply grieved. Peter thought he had already proven to Jesus that he loved him so why a third time? **How quickly his pride emerged!** We are so like Peter...we don't want our sins brought up again and again. We don't want to be reminded and feel the shame again.

And so, the realization that pride was not too far from him, He leaned on Christ and said, "*you know all things, you know I love you!*"

Just as Peter realized how quickly pride rears its ugly head, we need to be on guard against pride and destroy it at its first sight. **Don't delay. Don't hesitate.** Come before the Lord and repent and lean again on Christ as Peter did, again recalling Jesus' sacrifice, Jesus' resurrection, Jesus' glory.

How incredibly loving, patient and forgiving our Christ is....Bruce Milne wrote,

"As Peter discovered, no matter how desperate our failure, or how deep-seated our shame, he can forgive and renew us. Failure is never final with God."

For this reason, we can humbly follow Christ.

Humility grows in all the disciples of Jesus Christ as we recognize our own sin.

D.A. Carson explains,

The more we recognize the depth of our own sin, the more we recognize the love of the Saviour; the more we appreciate the love of the Saviour, the higher his standard of love appears; the higher his standard of love appears, the more we recognize in our selfishness, our innate self-centredness, the depth of our own sin.

- Humility allows us to see who we really are in the light of Jesus Christ. Sin veils our real self and keeps us blind to our depravity.
- Humility draws us to Christ, leans on Christ, and relies on Christ. Sin builds a thick wall of self-reliance.
- Humility opens our hearts to more growth, knowledge and wisdom in Christ. Sin closes our hearts to any spiritual appetite.
- Humility breeds love. Sin breeds more sin.
- Humility is the way of Christ. Sin is not.

Brothers and sisters, are you confessing and repenting of your sins regularly? Peter's sin of pride led him to deny Jesus.

- Any time we do not live our lives worthy of the Gospel,
- any time we live our lives in disobedience to the Word of God,
- any time we choose to do something contrary to the standards set by Christ, we are denying that He is our Lord and King.

So, are you denying Jesus in the way that you speak, act, think, spend money, do relationships, work, serve in the church, etc? **Repent and humble yourself before our Christ and lean on Him.**

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to follow with humility.

Lastly, a disciple of Jesus Christ, we follow in obedience.

Jesus' responses to Peter were feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep...these essentially they are the same command.

Peter was given the task of nurturing and caring for Jesus' beloved sheep.

- Jesus didn't say, "just watch them from afar...don't get too close to them. What if you deny me again and lead my sheep astray?"
- Jesus didn't say, "prove your worth to me. I want to see how well you know the Bible. I want to see how much you pray."
- He didn't say, "I need a guarantee from you that you will ever again sin."
- Instead, he said simply, "feed my sheep"

This is how complete Jesus' forgiveness and acceptance was and still is for His disciples.

Rita Snowden said, **"you ask me what forgiveness means; it is the wonder of being trusted again by God in the place where I disgraced him."**

So, here is Peter again to serve Jesus by ministering, feeding and taking care of Jesus' sheep. In addition to the work Peter will do, Jesus also shared in 21:18-19 that Peter will be martyred for the glory of God as he said he was willing to do in John 13:37. **He did not have the capacity of heart to do it then but a time came when he did lay down his life for Christ.**

And, we know that Peter obeyed Jesus' command to care for His sheep when we read the book Acts. Peter's leadership role comes very early on. In 1:15,

"In those days, Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about 120)."

After the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, it is Peter who addressed a huge crowd and at the end of his message, 3000 people were added to their numbers (in vs 2:41). Continue to read Acts and you will see how Peter, in obedience to Jesus' command, fed and took care of Jesus' flock.

As disciples of Jesus, as we follow with love and humility thus growing our relationship with Him, **Jesus will command us to do something for His Kingdom...**it may be in the church, it may be in your family, at work, at school, in your neighborhood, among your friends, for the city, for our country, for another country, for the world....**Jesus will command and our response must be obedience.**

Jesus did not endure the death on the cross, and resurrected so that you can continue:

- to live in sin as though it's nothing or as though it's something you can eventually get to but not now,
- so that you profess faith but don't live by faith,
- so that you boast about your vast knowledge but have no love,
- so that you do lots of church things but outside the church walls, you live as the world lives in speech, in thought and in behaviour. Don't be deceived...it shows in the church as well.
- so that you can serve, go on missions, teach, worship, give to the poor, share the Gospel and rarely ever spend time with the Lord

Jesus did not come so that you can live in hypocrisy and deception. He saved you for a purpose. In Eph 2:8-10,

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Saved to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do. You don't decide what it is. You don't decide when it is. You don't decide how it will be. God chooses. God prepares. God sends. Our role is obedience and trust.

Brothers and sisters, don't be deceived to think that today doesn't matter. Today is more important than tomorrow because what we do today will make an impact on what we do tomorrow. When we delay our obedience to tomorrow...that tomorrow may not come.

So, disciples of Jesus Christ, those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ, those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, follow Christ with love, humility and obedience.

In Luke 9:23

²³ Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Let's pray.