

The Gospel of John

Do You Love Me?

John 21:15-25

INTRODUCTION:

We began our sermon series in the Gospel of John on 12/2/2018 and 127 sermons later we are finishing the series. That is over a 2 year and 9 month period. There is always the satisfaction that a sermon series is completed, but I always hate to let it go. That is because I realize that this is likely the last time that I will be going through this same passage in sermons. The time that I spent studying and preparing these sermons definitely drew me closer to God and I pray that it has had the same effect on you. So it is with a measure of sadness that we come to the end of the gospel of John. This final section is aimed directly at Peter, but the message is there for us as well. As you know, I always offer an invitation after each of my messages. John basically does the same thing in our passage this morning.

Peter has already been in the spotlight in the first half of chapter 21. If you remember, Peter was being Peter. Through impulse he had acted disobediently. He was supposed to be in a mountain waiting for the Lord, but Peter decided that he was going to abandon his call to ministry, if you will, and go back to fishing. There were reasons for that. He had denied the Lord on three separate occasions. I think he felt inadequate. I think he felt guilty. I think he felt weak. He also was a man who did not have a lot of patience. He and all of the other apostles were doubtful of their own power, their own ability, to sustain a ministry to be fishers of men. Peter knew that he had failed so many times.

As we look at this final section we are going to see what is essentially a call to faithfulness for any believer who is going to serve the Lord. This is a wonderful model of what a committed Christian looks like. Through our commitment to Christ, our Lord will bring about the spiritual service that He wants out of each of us. This is a wonderful model.

Stand and Read Scripture

John 21:15-25 (NASB)

¹⁵ Now 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.” ¹⁶ 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.” ¹⁷ He *said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was hurt 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.

¹⁸ Truly, truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to put on your belt and walk wherever you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will put your belt on you, and bring you where you do not want to go.” ¹⁹ Now

He said this, indicating by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had said this, He *said to him*, “Follow Me!”

²⁰ Peter turned around and *saw* the disciple whom Jesus loved following *them*—the one who also had leaned back on His chest at the supper and said, “Lord, who is the one who is betraying You?” ²¹ So Peter, upon seeing him, *said to Jesus*, “Lord, and what *about* this man?” ²² Jesus *said to him*, “If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me!” ²³ Therefore this account went out among the brothers, 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?”

²⁴ This is the disciple who is testifying about these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ But there are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written in detail, I expect that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

Prayer

BODY:

I. A CALL TO LOVE CHRIST.

John 21:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ Now 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.”

Jesus says to him, "**Simon, son of John**".

Now that must have gotten his attention. That was his name before he met the Lord, and the Lord had given him another name. “You used to be Simon, now you are Peter.” Peter was the Lord's name for him. But Peter had fallen so far that the Lord is using his old name, because he is acting like his old self. **This is like when you did something wrong and your mother or spouse called you by your entire name. "Robert Wayne Lowry"!**

This must have been a shock. Peter did not necessarily want to be pointed out, he would like to have blended into the group. But he is pointed out and three times the Lord asked him if he loves Him, one for each denial. For each time that he denied Him, he gets an opportunity to be restored. And here is the restoration, it is as simple as this: “**Simon, son of John, do you love Me?**” That is the question. That is always the question to ask a disobedient believer, because what is being demonstrated in any act of disobedience is an incorrect love. You are declaring love for something other than Christ, and Peter had done that.

So He says, “**Do you love Me more than these?**”

These what? These men?

No, because they had all done the same thing. They were all guilty of a loveless disobedience. He means nets, boats, and fish. Do you love Me more than these things that were a part of your former life? Are you prepared to give this up, to abandon all your

successes, and your chosen career? Are you willing to give it all up? Do you love Me enough to do that?"

And the word He uses is a form of **agape** love. That is the Greek word for a high Godly love. "Do you really love Me, Peter, at the highest level?" That is the critical question. And that is the key to commitment.

"Do you love Me enough to live for Me? Do you love Me enough to walk away from the ways of the world? Do you really love Me in the fullest sense?"

So Peter replies, "He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.'" But he changed the word. Jesus used the word form of **agape** and Peter used the word **phileó**, he dropped it down a notch. **Phileó** is a kind of brotherly love, kind of warm affection, a friendship love. It is the word that Philadelphia was named after...brotherly love.

Look, Peter couldn't say, "Yes, You know that I love You at the highest level of love." He had denied Him, and now He had disobeyed Him, and He had enough sense not to be an absolute hypocrite and say, "Of course, I love You at the highest level." So he says, "Lord, I have great affection for You." He dared not claim **agape**, but he did claim **phileó**. But even with that, he has to lean on omniscience, the "all knowing" ability of Christ: "Yes, Lord; You **know** that I love You."

Peter says, "I have a great affection for You. It is not as good as it should be, but it is real."

This is amazing. Even with a less than perfect love the Lord accepts him and says, "**Tend My lambs.**"

I want to call to your attention the personal pronoun that Jesus uses. "**Tend My lambs.**" It is very important for us to realize that anyone we shepherd does not belong to us. If you are in ministry, if you are caring for any other believers in any way, you are shepherding **His** sheep, not yours. No congregation belongs to a pastor or an elder. No Sunday School class belongs to a teacher. No believers in a family belong, in a spiritual sense, to parents. They are His. That is why in Matthew the Lord tells us to be careful how we treat each other, because not only do they belong to Christ, but Christ is in them. So many people do not understand pastoral ministry as caring for **His** sheep.

But Jesus is not done. **Verse 16:**

John 21:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ 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."

Jesus asks again with the same word form, **agape**, and Peter replied "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (**phileó**) You." And Jesus said "**Shepherd My sheep**". In other words you are to give up your fishing in the lake and shepherd **My** sheep. This is your calling."

And then in **verse 17**,

John 21:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ He *said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was hurt 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."

Jesus, once repeated for the third time, "Do you love Me?". But this time He used Peter's word. "Do you really **phileó** Me?" In other words, He is questioning even that – "Do you really have strong affection for Me? Do you really?" Peter's deeds did not even support that.

John tells us that Peter was grieved that Jesus asked him three times. He is not grieved because He said it three times; but because there were three denials. He is grieved, because the third time He says, "Do you **phileó** Me?" and even questions that love. And, again, he says, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." No more fishing! Your job is to take care of My sheep.

Back in chapter 10 He talked about how He loved the sheep, how He gave His life for the sheep, how the sheep knew Him and He knew them. And now He is handing them over to Peter. Jesus is entrusting them to him and He needs to know that Peter loves Him more than his love for his old career of fishing.

We are all like Peter. The Lord has to use those of us who have an inferior love. This is where all Christian commitment starts: "Do you love Christ more than" (fill in the blank)? Whatever it is that we are preoccupied with here on this earth, the real question is "Do you love Him more? If you do then serve Him. I can tell what you love by what you serve, what you do, what the priorities of your life are. A committed Christian is compelled, driven by love for Christ, and that shows up in his or her life.

II. A CALL TO SACRIFICE FOR CHRIST.

Secondly – and this is equally important and builds on the first – a committed believer lives a life compelled by love for Christ, and secondly, it is **characterized by sacrifice for Christ**.

And that is exactly what Peter hears in **verse 18**.

John 21:18 (NASB)

18 Truly, truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to put on your belt and walk wherever you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will put your belt on you, and bring you where you do not want to go.

"Truly, truly, I tell you,". This has been repeated many times in the gospel of John. It is saying that you do not know this yet but it is absolutely true. When you were younger, you used to clothe yourself and lived your life the way you wanted to. But when you grow old, you are going to be taken prisoner. You are going to be bound and hauled off to a place you do not want to go. Then He says – "**you will stretch out your hands**". This signifies that he will be crucified. He will die on the cross.

How do I know that? **Verse 19** says it:

John 21:19a (NASB)

19 Now He said this, indicating by what kind of death he would glorify God.

Peter finds out here he is going to be a martyr. He is going to be a crucified martyr. And you remember the story that tradition gives us, that when it came time for him to be crucified, he did not feel he was worthy to be crucified as the Lord was, so he asked to be crucified upside-down.

“So, Peter, welcome back to the ministry. Go feed My sheep, go feed My lambs, and know this, that sometime in the future when you are old, you are going to be arrested, and you are going to be crucified.”

You might stop and say, “Well that is really bad news. Why would You tell him that? Better not to know, right, let it be a surprise.” No, it is important to tell him that. **He needed to know that the next time he got in a life and death situation he would not deny his Lord.** He needed to know that when they took him and captured him, and tied him up, and stretched out his hands, and nailed him to a cross, he would glorify God.

Think about this Jesus always spoke truth. Peter now KNOWS that he is going to be faithful until death. I think he lived the rest of his life with a new found confidence that totally overcame his self-doubt. Wow! I am going to be faithful. And although I will be arrested and crucified on a cross, it will be for the glory of God. This is good news!

This is the ultimate sacrifice, and that is how believers live. This is the extreme requirement for a committed life. Peter had said, Luke 22, “**I am ready to go with you to prison and death.**” It did not work out very well the first time, but it would work out that way the last time. In the end, he will die for his Lord. Peter has to be thrilled. His boldness is being elevated as he heads toward a triumphant encounter with those who will kill him for his faithfulness to Christ. That is the end result of remaining faithful unto the end.

III. A CALL TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

Then there is a third component in our dedicated walk with Christ. We are compelled by love for Christ. It is characterized by our sacrifice for Christ. And we are **content to follow Christ.**

John 21:19b

...And when He had said this, He **said to him*, “Follow Me!”

After Jesus had spoken the words about Peter's death, He said this to him, “**Follow Me**”.

John 21:20 (NASB)

*²⁰ Peter turned around and **saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them—the one who also had leaned back on His chest at the supper and said, “Lord, who is the one who is betraying You?”**

So Jesus told Peter to “Follow Me” and what did he do? He turned around and saw John. What? This guy is beyond hope. You say you love me. And I am telling you how you are going to die and how important it is to only be concerned with the task that I lay before you **and this cannot keep your attention?** Why are you turning around?

John 21:21 (NASB)

*²¹ So Peter, upon seeing him, **said to Jesus, “Lord, and what about this man?”**

So I am going to be crucified. What about him? Peter is a project isn't he? “What about him?” **Peter!**

I love the answer that Jesus gives to him.

John 21:22 (NASB)

²² Jesus *said to him, “If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me!”

Look, if I decide he is going to live until the second coming, it is none of your business. I want **your** commitment to Follow Me!

I mean this is the kind of focus that our Lord wants: “Follow Me”. Do not compare yourself with somebody else. Do not ask what God has for somebody else, you just follow Me wherever that leads – and for Peter, it is going to lead to death. What about John? That is irrelevant to you. If I want him to live until the second coming, what is that to you?”

Wouldn't it be interesting if he were still here? Well, that is what some people thought.

John 21:23 (NASB)

²³ Therefore this account went out among the brothers, 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?”

That is **gossip** for you. They **never** get it right! “John is going to live until the second coming.” Of course, they had no idea, just as us today, how long it will actually be until Christ comes again. In fact they started to get worried when some of the Christians began to die. What is going to happen to them?

The Lord has to straighten that out. Jesus explained that He did not say to him that he would not die, He just said, “*If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you?*” He had to correct a rumor, because if people actually believed Jesus said he was not going to die and then he died, then Jesus has made an incorrect prediction. It was those who heard about this statement that got it wrong. One false prediction and Jesus is not the Messiah!

Peter must have got the message. He **would** be faithful, he would remain focused, and he was crucified upside-down. John lived much longer than Peter. He died on the Isle of Patmos at the end of the first century in exile.

Then John, who is being referred to here, adds his own little final note in **verse 24**:

John 21:24 (NASB)

²⁴ This is the disciple who is testifying about these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

Here is John saying, "The one that the writer of this gospel was talking about, that is me. I am the one who wrote all of this and it is the truth. He authenticates his own gospel: It is the truth."

CONCLUSION:

We have been to the heights. We have been through the cross, the resurrection, and the post resurrection appearances. And in the final chapter, we just come back down to earth and we meet these two guys. **That is such a fitting ending, because the glory of the gospel eventually ends up with us, right? Each of us must decide, like Peter, if we are willing to give up our past and decide if we are going to love Christ, sacrifice for Him, and be content to follow Him.**

John finishes with one final thought.

John 21:25 (NASB)

²⁵ But there are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written in detail, I expect that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

Consider your own life. Consider all the words you have ever said, that you have ever written, that have ever been sent to you, or have ever been written about you. Consider all the interaction you have ever had in this world. It would take a considerable amount of books to record all of it. That is just you **and who cares**, right?

John knew that if everything Jesus ever did was written out in full, and everything He ever said was recorded, the world would not be able to contain it. But when we get into God's heaven, I think we will all know the full story.

I want to finish by rereading the purpose that John gave for writing this gospel.

John 20:31 (NASB)

³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name.

John has laid out for us convincing proof that Jesus was the Messiah foretold by the prophets. Now it is decision time. Are you going to believe or are you going to reject his message? If we are to have eternal life it will require **love, sacrifice, and obedience** on our part. In order to be a true believer a sinner must submit completely to the Lord Jesus Christ by believing in his heart that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. Salvation is not cheap.

Matthew 16:24

²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.

In order to follow Jesus you must to **find** your life by losing it, **fill** your life by emptying it, and **live** your life by dying to self.

He is Lord!