

“Do You Love Me?”—John 21:15-19

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Do You Love Me?”, is John 21:15-19 → *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, “Feed My lambs.” He said to him 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, “Tend My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” and he said to Him, “Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This He said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this He said to him, “Follow Me.” This is the text.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

“Talk is cheap.” This clichè expresses the frustration of an individual who has experienced what appears to be the hypocritical behavior of another person. In some way that person did not follow through on his promise or his actions were not consistent with his words. It’s easy to express commitment and make promises but much more difficult to follow through with the appropriate action.

This challenge is especially evident in marriage relationships where a couple encounters every side of each other—the good, the bad, the ugly. In fact, many couples may find themselves believing that “talk is cheap” when their spouse says “I love you!” over and over but their actions display quite the opposite, such as looks of disgust accompanied by behaviors and words which are abusive and cruel. All the “I love you’s” in the world may not make up for the sinful behavior poured out on those whom we do love.

I wonder how Peter felt when he discovered for himself that “talk is cheap” after the events of Jesus’ suffering and death. Aside from the shame and remorse he felt when he denied having anything to do with Jesus, I wonder if he felt like he wished he could “make it up” to Jesus somehow. Did he long for a “redo” so he could do things differently? Did he feel like he blew all his future chances for participation in Jesus’ mission?

The encounter of Jesus with Peter described in our text reveals

Jesus confronting Peter about his devotion to Himself: *Simon, son of John, do you love Me?* Picture the flashbacks which could have been flooding Peter's mind upon hearing this question, especially it being asked of him three times. Even verse 17 of our text says that **Peter was grieved** because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?"

Notice how Peter responded to this question. He didn't simply say, "Yes Lord, I love You." Each time he placed the focus on Jesus and **Who He is** when he said, **You know that I love You**. Along with Thomas he confessed that Jesus is God by referring to His omniscience. Before Jesus his whole heart, soul and mind was laid bare as he confessed **Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You**.

Peter certainly had learned that lesson well. It takes us back to the upper room before Jesus' crucifixion. Here's how the interaction went according to Matthew 26:31-35. After telling His disciples that they would all fall away because of Him, *Peter answered Him, "Though they all fall away because of You, I will never fall away."* Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter said to Him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same. Sure enough, only hours later Peter denied any knowledge of Jesus, at which point *the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered* these words of Jesus. *And he went out and wept bitterly.* (cf. Luke 22:61-62)

Now, after Jesus' resurrection, Peter knew that his love for Jesus had to be based completely on the Person & Work of Jesus for him. His own love for Jesus had failed both of them miserably. Peter was now a man with *a broken and contrite heart* (cf. Psalm 51:17). The presence of Christ humbled Peter as he recognized his sin in the presence of God Himself in the flesh. That flashback may have also taken him back to his encounter with Jesus at the beginning of His earthly ministry in Luke 5:8 with the miracle of the great catch of fish then. *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."* Now, at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, we find Peter again recognizing Jesus for Who He truly was—true God and true man—and was humbled in His presence.

However, the love which Jesus had for such a sinner as Peter was to be expressed in another way. Jesus reassured Peter of the forgiveness which He had purchased for him by His suffering, death and resurrection by calling him to continue serving His *sheep*—His Church. The heavy duty burden of law which Peter experienced in the presence of Jesus because of His sins was immediately counteracted by Christ's words of forgiving grace! Jesus still wanted Peter to serve in His Church!

This forgiveness, love and desire for Peter to continue in His service could have produced more flashbacks for Peter, taking him back once again to Jesus' denial prediction on the night before His death. Jesus

told Peter in Luke 22:31-32 → *Simon, Simon, behold, satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. **And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*** In our text Jesus reaffirmed these words for Peter when He was told to feed His sheep and continue following Him. Jesus reinstated Peter by grace into His service.

Once again we encounter the fantastic grace of God as He calls each and every one of us sinners into His service. God has no perfect people with whom to work. He only has sinners such as you and I who strive to bring the Law and the Gospel to sinners in a sinful world. Maybe you're feeling like you've done unforgivable things in your life. The only unforgivable sin which a person commits is to continue in unbelief to death or until Christ's 2nd Coming (cf. Matthew 12:30-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:8-10). However, when you repent of any sin, trusting in Jesus, it is forgiven. Your relationship with Him is completely based upon grace as expressed in His love for you **in Christ**.

He asks you the same question: *Do you love Me?* What is your response? Does it make you feel inadequate and guilty because your love pales so in the light of His sacrificial love and the presence of His holiness? Does it bring flashbacks of the many times your words of commitment to Him were undone by your lack of an obedience to His will? The question certainly can bring you to your knees so that you

plead along with Peter, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*

However, instead of departing, leaving you to wallow in the burden of your sins, He comes to you. He gives you the full expression of His love so that you are completely forgiven, freed up and empowered to serve Him! Then you can answer along with Peter: *Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You* (verse 17). **It is based upon His perfect love for you** and not your frail efforts at love for Him. 1 John 4:10 puts it this way: *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

Because love is completely defined in God's steadfast love for you in the Person & Work of Jesus you can move forward in full assurance of faith and express this love to others as you follow Jesus. You have been freed up to serve! Because this love is based in Christ you **get** to serve Him by serving others, frail and tainted by sin as that service may be from your perspective but sanctified from God's perspective. 1 John 4:11,19 continues: *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. . . We love because He first loved us!*

Thus, like Peter, you can go forth in confidence knowing that Jesus is Lord and that the results of any service of love belong to Him—**not to you**. Our desire is simply to follow Him, knowing that our walk will not always match up to our talk. Still, we go under the power of the Holy

Spirit, clinging to His love based upon His forgiveness and His grace
new for us each day to walk and talk to the praise of His glory! Amen.

Thanks be to God,

Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable,

always abounding in the work of the Lord,

knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

(1 Corinthians 15:57-58)

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