

Mark 16 9-20

John 21:15-25

<sup>15</sup> So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, 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." <sup>16</sup> He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, 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 all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep." <sup>18</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish." <sup>19</sup> This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." <sup>20</sup> Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" <sup>21</sup> Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what *about* this man?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me." <sup>23</sup> Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you?" <sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. <sup>25</sup> And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

Now, we need to remember the context in order for us to get the most out of this passage. Peter had failed miserably. He had trusted in his flesh to remain loyal to Christ to the end. And his flesh let him down. Flesh will always let us down in when we are trying to follow God in our own strength. We must expend human effort in our walk with God, but we cannot depend upon that effort as the source for that which needs to happen most.

**Psalm 127:1**

**<sup>1</sup> Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.**

We see in these verses that the builders and the watchmen are doing their jobs. And they must do their jobs. God's part in all this does not free them from the need of expending maximum effort. We must work hard. We must strive. We

must struggle. Scripture is full of that kind of language. Spirituality does not buy us out of work and effort.

But all of our effort is fruitless if God does not do the spiritual heavy lifting. For instance, when we struggle with the sin that so easily besets us, does scripture ever tell us to just pray and God will take away our desires to do evil? I know of no scripture like that. We are told things to do. Things to think. Truths to believe. Lies to take captive. Habits to change. True spirituality assumes a **changed heart** that will **give maximum effort** to please Christ, but that maximum effort is fruitless without God doing what only He can do at the same time. The laborers labor. The watchmen watch. And it is God who gives their effort the success He determines.

The Christian life is odd in that it **assumes maximum effort**. But it never **rests its confidence in the effort**. Confidence is only to be **in God**. I can work hard to prepare a sermon that represents what God's Word says, but it is a worthless piece of prose unless the Spirit accompanies His word in the hearts of its hearers, me included. So should I stop preparing and just trust God because only He can do the heavy lifting? If I do, you should instantly fire me. I would be disobeying God's command to be show ourselves workmen in the word. Should I prepare believing that my work can accomplish anything in the heart of any hearer? If I ever say such a thing you should instantly correct me. I should work as hard as I can for the time that I have and I should trust that only God can make anything I say have any impact. That is how we are to do everything. Justification is monergistic, in that God does it all. Sanctification is synergistic in that two parties are exerting effort. But ultimate success still relies upon God.

Peter had trusted Peter. And flesh had let Peter down. And Peter had let Christ down. Now Christ publicly addresses Peter. Luke 24:34 says that Christ appeared privately earlier to Simon and I Cor 15:5 says that Christ was seen of Cephas and then of the twelve. We don't know when and how this happened. Scripture only reveals that it did.

Now Christ could have, at this point in our text, told Peter that His failure was so great he would **never be qualified to lead again**. That would have been just. But that was not Christ's will for Peter.

I want to stop here and take note of something. If we had been there, what would we have wanted **Christ to do to Peter** for having failed so miserably? I ask this because we aren't likely to think about it if we just move on with the story. I find in me some of the brother **that stayed at home** in the prodigal son story. Remember that story. The one son stayed home and worked for his father. Then when the prodigal son returned the remaining son shared none of the joy that his father had over his lost son returning. The stay-at-home son would have rathered

the prodigal son be treated badly. He didn't want full restoration. He didn't want blessing for his brother who had failed his father so badly.

I find that in me. Do you find it in you? We want grace to be extended for our failure. Because, after all, our failures aren't that big to us. We have our reasons and excuses. But we want a pound of flesh for others who fail in ways that we haven't, failures that we have lofted to an unforgivable status. And those sins are mostly put in that status simply because we have not done them.

How do we want those who have failed and repented to be treated? Do we want them to be given something **we don't even have**? That is the position of the other disciples in this group. Peter was their leader. Christ recognized him as such. And the leader had failed miserably. If we were there, would we have wanted Peter reinstated? We would if we had Christ's heart and wisdom. How do you think you would have responded?

<sup>15</sup> **So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, 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."**

Did your moms use your middle name when addressing you when you were in trouble? Mine did. Well the name "Simon" was like that for Peter. Jesus normally called Peter Peter. But when he rebuked Peter he often called him Simon. Matt 17:25, Mark 14:37 Luke 22:31

Now Jesus asks Peter, do you love me more than these? We looked at this last week. The most likely "these" that Christ was talking about was either the rest of the apostles... do you love me more than they love me? Or Peter's boat and former life. Do you love me more than your former way of life? In light of the context I think it was probably the later.

Jesus is asking Peter if he loved Christ more than his normal predictable life where he can supply for himself and live a normal life. It wasn't worth much and it didn't cost much. There are many who might be able to follow Christ as a fisherman for fish. But that is not what Peter had been called to.

Most of us know the word Jesus used for love was agapao. This is the kind of love **God has for us**. It is an unwavering commitment to do what is in the other's best interest, no matter what the cost. So Jesus asks, do you love me in a fully committed way that may cost you everything, do you love me that way more than you love your old way of living, your comfortable way of living?

That is a good question for us this morning. Do we love Christ more than the way of life we have come to know? Do we love Christ more than anything this world has to offer?

The core of the Christian life is love. What we believe is not primarily a creed. It is not primarily a set of rules. It is not primarily a political view. It isn't primarily a support group. It is primarily based on love. First we must love God with all our

heart soul mind and strength. Then we are to love our brothers as ourselves. This isn't an optional kind of Christianity. This isn't the enriched version. This is Christianity 101. This is what every believer is called to. Loving God and loving people, more than anything else.

I will borrow a little of MacArthur's study here.

**In [1 Corinthians 8:3](#) Paul wrote, "If anyone loves God, he is known by Him." On the other hand the apostle warned, "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed" ([1 Cor. 16:22](#)). Only those who love God receive eternal life ([James 1:12](#)) and inherit the kingdom ([James 2:5](#)). Peter wrote in his first epistle, "Though you have not seen Him [Christ], you love Him" ([1 Peter 1:8](#)). Love is also the driving, compelling force that motivates Christian service ([2 Cor. 5:14](#)). MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – John 12-21.**

Love is at the heart of Christianity. God loved us first. And He has enabled us to love Him in return.

Listen to what Christ said about competitors of His love.

**If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. ([Luke 14:26-33](#))**

Christ is not bashful about competing loves. He does not allow them. He will wean us from them if we are His. We may have all kinds of duties. We may have all kinds of relationships. We may have all kinds of skills and talents. We may have all kinds of possessions. But all of them must be held loosely in the palm of our hands before our God, willing that if He, in his love, decides to remove them from our hand, we will trust Him. Neither He, nor we, will allow those things we enjoy to interfere with our devotion to God.

And that love is seen in obedience. Anyone who thinks they love God but habitually knowingly disobey Him are on very dangerous footing. Christ Himself said that if we love Him we obey Him.

## 1 John 2:3-6

<sup>3</sup> Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup> He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup> But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. <sup>6</sup> He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

So we see that love and obedience are tightly tied together. What Christ is asking Peter about is not some emotional intention. He is not asking, "Peter do feel more warm sentiment toward me than you have toward your fishing boat?" That would have been easy. Peter could have said, "Oh yes Christ, I feel much warmer toward you than my boat." And then that evening Peter could have gone back to the boat thinking that he loved Christ more. No. There is none of that. The love Christ is talking about is a life directing force. It is all invasive- it directs and compels the heart and the soul and the mind and the strength. It isn't some fond emotion. It is a commitment of our whole person to the welfare of the name and person of God at our expense.

That is what Jesus was asking and Peter understood it as such. Christ was essentially asking if Peter loved His Lord more than all competing endeavors. Peter answered by saying this.

**"Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."**

Think about it. If you were Peter, in light of your latest failure, how could you promise to love Christ in that superior agape way? Peter may want to. He may want to **think he could**. But my guess is, at this point, Peter was no longer his old cocky self. He is finally learning. So instead of using the word Agape, Peter chooses the word Phileo for love. This is fond brotherly love.

And Peter appeals to Christ's omniscience in his response. He tells Christ, Yes Lord, you know that I am very fond of you. You know I love you like a brother. Maybe he is appealing to Christ to have pity on him. Old Peter would have quickly jumped to the word Agapeo. And he would have thought he was telling the truth. But this new Peter is essentially telling Christ that Christ already knows Peter's love for Christ is not exactly infallible. It isn't exactly rock solid. He is saying to Christ, you know about the best I will do is phileo. I know how I feel about you Christ. But I don't want to promise things I have shown to both you and I that I won't deliver.

This is wonderful honesty on the part of Peter. He is beginning to understand where Peter had to end and God had to begin.

Then look what Christ says back to Peter. He doesn't rebuke Peter for softening his word for love, for removing its strength. He just tells Peter, then Feed my Lambs. Previously Christ had called Peter to be a fisherman of men. Now Christ uses another imagery and tells Peter to be a good shepherd to His flock. He is to

feed Christ's lambs. This word for feed also could mean to tend. He is to feed and care for the newborn in the flock. We understand that to mean that He is to provide the flock, the fledgling church, the truth of the word of God in an environment that is most beneficial. That is the food that Peter is to share with those in the flock who need to hear it most.

It is important too to see whose sheep they are. It is not the church of Peter. It is the church of Christ. The sheep are never ours. They are always Christ's. We are always working for Christ, never for ourselves.

The verb tense for feed or tend is continuous. Peter was to do it and keep on doing it. This was going to replace Peter's fishing business. This was going to be his occupation from now until Peter dies.

**<sup>16</sup> He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."**

Again we see the same interaction with the same Greek words. Christ asks if Peter has Agape love for Christ. Peter appeals to Christ's knowledge of Peter's heart and he affirms to Christ that Peter believes that he at least has phileo love for Christ.

This time Christ changes the word to a word that means to shepherd. It is probably a synonym to the first word used. But Christ is essentially telling Peter again to shepherd the flock of Christ. Pastor the church. Care for the sheep. Tend them. Make sure they make it. Make that your business, your life goal.

**<sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, 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 all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."**

So Christ asks essentially the same question again, but this time Christ comes to the level that Peter has been offering. He comes to the level Peter thinks he can honestly assess his devotion at. And Christ essentially asks Peter, Peter, do you even love me that much? Do you really love me with a phileo love? Do you love me as a brother?

This troubles Peter. This is clearly intended as a rebuke and a challenge to Peter. Christ was meeting Peter where Peter was. Peter understood that Christ wasn't even exhibiting confidence in Peter's profession of love in its reduced version. He is challenging Peter to rise up to that level. He is challenging Peter to love Christ. Peter responds by telling the absolute truth trusting that Christ can see it for what it really is. Christ knows Peter even better than Peter knows Peter. But Peter is fairly confident that he is telling the truth about his heart toward Christ. Peter can appeal to the omniscience of Christ. Peter is essentially telling Christ, you know that I am telling the truth. You know everything. You know that I am being

as honest as I can possibly be. I truly do love you as a brother. I might not know anything else. I am not confident of making any other claims. But I believe this to be true about me. I love you like a brother.

In the first two instances Peter uses the word oida for know. This means intellectual knowledge of a fact. In the third he uses the word ginosko. This is knowledge gained through experience. This probably means that Peter was becoming emphatic at this point. He is saying, Christ, you are experiencing this as you look at my soul right now. You know it to be true.

And Christ tells Peter to Feed His Sheep. This time Peter uses the first word for feed or tend and the second word for Sheep. I think Christ is using synonyms in a way to emphasize the point. Christ no longer wants Peter to be fishing. From this day forward, if Peter has any level of love for Christ at all, Peter needs to be about taking care of the sheep of Christ. Peter is to be about taking care of those people who are going to respond to the evangelistic message.

This is the same ministry that every elder has been called to. We are to be shepherding the flock. We are to be about the things Paul told Timothy to be about. **2 Timothy 4:2**

**<sup>2</sup> Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.**

Elders, that is what we are here for. We need to make sure we are properly prioritizing these activities. We need to make sure we are doing more than meeting our family's responsibilities. We have got to give attention to the welfare of all of Christ's sheep that we were given charge of. Do you love Christ? Then be about the things Christ has called you to.

Peter did what Christ said. Peter died in doing this service to the Lord and His flock. This is what Peter said close to the end of his life.

**Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ([1 Peter 5:1-3](#))**

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – John 12-21.

Something was pointed out in Sunday School last week that I had forgotten to include this morning. Christ asked Peter if Peter loved Christ the same number of times that Peter had denied Christ. That probably didn't escape Peter's notice. God has a way of drawing attention to our failures in a way that gets the best mileage from them. There are sins that we may commit that we don't think are a big deal, but God will at some point bring them to our attention in a way we need

to do business with them. It is a point where we see ourselves as we are and we learn what we must do differently. It is very good that God does this. It proves that He loves us.

Now, Christ has made clear to Peter what Peter should do if he truly loves Christ. Now Christ is about to tell Peter what that will translate into. He is telling Peter what the cost will be for loving Christ and obeying Christ.

**<sup>18</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." <sup>19</sup> This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."**

Basically Christ is telling Peter that following Christ is going to result in a death by the hands of men. He is going to be murdered for ministering for Christ.

It is interesting how Christ contrasts the youth of Peter with the future of Peter. It is almost like a contrast between pre-Christ and post-Christ. When Peter was young and free he did what he wanted to do for the most part. Sure he ran his fishing business. He carried out his responsibility. But it had a sense of freedom with it where Peter could determine what Peter was going to do. That liberty is now gone.

Now Peter is a slave to Christ. Now Peter is a shepherd to the church. And doing that job, carrying out that responsibility is going to lead to martyrdom. Peter is not going to dress and go where he wants. There are people who will take you and carry you to where they want to take you. That is Peter's destiny in following and loving Christ.

It is interesting that Christ makes no effort to hide the price at all. He doesn't short change it. Peter just pronounced his love for Christ. Christ is telling Peter what that love is going to cost him.

Then Christ says these two words:

Follow me.

The verb tense here is also continuous. Start following and keep following me. Peter has seen the example of his loving Lord giving His life for His sheep. That is the example that Peter is to follow. And we understand through tradition that this is exactly what Peter did. Peter followed Christ to death in service to Christ and the sheep.

Wow. Christ says first, do the job I was doing and then Christ tells Peter, die the death I died. That is the ultimate of following Christ. Most of us figuratively pick up our cross and follow Christ. Peter did it literally.

This had to be a hard blow to Peter. This would have been a shock. These guys were not following Christ so they could be martyred for His cause. They probably wouldn't have even started down that path if they knew where it led. But now,



having experienced what they had, they are willing to follow Christ even to death. After all, who else had the keys to life and death? Who was there like Jesus? No one.

Well after this blow, Peter is probably curious how this will work out for everyone else. So he starts with his best friend John. John has an odd way of identifying himself. He will never just say- me...John.

<sup>20</sup> **Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"** <sup>21</sup> **Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what *about* this man?"** <sup>22</sup> **Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me."**

One day, maybe, we will all learn that what God has planned for another of His servants is none of our business. In fact, much of what God does is none of our business. Many of our questions toward God can be answered by God with the question "what is that to you?" Why do we feel so much of a need to compare how God deals with us to how God deals with others? Do we really think we are qualified to evaluate God? That was one of the lessons that Job, one of God's favorites, had to learn. We cannot add things up like we would like. One person may be completely faithful and end up with a very difficult life. Another might do everything wrong and God graciously provides them with a very easy life. We might think that isn't fair. But we aren't qualified to make those judgments. Only God is. Bluntly put, we need to mind our own business when it comes to what plans God has for others.

We also do not ultimately answer for how others live their lives. We only answer for how we live our own. That should give us pause in thinking we are qualified to tell other people how they are to carry out their God given responsibilities. We are free to quote what God says, but we need to keep in mind that **they answer for their lives**. We do not.

Then Christ ends with the only thing that is important for Peter to know. **You follow me**. No matter what happens with John, you follow me. Let me worry about what will happen to John.

Now Christ saying "**If I will that he remain till I come**" was one of few clear references by Christ that He was going to return. It wouldn't be hard to figure out from the Old Testament. Christ would have to return to fulfill all the promises of what the Messiah would do. But here Christ says it clearly. And the statement he makes is one of an extreme to make a point. Christ was basically saying that if I want John to live the whole time any people will be on this planet, that is my business. Christ was not saying that John **will** live that long. He is just saying that **if he did**, that would be no one else's business.

If the disciples were sharp the reference to Christ's return could have been very encouraging.

<sup>23</sup> **Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you?"** <sup>24</sup> **This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.**

People are always people. And very few people listen to people closely. So a rumor got started on Christ's words to Peter. That is typical.

John concludes by saying that what he writes is true and believable.

I find great comfort in Christ's restoration of Peter. It means that our lives are not over after we have blown it. God is not going to accept our excuses for disobeying Him or for refusing to obey Him. Repentance is admitting the truth about ourselves and our sin to God. We must do business with our failures. But when we have, God points us toward the future He has planned for us. A prior failure doesn't mean that we have no future. God has a future in mind for us. He has planned it. And we can rest in His sovereignty and go on. Christ **called Peter** to follow Christ. Christ **calls us** to follow Christ. No matter what our failures, that is the future that God intends for us. What will happen? Well that is God's business. But we can go forward with our sins dealt with and forgiven. God will restore us to the life He wants us to have.