

“DO YOU LOVE ME?”

John 21:15-25

Key Verse: 21:15

When 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.”

This passage is about a beautiful conversation between the Risen Christ and his disciple Peter. Jesus asks him the question, “Do you love me?” How would you answer if Jesus asked you the question personally? What will Jesus say to us if we answer yes? Let us hear the voice of Jesus personally as we study this passage!

I. “DO YOU LOVE ME? FEED MY SHEEP” (15-17)

Peter had failed as a disciple. On the night Jesus was arrested, he denied knowing Jesus three times. A sense of failure overwhelmed him and he wept bitterly. Then he failed again, this time as a fisherman. He went back to his old job, thinking that fishing was one thing he could do well. But he caught nothing that night. He and his companions returned to the shore empty-handed, dejected, hungry and tired. That’s when the Risen Christ appeared to them and helped them to catch a large number of fish. Then Jesus served them a delicious breakfast on the beach. As they enjoyed the eating fellowship with Jesus, all their frustrations melted away. Jesus still loved Peter despite all his failures. Jesus loved him despite his denials. Jesus’ love for him was unfailing!

Let us look at verses 15-17. *When 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.” Again 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.” The 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.*

Jesus asked Peter the question “Do you love me?” three times. Why ask the same question three times? Peter had denied Jesus three times. Jesus understood how much he was hurting. So Jesus gave him three opportunities to affirm his love for Jesus. Jesus wanted to restore Peter’s love relationship with him.

Let’s read verse 15 again. *When 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.”* What is love? There are at least three different words in Greek that can be translated into love in English. The first is *eros*. This refers to passion and physical desires. This is the kind of love that Beyoncé

sings about. Her latest song title is “Drunk in Love.” This was Samson’s love for Delilah (Jdg 16) and Amnon’s love for Tamar (2Sa 13).

The second word for love is *phileo*—the love of emotional affection or friendship. This is called “brotherly love”. Philadelphia is known as the city of brotherly love. This was David’s love for Jonathan (2Sa 1:26) and Onesiphorus’ love for Paul (2Ti 1:15-18).

The third is *agape*. This love goes beyond emotional feelings and affections. This love is based on a person’s choice. In the Bible, this word is used to describe God’s love. God so loved the world and sent his one and only Son to save us. God made a willful choice to love us, even though we are not lovable, huggable people. God showed his love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (Ro 5:8). We learn that agape love is more than emotions—it is of one’s mind, heart and will. This is unconditional love. At the core of agape love is self-sacrifice. This love comes from God.

In today’s scripture, when Jesus asked Peter “Do you love me?” he used the word *agape*. On the other hand, when Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, I love you,” he used the word *phileo*. He could not dare to say that he agape-loved Jesus after denying him three times. But Jesus wanted him to know the unconditional love of God and to reciprocate the love with his full commitment. Jesus wanted him to know that he loved Peter despite his failures. Jesus wanted to restore his love relationship with Peter, not based on feelings, but based on the love of God.

Jesus asked Peter, “Do you truly love me *more than these?*” What does Jesus mean by “more than these”? Jesus wanted Peter to love him more than anything or anyone in this world. Of course Peter loved Jesus dearly. But his love for Jesus was based on his emotions rather than the truth of God. He loved Jesus, but he loved his own ambition, too. He wanted a high position in the earthly kingdom he thought Jesus was going to establish. Peter’s love for Jesus was emotional and relative. His love was conditional.

Jesus taught Peter what the true love is. He did not abandon Peter despite his failures. Jesus restored him from his failure in fishing. Jesus told him, “Come and have breakfast with me.” He also taught him how to love by restoring him as a shepherd of his sheep. In verses 15-17, Jesus tells Peter “Feed my lambs” (15) “Take care of my sheep” (16) and “Feed my sheep” (17). Each time, Peter confessed his love for Jesus. But Jesus didn’t say, “You really love me. I’m so happy.” Instead, Jesus told him to feed his sheep. Jesus told him to show his love by taking care of his sheep. Someone said that love is not love until you give it someone else. We learn here that we can show our love for Jesus by loving his sheep.

How can we love Jesus? In John 14:15, Jesus says, “If you love me, you will do what I command.” We can love Jesus by obeying his command. The secret is to first accept in our hearts the love of Jesus for us. 1 John 4:19 says, “We love because he first

loved us.” Jesus’ love is much deeper than any human love. After his 1:1 Bible study with a Samaritan woman, he suddenly told her to go and call her husband. She protested say, “I have no husband.” Jesus knew about her pain. More than that, he loved her. He wanted to help her to solve her problem of sin. When the news of Lazarus’ sickness came, Jesus delayed two more days making sure that Lazarus was dead. It was because he wanted to plant resurrection faith in the hearts of Mary and Martha. Jesus loved them as his own daughters. Just before his crucifixion, Jesus wanted to show his love for his disciples. What did Jesus do for them? He washed their smelly feet! (13:1-17) Then he said, “Love each other as I have loved you” (15:12). Most of all, he willingly suffered and died on the cross in order to save sinners like you and me.

As for Peter personally, Jesus loved him from the beginning. Before Jesus called him, Peter’s goal in life was to catch as many fish as possible to save money for his family. Every night, he would struggle against the strong wind of the Sea of Galilee, trying to catch more fish. He would have lived and died as a smelly fisherman. But Jesus loved him. He did not want Peter to live for only three meals a day and die as a selfish fisherman. He wanted to restore God’s mission for his life. So he called him saying, “Come, follow me and I will make you a fisher of men” (Mk 1:17).

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Jesus knew that it was difficult enough for Peter and the disciples just to struggle to survive. But he did not say, “After you get a job, after you pass the exam, after you get married, after you get a promotion, after you get out of whatever situation you are in, feed my sheep.” He simply said, “Feed my sheep.”

Jesus also said, “Take care of my sheep.” Taking care of sheep is more than just studying the word of God with them each week. I enjoy studying the Bible with students, especially when they have a learning mind. But I realize that, in order to take care of them, I must know their problems, wash their feet, and have breakfast with them. Most of all, I must pray for them earnestly. I really want to learn how to be a good shepherd. I pray that God may help each of us to take care of Jesus’ sheep until they commit their lives to Jesus.

Finally, Jesus said, “Feed *my* sheep.” We may consider our Bible students as *our* sheep. It is good for us to have a sense of responsibility for them. But actually they are Jesus’ sheep. Jesus is our Chief Shepherd and we are “under-shepherds.” Our mission is to help young sheep to know and follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd. To do this, we must first be good sheep of Jesus.

“Feed my sheep”—in these words of Christ is God’s desire to save one more person from sin and death. The words teach us God’s broken heart and his love for the sinful humanity. Let us think about the heart of Jesus as we meditate on this command.

We feed Jesus’ sheep in response to his love for us. But I believe that this is God’s way of blessing us as well. Feeding sheep helps us to overcome our selfish nature. To

feed Jesus' sheep, we cannot be preoccupied with ourselves, our family and our problems all the time. As forgiven sinners, we are still very selfish, self-centered and even narcissistic. Today's social media seems to encourage this. Recent studies show that people are becoming more self-centered and narcissistic. They use Facebook or Twitter as "a technologically enhanced mirror, reflecting a preoccupation with one's own image, others' reactions to this image, and a desire to update the image as frequently as possible." This is called the "Selfie Syndrome." Social media may not be the cause of narcissism (which is already in our sinful nature), but it provides a digital playground to display the behavior. I hope we can use social media for evangelism rather than for a selfish purpose.

It is also important to notice that Jesus asked the question, "Do you love me?" before telling Peter "Feed my sheep." Our love relationship with Jesus must come first before we can feed his sheep. In the movie, *The Fiddler on the Roof*, when Reb Tevye asks his wife "Do you love me?" his wife Golde answers, "After cooking your meals and washing your underwear for 25 years, now you are asking me, 'Do I love you?'" She seems to be saying, "I serve, therefore I love." This is a recipe for burnout. Instead, our motto should be, "I love, therefore I serve." We take care of Jesus' sheep because we love Jesus.

II. "FOLLOW ME" (18-25)

Look at verse 18. *Very 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.*" In this verse, Jesus tells Peter that his life would be changed now that he was restored in his love relationship with the Lord. In the past, Peter had lived according to his desires. He bragged that he was willing to die for Jesus. But in reality, he was a man of selfish ambition. So he did not understand the shepherd's heart of Jesus. He never fed God's sheep. Instead, he offended his fellow disciples with his competitive attitude. But his life would be different from then on. He would live the sacrificial life of a shepherd. He wouldn't be able to choose his own clothes to wear. He could not wear gym shorts as he wanted. He could not go wherever he wanted. He would have to eat and drink for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of God's sheep (1Co 10:31). In short, he would have to give up his selfish life, and live a life of mission. What a sacrifice Peter had to make because of his love for Jesus! In order to become a good shepherd for Jesus' sheep, we must also sacrifice our selfish ambition.

Look at verse 19. *Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"* Jesus predicts that Peter would live a holy life of mission to the end and glorify God through his martyrdom. According to the early writers, Peter was executed by Nero in Rome around 68 A.D. It is said that he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as the Lord and requested to be crucified upside down. To live a life of mission is not easy. But it is the path that our Lord Jesus

already traveled. That is why Jesus says to Peter, "Follow me!" Jesus took care of his sheep by feeding them. Now it was Peter's turn to follow the same path.

What was Peter's response? Peter turned and saw John. Then he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Peter wanted to live a life of mission; but not alone. What did Jesus say? *Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me"* (22). The decision to live a life of mission is a personal one. Peter had to decide himself before God personally. He had to make a personal commitment. Each of us must make a personal decision to follow Jesus in his footsteps if we want to live a life of mission. Jesus basically said, "Peter, you are you, and John is John. You must accept God's mission for your own life" (Ge 1:28).

College campuses today are full of wandering sheep--young people without a direction or meaning in life. Outwardly they look fine. But in the eyes of our Lord, they are like sheep without shepherd. They are under the power of sin and death. They need a shepherd who can pray with them and feed them with the word of life. They need a shepherd who can take care of them. May God help each one of us to hear Jesus' voice "Do you love me? Take care of my sheep!"