



FEED MY SHEEP

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Did Peter “love” Jesus? Do you “love” Jesus?

Feed My Sheep, Part 3

We are in the middle of the story of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to seven disciples on the beach of the sea of Galilee. We left off in John 18 where Peter was denying that he even knew Jesus.

KJV John 18:25 And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also *one* of his disciples? He denied *it*, and said, I am not.

26 One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him?

27 Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew.

Let us add some additional details from Matthew, Mark and Luke’s account of this. You see, we can look here at Peter and think: “What a coward! There was Jesus, who had worked all those miracles, standing in front of the high priest and just a few yards from Peter and yet Peter could not admit that he even knew Him! How shocking and foolish!”

Not only did he deny knowing Christ to the girl at the door, but then he had no feeling of repentance after that and he hardened himself by the very license he took in sinning. Thus, he easily slid into denying Jesus the second time. ...And a third time.

We can surmise that if every person in the palace had come up to Simon Peter and accused him of being Jesus’ follower, that Pete would have denied it every single time, such was his mindset at the time. Notice what Mark adds when Peter denies Jesus the third time.

NKJ Mark 14:70 But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, “Surely you are *one* of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows *it*.”

71 Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this Man of whom you speak!”

In other words, the sin was exacerbated because Peter got more vehement and angry in his denials, so much so that he cursed and swore.

This incident illustrates for us the wiles of the devil and how the adversary operates in all of our lives. That once the adversary has succeeded in tempting us to slip the first time, maybe just a little sin; but after we give in; the rush is on and it gets easier to slip each succeeding time. It becomes habitual and then the conscience becomes numbed, resulting in the situation where a person who, like Peter, had formerly enjoyed sweet companionship with the Lord, now despises Him and turns away.

The person who follows that path ultimately comes to act as though nothing is unlawful for him. That person has the capacity to go on to commit the greatest evils imaginable. Let not one of us think “that couldn’t happen to me.” I remember vividly when a friend of mine—whose spiritual maturity far surpasses my own—one day said to me:

“James, we must never allow ourselves to be so proud as to think that *I* could not slip into the most heinous of sins.” He continued, “I honestly tell you that I *know* that within *me*—the old (Adamic) man part of me—lies the capacity to be every bit as evil as—say—

Adolph Hitler was. It is only the grace of God that makes me what I am, and keeps me from falling into the worst sins imaginable.”

I was stunned at his statement—he thinks that he could be as evil as Hitler?! — but as I thought about it, I concluded that he had the right attitude. And if it were true for him, then it was *certainly* true for me. And so there is no better course to follow than when that first little temptation arises that *we call on the Savior* in order to avoid falling that first time. We need to look to the Savior, because that’s what caused Peter to repent. According to Luke’s account, even after the rooster crowed, it wasn’t until perhaps just immediately following that moment, that their eyes met. It says in...

KJV Luke 22:61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Luke 22:62 And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

The meaning of the word “apostle” is one who is sent or one who is commissioned with a task. This is surely what Jesus is doing here as He commissions Peter to “feed my sheep.” (We are back in the post-resurrection beach scene now in John 21.)

This restoration was necessary on at least three counts. First, for Peter himself. He had to have the personal reinstatement to that position of apostleship from which he had fallen.

Pete needed this reinstatement from the Savior so that he could go forth *boldly* (as befitted his innate character)...to go forth boldly with the knowledge that he was indeed fully restored and commissioned to spread the good news. He had to have the reassurance that he was forgiven of his failure, that the slate had been wiped clean.

Secondly, the restoration of Peter was necessary so that his fellow apostles and disciples could witness the same, and that henceforth when Peter spoke, not one of them could say: “Hey, who do you think you are? You are no longer qualified to be an apostle; you denied the Lord.”

With this scene on the beach of reinstatement in the presence of these witnesses, Peter’s authority to

proclaim the good news would be unchallengeable. If the Lord himself had forgiven Peter, then the stain of his fall was henceforth of no account. It could not be held as a sword over his head. The slate was clean.

Thirdly, the restoration of Peter was necessary for all of us Christians down through the centuries, so that we, too, can have confidence in the writings of Peter in our Bibles. Not only that, but so that we, too, might be assured of our *own* restoration when we ourselves fall into divers sins, and thus in effect deny the Lord Jesus.

In John 21, they had now finished shore-lunch, or in this case, shore-breakfast, and although there must have been considerable conversation among the *disciples* and Jesus, God did not see fit to have John record any more than this exchange between Simon Peter and Jesus. Incidentally, I say *disciples* here instead of apostles because it is not clear that all seven were apostles. In verse two, these are named: Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John who are the sons of Zebedee, and then it says “and two other of his disciples.” They may have been part of the eleven remaining apostles, but we do not know for certain.

I will now present the gospel text we are focused upon and then we will go back and I shall explain many points which are not apparent on the surface and some which would be missed entirely, having been literally lost in translation.

John 21:15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

A superficial homily would note just two points from this incident. One: that Jesus was really holding old Pete’s feet to the fire here by asking him repeatedly whether or not he really loved Him. Additionally,

it is, of course, beyond obvious that just as Peter had denied the Lord three times, so now Jesus asks Peter to affirm his love three separate times.

Number two: The recommissioning of Peter was first to “feed my lambs,” and then on the second and third affirmations, he was told to “feed my sheep.” Simple enough for Sunday School, but let us now dig a bit deeper. Let us begin by noticing how Jesus addressed the disgraced fisherman. In verse 15, He says:

“Simon, *son of Jonas*,” ... That is, son of John. But we notice that He does not call him Peter. Remember that Peter was the new name that Jesus had given him in Matthew 16 when Peter was given to understand the divinity of Jesus.

Peter means a rock or a stone. In Matthew 16 Simon was able to declare the reality of the divinity of Jesus. As a result of that declaration, Jesus had told him that “upon this rock I will build my church.” But the rock there was not a reference to Peter, which thereby ordained him the first pope, as some suppose, but Paul tells us that *the rock was Christ*.

It was Peter’s acknowledgement of the divinity of Christ, that that truth would be the foundational basis of the church. Because a Christian church without a divine Christ is just another pagan religion.

But there, Simon had been given the new name Peter, which really means a *little* rock or a *little* stone, and it thereby was to define Peter’s character as one who would stand solid as a stone for Jesus. But alas, he failed.

At the trial of Jesus, Simon refuses to acknowledge Jesus; therefore, his new name was stripped from him momentarily in this scene on the beach. Jesus is thus making the point to Peter that he had not really attained yet to the fulfillment of his new name.

By thus addressing him by his old name, Simon, not only is Jesus making the point of bringing Peter’s denial to the forefront, but perhaps between the lines, He is also saying to Peter that you need to go back to your first name again and fulfill it first.

You see, his old name, Simon, comes from the Hebrew, as in *Simeon*, and it means “hearing” and the verb form “to hear.” In Hebrew the words translated “to hear” and “to obey” are the same. You see, Peter

would not have fallen into the three-fold denial if he had been obedient in the first place. What are we talking about? Let us look now at John 13. This occurs at the last supper. Jesus has just dipped the sop and given it to Judas. Jesus tells Judas that what he is planning to do, to go and do it quickly. The other apostles are puzzled by this, and after Judas is gone, Jesus begins to tell the rest that He is about to be glorified.

John 13:36 Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.

And of course, the impetuous, headstrong, boastful, shoot-from-the-hip Peter can’t help but brag about his devotion to Jesus:

37 Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.

38 Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.

Jesus told him: Peter, you can’t follow me now. But a short time later, when Judas brought the soldiers and they took Him to the palace of Caiaphas, what did Peter do? He disobeyed and tried to follow Jesus. Now back to John 21, verse 15, where Jesus asks Simon:

lovest thou me more than these?

For *lovest*, Jesus used the word *agape*. Well, technically, Jesus was probably speaking Aramaic, but that is beside the point, because the Holy Spirit inspired John to make this important distinction for us in the Greek language of the gospel. Jesus says: Simon, do you agape-love me more than these?

What does “these” refer to? Some think it refers to Peter’s boat and the other tools of his fishing trade. Do you love me more than fishing? (grin, grin) Boy, the Lord really knows how to confront us with hard choices, doesn’t he?

Actually, I don’t think Jesus is referring to fishing at all here. It seems pretty obvious to me that once again Jesus is getting Peter’s denial out in the open. Sometimes doctors have to hurt us in order to heal us, don’t they? And so it is here with the great Physician.

He has to get Simon's sinful denial out in the open in order to heal him and thus prepare him for his future work.

So when Jesus says, do you love me more than these, He is referring to the other apostles and disciples. Recall that Peter had proudly and arrogantly boasted that even if all the other apostles stumbled, that HE would not stumble. That's how much he loved Jesus. He was asserting and implying thereby that he, Peter, loved Jesus more than everybody else. And so Jesus, as the Great Shepherd, brings this to his attention—a kind and gentle rebuke to Peter's pride. Jesus obviously knows that Peter's pride has been broken; that he had been humbled immensely. And so Peter answers, still in verse 15:

He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.

Now remember that Jesus had asked “do you agape-highest form of love”-Me more than these other men? Remember that agape is not so much an emotional love, but a love based on commitment and purpose! It is an act of the will, followed by actions to back it up.

Here is what we miss in English...Simon answers, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I phileo-love thee. He changed the word! In other words, Simon affirms that he has this strong emotional draw to Jesus. He's saying “I love you as I would love a family member. I love you as my brother, to whom I am very attached.”

At this juncture, I must point out that our previous mention of the 50-50 character of phileo-love does not necessarily hold at all times and in all instances. Because the meaning of *phileo* in the Greek language can encompass much more than that. *Phileo*-love does not rise to *agape*-love, but it *can* exceed the mere “I will love you as long as you give me my rights” type of love.

Peter was asserting more than a 50-50 type of love for Jesus. Nonetheless, he was professing his strong emotional attraction to the Savior, his affection for Jesus.

It reminds me of what I have witnessed in many pentecostal or charismatic gatherings over the years where people get all worked up and emotional and expressive. They weep and shout and profess their

love for Jesus. And that's okay! I do not condemn emotional proclamations of one's love for Jesus. But to me, it simply demonstrates that at least on those occasions, they are demonstrating *phileo* love, not *agape* love.

So why did Simon change the Lord's word? Why did not Peter affirm that he agape-loved Jesus? I would submit that he did not use agape because he knew it was not true! Agape means commitment. He admitted that he had failed in his commitment. With this in mind, let us turn to Luke 22.

There is a fascinating statement here by our Lord in the same breath that he predicts Peter's denial. The scene once again is the last supper. Jesus has already broken the bread and passed around the cups of wine. Judas has already left the room, and then Jesus turns to Peter and notice how He addresses him first—not as Peter, the name He had bestowed upon him, but...

Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have you*, that he may sift *you* as wheat:

32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

33 And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.

34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

Here in verse 34, our Lord *does* address him as Peter, but I believe it is in response to Peter's proud boast. It is as though Jesus is saying, “Oh, so you think you already are Peter, the rock-solid man who is so strong he will never desert Me? But I tell you that you are going to deny me three times.

(To be continued.)

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