

The Restoration of Peter to Fellowship with the Lord

John 21:15-25

John 21:15-25 - *“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.”

¹⁶ *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.”*

¹⁷ *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. ¹⁸ 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.” ¹⁹ This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”*

²⁰ *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?” ²¹ Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?”*

²² *Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”*

²³ *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?”*

²⁴ *This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.*

²⁵ *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.”*

Background Notes

Just a few weeks ago I stood on the shores of the Sea of Galilee near the site of where Peter was restored to fellowship with the Lord. Our study group was at the site on the western shore, where tradition says this event took place. We can't be sure of the exact location, but it was likely very close to that site.

In verse 15 the Lord asked Peter, *“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?”* To what was the Lord referring when He said *“more than these”*? More than the large catch of fish? More than Peter's boat and his fishing business? More than the other disciples? There are lots of different opinions here. I believe that most likely the Lord was asking Peter whether he really loved the Lord more than the other disciples loved the Lord. After all, at the Last Supper

Peter had indicated that he loved the Lord more than the others. He had actually declared that even if all the other disciples forsook the Lord, he would remain faithful! But that same night he denied the Lord three times.

The Lord predicted Peter's martyrdom in verse 18: "*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.*" The Lord's words seem to indicate that Peter's martyrdom would be by crucifixion. "*This He spoke signifying by what death he would glorify God.*" There is quite a strong tradition in early Christian literature indicating that Peter was crucified upside down. Why upside down? Again, tradition indicates that Peter felt he was not worthy to be crucified in the same way as his Lord was crucified.

"*This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true*" (v24). As we can see from the context of previous verses, by process of elimination we believe that this disciple who wrote the book is none other than John the apostle.

A final background note. Some commentators have said that verse 25 is "hyperbole." We use "hyperbole" when we *purposefully exaggerate* in speaking or writing. Have you ever said, "I've told you a million times...." when you reprimand your kids? Is that a lie? No! It's *hyperbole*! Purposeful exaggeration! So some have said that verse 25 is an instance of hyperbole in the Bible - and that may be, but not necessarily so.

"*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.*" This verse **could** be taken quite **literally**. After all, the Lord Jesus is the infinite, eternal Son of God. The world literally could not contain the number of books it would take to record, let alone describe, the infinite number of activities of the eternal Son of God.

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. The Good Shepherd restores the sheep.

In the first half of John 21 the Lord used the illustration of **fishing** when was speaking of evangelism. In the second half of the chapter the Lord used **shepherding** to illustrate pasturing (nurturing) and restoration.

One of the things that a shepherd does is restore the sheep when they're ill or injured, and Peter was being restored. In John 18, Peter warmed himself at the **world's fire**. In John 21, Peter was restored at the **Lord's fire**.

The Good Shepherd restores His sheep. Psalm 23:1-3 says, "*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness...*"

Peter had denied the Lord three times. Now the Lord asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" You may be aware that two different Greek words for *love* were used here. Most likely this is quite significant. Even though our Lord probably spoke to Peter in Aramaic, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John captured the essence of our Lord's conversation with Peter in the Greek language.

In verse 15, the Lord used the Greek word *agape* – a sacrificing type of love, a love that's more of the **will** rather than the emotions. Peter responded with the Greek word *phileō* – the word for affectionate or brotherly love. Again in verse 16 the

Lord used the word *agape*, and Peter responded again with *phileō*. In verse 17, the third time the Lord asked Peter "Do you love Me?", He used the word *phileō*: "Peter, do you have affection for me? Are you really my friend?" We read that Peter was grieved because the Lord was pressing him, and he responded, "*Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.*"

The restoration process is not always pleasant, but a good shepherd knows the best way to restore the sheep in his flock. Maybe you're a wandering sheep and you're in need of restoration. You can be sure that the Good Shepherd knows the best way to restore your soul. It may not be pleasant, but the Lord will use the **best** way. Are you willing to let Him do it? That is the key! Are you willing to let Him do it?

By the way, verse 20 strongly indicates that John was some distance away, and this was a private conversation between the Lord and Peter. This teaches us that the Lord deals with us one on one in the restoration process. Each person is different, and the Good Shepherd works with us in individual ways when He restores His sheep.

2. The Good Shepherd feeds His sheep.

Three times the Lord told Peter to take care of His flock: Feed my lambs (v15); Tend my sheep (v16); and Feed my sheep (v17). And the Lord says the same to us. The Good Shepherd wants His flock to be fed and cared for, and He uses us to do the job.

In that sense, we are all pastors and shepherds. If you're a Christian, you're both a sheep and a shepherd at the same time, and we're to follow the model of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd nurtures and feeds His sheep, and we should be looking for ways to care for our fellow believers.

Do you notice here how feeding the flock is a test of whether or not you love the Lord? Three times: Do you love me? Feed my lambs. Do you love me? Tend my sheep. Do you love me? Feed my sheep.

Do you love the Lord? If your answer is yes, are you involved in feeding and caring for the sheep? Are you involved in teaching somewhere? Are you involved in feeding the Lord's flock? What about teaching or helping with VBS or Sunday School? What about Bible studies? Are you directly involved - or indirectly involved - in feeding the sheep?

Right here we learn that feeding the flock is a test of whether or not we truly love the Lord. Do you love me? If so, then feed My sheep! The Good Shepherd feeds His sheep, and we should follow His example.

Practical Applications

1. Don't keep looking around at other believers.

After the Lord revealed to Peter that he would die as a martyr, Peter turned to look at John and asked, "*But Lord, what about this man?*" Jesus said to him, "*If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.*"

The Lord says the same to us today: "Don't keep looking around at other believers - **you follow Me!**"

Why is it that we tend to compare the way the Lord works with us with how He deals with other believers? For example: "Why does the Lord let that other believer have more money than I have?" "Why does the Lord let that other ministry be supported more generously than the ministry in which I serve?" "Why does the Lord seem to bless that family more than our family?" "Why did the Lord take my spouse home to Heaven, and not another person?" "Why do I have more problems than brother so-and-so?" "Why am I always sick, and that other sister is so healthy?"

The answer is simple: Keep your eyes on the **Lord!** Follow **Him** - and don't keep looking around at other believers!

2. Make sure you quote the Word correctly!

In reference to John, the Lord said to Peter, *"If I want him to remain till I return, what is that to you? You follow Me"* (v22). *Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple [John] would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I want him to remain till I return, what is that to you?"*

The early Christians misquoted the Lord: *"this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die."* But Jesus didn't say that, and John had to correct the misconception that was spreading.

Do you see the false doctrines that could have developed from misquoting the Lord here? From this misquote, a doctrine could have been built that John would never die, but would live forever. Or a doctrine could emerge that the return of the Lord had to be within John's lifetime. Or a false doctrine that some of the Lord's predictions were not accurate could have begun.

Do you see the problem? **The problem was that they didn't quote the Word correctly!** The Lord didn't say John would not die; He said, *"If I want him to remain until I return, what is that to you?"*

Make sure you quote the Word of God correctly! Incorrect quotations from the Bible can lead to incorrect ideas of what the Bible teaches. For example, 1 Timothy 6:10 is frequently quoted incorrectly as: "Money is the root of all evil." True? No! That's a misquote, and it could lead to distorted and incorrect ideas about money. The verse actually says that the **love** of money is a root of **all kinds** of evil. Make sure you quote the Word of God correctly!

And here's another aspect of the same point: don't quote as "Scripture" things that are not actually Scripture at all! For example, "God helps those who help themselves." You've heard that one, right? You probably have - but you didn't hear it from the Bible - because **it's not in the Bible!**

So - make sure you quote the Word of God correctly!