

## John 21

### Do You Love Jesus?

How would you feel if you got up in the morning, sat down for breakfast with your wife or husband, and then they looked you straight in the eye and asked you, “Do you love me?” I don’t know about you, but I would immediately feel queasy, like my stomach was doing backflips, like someone was sitting on my chest. The reason why should be pretty obvious: if they confidently know that you love them, then they shouldn’t have to ask. What they’re actually asking is, “I know you’ve said that you love me, but do you *really* love me?” It’s a vulnerable question, one that cuts deep. If my wife asked me that, my mind would be racing, thinking, “Why is she asking this? We’re married; does she not know that I love her? Does she not *feel* loved? Am I doing a bad job of *showing* her how much I love her?” Such a question demands a two-fold response, with *words* and *deeds*. You have to *say* how much you love her (or him) and then *show* your love to be real, sincere, and genuine.

As uncomfortable as it would be for your spouse to ask you that question, imagine if Jesus Christ Himself asked you: “Do you love me? Do you *really* love me, sincerely and truly?” Just think about that: the God of this universe, who already knows the content of your heart and what you’re thinking, asking if you love Him. Not only this, but He *is* love, the very definition of true love, and He has already shown how much He loves *us* by dying for us. How do you answer such a question? This isn’t a vague hypothetical: as we read this passage this morning, that’s the question being asked of you, of each of us: do you really love Jesus? So take a moment and pause: think, look at your life, search your heart, and ask yourself: do you really, truly, love Jesus? Are you *showing* that you love Jesus? If someone looked at your life, would they have any reason to believe that you love Christ?

But that begs the question: what does it look like to love Jesus? How do we *show* Christ that we love Him? Here in our passage, Jesus tells us how to show our love for Him, but that’s not all: He first shows His love for us, compelling us to love Him all the more. First, we see Jesus revealing His divine power and glory in His resurrected humanity, and then His redeeming love for us, compelling us to love Him all the more; and then, we see that we can show our love for Jesus by 1. Loving and building up our fellow Christians; 2. Suffering for His sake; and 3. Following His Will without complaining or comparing our walk with others’.

## I. You should love Jesus because of the glory revealed in His resurrected humanity (vv.1-14)

We see this in the beginning of the chapter, in vv.1-14. Last week, we saw that Jesus rose from the grave after dying on the cross for our sins, conquering over death and overthrowing the grave in glorious victory. And then He revealed Himself to His disciples, showing them that He has arisen, even letting them touch the holes in His hands and side, proving that it's really Him, and that He is really, truly, and *physically* alive from the grave, with a glorified body never to die again. He appeared to them twice in His resurrected glory in chapter 20. Now, here in chapter 21, He appears to them again. Some time has passed, but we're not told how much. Peter, John, and a few other disciples were together, no longer in Jerusalem, but up by the Sea of Tiberias, and they decide to go fishing together. If you've read the other gospel accounts - Matthew, Mark, and Luke - then you know that before they started following Jesus full-time, some of them, like Peter and John, were commercial fishermen. That was their job, how they made money and provided food for themselves and their families. So, we see them here just going about their normal, mundane, ordinary lives: going to work, out fishing with their buddies out on the lake.

Yet they were out all night, casting their nets over and over again, and caught nothing, all night long (v.3). But just as dawn was breaking on the horizon, in that dim first light of morning, they saw a man standing on the shore. They couldn't tell who it was: it was too far and the light too dim for that. The man called, "Children, do you have any fish?" (v.5). To our ears, this may sound condescending or offensive; if a man called a bunch of other grown men "children" in our context, it would come across as mockery or an insult. But the word for "children" used in v.5 was used much like how we use the word "boys" or "guys" in American English: if I walked up and called a bunch of my male friends my age "children," that would be offensive, but if I tell them "hey guys," or talk about them saying "I'm going to hang out the boys," that's not offensive or condescending at all. Same thing going on here.<sup>1</sup>

So he calls out to them, asking if they caught anything, and they tell him no. He calls out again, in v.6, saying, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of the fish." And as soon as this happens, they begin to realize who's speaking to them: it's Jesus. In v.7, John tells Peter, "It is the Lord!" John recognizes this as a miracle. In fact, this would have been a familiar

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<sup>1</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p.670.

miracle for all of them: it's essentially a repeat of one of the earliest miracles they ever saw Jesus do, back when He called them to come and follow Him, in Luke 5:1-11, at the *beginning* of His ministry. He told them to let down their nets, after not catching anything all night, and they caught so many it broke their nets! Now, at the end of Jesus's ministry, the same thing happens: only this time, even though they catch 153 "large" fish (v.11), a huge haul, the nets don't break: it's a familiar miracle yet even better this time. his miracle shows them His divine power as God, and shows them personally that it is Jesus, in a familiar way. They immediately recognize Him.

But while they start hauling the heavy nets to shore, Peter doesn't wait: he jumps straight into the water and swims to shore, rushing to be with Jesus. When He gets to shore, Jesus is sitting over a fire, already roasting fish. When the others get to shore, they bring over some more fish so they can all eat breakfast together. After revealing His divine power and glory, now Jesus reveals His real, physical humanity, as He sits and eats with them. He's revealing His resurrected glory, as both God incarnate and the Man, true and better Adam, who was raised as the firstfruits of a New Creation. We're meant to see this seen as a revelation of His resurrected glory and humanity. It's no coincidence that the word "revealed" is repeated at the beginning, in vv.4 and 7, then again at the end of the passage in v.12. It reveals esus's glorious *resurrected humanity*: even though He's God, and even though He died and came back, He is in the flesh, physical, real, and tangibly, so much so that He cooks and eats bread and fish on the beach with Him.

It's a powerful picture of Christ's *transcendence* and *immanence*, His nearness - He is the divine Lord who comes down, reveals Himself and makes Himself known to His people, then sits and fellowships with them, providing food, cooking, breaking bread, eating together. Christ, not only in His incarnation and birth, but also in His *resurrected humanity*, reveals His glory in such a way to draw near to us and invite us to draw near to Him; He bridges the gap, He comes down to us, He breaks bread in fellowship with us. This is why we take Communion, the Lord's Supper, every Sunday: as we break bread together, Christ is breaking bread with us, inviting us to His Table, drawing near to us; it's a reminder that God has drawn near to us in His humanity, that He is eternally still *human* even in His glorious resurrected body, that He is *even now* with us and revealing His glory to us, and inviting us to come and enjoy His glorious fellowship and love forever. And just as the revelation of Jesus's resurrected glory compelled Peter to drop everything and run straight to Jesus, so it should capture our hearts and compel us to run to Christ, to love Him all the more and be reverent, worshipful, delighted awe at His glory and

grace. Friends, behold Jesus: behold His glory as God, behold His glory in His resurrected humanity, behold His love in condescending to come down, to draw near, and believe that He invites *you* come and sit and fellowship with Him, as His friend. And then come. Draw near in faith. Let your heart be compelled to love Christ all the more.

Because Jesus came down, died, rose again, and revealed Himself to His disciples so that *we* can believe and be redeemed and restored by Him. Which brings us to our second point...

## **II. If you love Jesus, He will redeem you from your worst sins, your guilt and shame, and even your deepest regrets (vv.15-19)**

After having breakfast on the beach, Jesus pulls Peter aside; perhaps they went on a walk, since v.20 mentions Peter looking behind him and seeing John following them, listening to their conversation. And Jesus asks Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He’s asking Peter if he loves Jesus more than the other disciples love Jesus. That may sound like a strange thing to ask, but remember, this is Peter: Peter often boasted of his love and undying loyalty for Jesus, a willingness to fight and die for Jesus! This is the guy who went to battle for Jesus and sliced off a guy’s ear in the garden when the soldiers came to arrest Him. But this is also the same Peter who, after talking a big game and starting off strong, denied Jesus that same night *three times* before the rooster crowed, denying Christ in order to save his own skin, even at the exact same moment as Christ stood on trial, condemned, in Peter’s place. And Jesus endured the unjust trial, and beatings, and mockery, and death, and condemnation and wrath of the Father on the Cross, and then conquered the grave through His resurrection - He did all of it to *save and redeem Peter*, the one who denied Him three times. And that’s why Jesus asks Peter three times here: “Peter, do you love me?” Three times around a charcoal fire in the high priest’s courtyard, Peter denied Jesus, saying he didn’t know the man and had nothing to do with him. Three times, around a charcoal fire on a beach after breakfast, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” It stung Peter; Peter kept saying, “yes, Lord, I love you,” “yes Lord, you *know* that I love you;” by the time Jesus asked it the third time, Peter was grieved in his heart, saying, “Lord, you know *everything*; you know that I love you.” He’s grieved because it feels like Jesus is saying he doesn’t quite believe that Peter loves him; he’s grieved because he knows he failed Jesus three times; and yet, even so, he truly does love Jesus. And that’s why Jesus is doing this: He’s giving Peter three opportunities to undo his denials, and confess His love for Christ, to claim the one whom he denied.

Some commentators and preachers like to draw attention to the fact that two different Greek words are used here for love, “agapao” and “phileo.” They say that the verb for “agape” love is a sacred, divine unconditional love, and “phileo” a lesser, brotherly love, and try to draw a lot of significance and application out of that. But that just isn’t the case. Don’t assume people have unlocked a hidden meaning just because they’re using fancy Greek words. The words “agape” and “phileo” are often used as synonyms for just the general word for “love.”<sup>2</sup> John is just using two different words that mean the same thing stylistically, just like Jesus says “lambs” in v.15,” then “sheep” in vv.16 and 17. The focus shouldn’t be on what *kind* of love Peter had but on the *genuineness* of his love and the *object* of His love: Jesus. That’s the point here.

Jesus is redeemed and restoring Peter. He has *already* redeemed Peter, through His finished work on the cross and in His resurrection. And now, He is inviting Peter to draw near, to confess his love and faith, and to see and believe that Jesus forgives him and is restoring him. Jesus is showing Peter that He has redeemed him from even his worst moments and deepest regrets. And He’s showing us this for our sake, too. If we believe in Jesus and love Him in truth, then He offers the same redemption to us - last chapter ended by telling us the point of this whole book is so that we will believe in Jesus and have life in His name; this chapter, and the whole book of John, ends with John telling us that He is the beloved disciple, that His testimony is true and trustworthy (v.24) He couldn’t write everything down that Jesus did or the world could not contain all the books that would be necessary (v.25). But what has been written is for our benefit: we’re given a true and trustworthy testimony and account of what happened, of who Jesus is, of how much He has loved us and loves us still, so that we, too, can know Him, believe in Him, trust Him, love Him, and follow Him.

If you trust in and love Christ, He will redeem you from even your worst sins, your deepest guilt and shame, and the moments you most deeply regret. So think back on your life and examine you’re own heart for a moment: what are those sins that you’ve been struggling with? What are the temptations you’ve been fighting - or having a hard time fighting? Christ knows your every sin that you’ve committed, knows your every struggle, you’re every moment of weakness and failure - and yet He loves you, He died for each of those sins, and He is drawing

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<sup>2</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p.676; James Hamilton, Jr., *ESV Expository Commentary*, The Gospel of John, p.306. For example, in the Greek Old Testament translation of 2 Sam. 13, the verb “agapao” was used when it says Amnon “loved” his sister, Tamar, whom he raped and then despised. In 2 Tim. 4:10 Demas, a false brother, fell away because he “loved” the present age, and that word is “agapao.” It doesn’t mean unconditional, divine love, it usually just means the general word for love.

near to you to redeem you; He has forgiven you and is at work in your life to redeem you from those sins, and even redeem those areas of brokenness, transforming them into moments that will display His glory, grace, and love for you. What's the burden of guilt or the baggage of shame that you've been carrying around with you, that weighs down your soul, that makes your heart sad and heavy, or effects your relationship with God or with other people? Christ knows all your guilt and all your shame; he knows what you've done and what you deserve - and yet He loves you, and draws near to you; He's not ashamed of you, but invites you to come and have genuine fellowship with Him, to cast your burdens and baggage, your guilt and shame, at His feet. Draw near and bring it to Christ and He will redeem and restore you. What are the deepest regrets in your life? Those moments that still haunt you, or fill you with embarrassment and regret? Those moments you wish more than anything that you could take back. Those moments you're ashamed to tell anyone else about, because you're afraid of what they would think of you. Friend, Jesus already knows all about it. He was there and saw it all. Yet He isn't revolted at you. He's not disgusted or turning away from you. He's calling out to you, drawing near to you, and inviting you to draw near to Him. He loves you. He has come to redeem, restore, and reconcile you to Himself and to the Father. He loves you so much He even *died* for you, in order to forgive your guilt and redeem your greatest regrets and shame!

How could you *not* love such a Savior as Jesus? Why would you not want Him to be your Friend? No matter who you are, or what you've done, no matter how bad you are or messed up you think your life is, God sees you, knows you, loves you, and cares for you; He invites you to draw near and trust Him to love you, provide for you, forgive you, and redeem you. So don't stay on the sidelines. Draw near to Christ. Come and love Christ, because He first loved you; come and rest in His grace and He will redeem you, even from your worst sins and deepest regrets. This is promised to all who truly love Christ and believe in Him!

But what does it *look* like to truly love Christ? How do we show that we love Him? This brings us to our next three points, starting with point number three...

### **III. If you love Jesus, show it by investing in His sheep: your fellow Christians (vv.15-17)**

Look back at verses 15-17: Each time Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" and Peter responds, "yes Lord, I love you," Jesus then replies, "Feed my lambs," (v.15); "tend my sheep" (v.16); "feed my sheep" (v.17). These are three different ways of saying the same thing: Jesus's sheep are His people, those who repent and believe in Him as the Good Shepherd who laid down

His life for us. Jesus's sheep are all true Christians. And Jesus tells Peter that if he truly loves Him, then he should show it by feeding and tending to His people *spiritually*. This refers to the work of pastoral ministry: pasting the flock of God, Christians in a local church, through preaching, teaching, counseling, oversight, and general pastoral care. Christ is commissioning Peter. The first time Jesus told Peter to throw out a net after a long night of catching nothing, and he caught a ton of fish, Jesus then told him to come and follow Him and He would make him a fisher of men. Now, after doing that same miracle a second time, He tells Peter to follow Him again, and commissions Him to go forth and pastor and teach His people, feeding His sheep and tending the flock as an undershepherd to Christ. All of the early disciples were charged to do this, as Apostles; they wrote scripture and planted and pastored the early church. But Jesus singles out this commission for Peter here, for two main reasons, I think: first, to show him that he truly is redeemed and restored, that even though he denied Christ, Christ is calling him to go and *represent* Christ as a spiritual leader; and secondly, it shows us that true love for Jesus will always reveal itself in true love for Jesus's people.

If we love Christ, we will love Christ's people, Christ's Church, our fellow Christians. Jesus made this abundantly clear back in chapter 14: if we love Christ, we must love one another. So Peter is called to show His love for Jesus and put it into action by loving Jesus's people as a pastor, building up local churches, real flesh and blood flocks of Christians, through preaching, teaching, and pastoral care. This is a wonderful encouragement and charge to pastors, or to anyone here today who aspires to pastor, to "shepherd," as an elder one day; it's also an encouragement to all of us that Jesus gives us pastors *because He loves us*; He calls each of us to be part of a local church because He intends to shepherd and feed our souls, in part, through gifting and raising up qualified men to feed and tend to our souls, giving us the spiritual food of the word and binding our wounds and coming after us when we stray. This is God's plan for us.

But this doesn't *only* apply to pastors. Every Christian is called to put love for Christ into action by loving Christ's people. Not all Christians will be pastors or teachers. In fact, James tells us that *most* people should not be teachers. And most Christians are not qualified to be pastors. But *all* Christians are gifted by the Holy Spirit to pour into fellow Christians and build them up in love. We all have different gifts and we're all called to use them for encouraging, edifying, and discipling one another spiritually. If you love Jesus, you must show it by loving His people - your fellow Christians. Be part of a local flock and commit yourself to it as a member. Feed your

brothers and sisters spiritually by praying for them and with them; by singing loudly and joyfully in corporate worship, singing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs to one another; by serving and meeting needs, giving, fellowshipping, and caring for one another. Or any other gifts or opportunities the Lord gives you. Show you love Jesus by showing your love and care for His Church. Secondly, we show our love for Christ when enduring suffering for His sake...

#### **IV. If you love Jesus, show it by being willing to endure suffering for His sake (vv.18-19)**

In vv.18-19, Jesus says to Peter: “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk where 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.’” As Jesus concludes this moment of redemption and restoration for Peter, redeeming Peter’s moments of denial and shame and failure, he tells Peter that he is going to show how much he loves Jesus by dying for the sake of Christ, glorifying God in his death by dying as a martyr, being persecuted unto death for the gospel. Jesus is prophesying about the future, when Peter will be an old man, bound and captive as a prisoner, blind, suffering and dying for the sake of Christ.

If we love Jesus, we must be willing to endure suffering for His sake, and strive to glorify Him, in our life and death. If we believe in Jesus, love Him, and follow Him, we will suffer for His sake, just as he suffered for our sake on the cross. Jesus told us this explicitly back in chapter 16, and now Peter is being held up as an example for us. This does not mean that every true Christian will be imprisoned or killed for their faith. Nor does it mean that only martyrs truly love Jesus. No, that’s not the point. Suffering and persecution come in many different varieties. And no Christian has ever suffered as much as Christ has suffered for us. Yet all of us are called to pick up our cross and follow Him, to take part in the afflictions of Christ. It will be different for each of us: your walk will not be the same as mine, or the person sitting next to you. But each of us will endure suffering and persecution, of some kind and in some way. Some may be more than others; some forms are definitely harder. We should all be very grateful that we are not living in Nigeria or Somalia or any of the many other places where Christians are being beaten, imprisoned, and killed simply for being Christians. We should remember and pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters faithfully.

But we, too, must also be willing to patiently endure whatever suffering Christ calls us to endure in a way that glorifies Him. When we do, we are showing that we love and trust Jesus. Especially when we do so without complaining or comparing our walk negatively with others', which we see in our fifth and final point...

**V. If you love Jesus, show it by following Christ and obeying God's Will for your life without complaining or comparing it to other people's callings (vv.v.19b-25)**

After Jesus calls Peter to follow Him, in the end of v.19, Peter then turns around and points at John, the beloved disciple, and says, in v.21, "Lord, what about this man?" It's possible that Peter is asking out of concern for John, one of his best friends; he's just heard about how he's going to suffer in death for the glory of Christ, so maybe he's asking out of concern for his friend, hoping the same won't happen to him. But I think it's far more likely that Peter is not being quite so selfless and benevolent in his question here; I think what he's saying is, "Hey, that sounds pretty bad, Jesus; if I'm going to have to suffer and die as a martyr, well... what about him? Why don't you say how bad it'll be for him, too?" But that misses the point entirely. He needs to focus on Christ and following God's will for His life, and not worry about God's will for John's walk; it's none of his business what suffering will befall him, and it's not his place to compare who is going to suffer more or less, or to complain or call it unfair. That's exactly Jesus's point in vv.22-23: "Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!' So the saying spread among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?' In other words, Jesus was saying, "That's none of your business." People in the early church misunderstood and thought that meant John wouldn't die, but no, John sets the record straight: Jesus was simply making his point with a hypothetical.

The point is this: if you love Jesus, you show it by following Christ and obeying God's will for your life without complaining about it and without comparing it to the path He calls others to walk down. We should not complain and call it unfair when following Jesus brings hardship into our lives, and then we look over and see other Christians following Jesus and being blessed because of it. We should rejoice in both situations, and count it a joy to share in Christ's afflictions and glorify Him in our suffering, trusting that His will for our life is good and perfect and best for us. We should not look down on Christians who suffer less than us, or doubt our faith because we suffer less than others. It would be ridiculous for Peter to look down on John or

doubt his love for Christ just because he didn't die a martyr. We don't need to worry about what other people are going to go through. We must not complain or compare like that. We must simply worry about our own walk with Christ, keep our eyes on Jesus, and follow Him. If you love Jesus, focus on follow Him, obeying Him, and being like Him, no matter what it costs you, even when it makes your life harder sometimes, even when it feels unfair. We know Christ suffered far more for our sakes, and we know it will all be worth it when we are raised up with Him unto eternal life. So let us trust God's will for our lives, Brothers and Sisters, and joyfully follow Christ and God's will for each of us.

Let us show our love for Christ by loving His people, enduring suffering for His sake, and following Him without complaining. And let us love Christ all the more because of His great love for us in drawing near to redeem us from all our sin, guilt, and shame. And one way we get to do this is by coming to the Lord's Table, to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. Just as Christ broke bread and ate breakfast in fellowship with His disciples on the beach, so He invites us to come and break bread in fellowship with Him as His beloved sheep whom He loves and feeds and provides for. As we come to the Table, we are proclaiming our love for Christ and His people as we draw near to Him and to one another. So if you are a sheep part of Christ's flock - baptized believer who belongs to a gospel believing church family - then we invite you to come join us at the Table in just a moment.

But if those three things don't describe you, we invite you instead to just sit back and observe, and to respond instead by, first of all, repenting believing in Christ to redeem you from your sins; secondly, by proclaiming and showing your love for Christ by being baptized; and thirdly, by showing your love for Jesus by loving His people and joining a local, gospel preaching church that will spiritually feed and tend to your soul. If you have any questions about any of those three things, please come and find one of us after the service; we would love to speak with you. Until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.