

Question Series

Title: Lovest Thou Me?

Text: Jn 21: 15-22

Date: August 20, 2020

Place: SGBC, NJ

Peter was an apostle—even a chief apostle—he was the apostle to the Jews, while Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles—but Peter was a sinner.

Mark 14: 27 And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. 28: But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. 29: But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.

We are just like Peter: he missed the good news Christ declared—that Christ would conquer sin, death and hell and arise and see them again. He missed it because of the pride of his flesh. He could not consider that it was possible he could deny the Lord like the rest. What he said is the same as saying, “I love you, Lord, more than these other apostles love you; they all shall be offended, yet not I.”

Mark 14: 30: And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, *even* in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. 31: But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.

God knows what we need before we ask him because God knows what we will do before we do it. So Peter followed as the soldiers took our Lord.

Mark 14: 66: And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: 67: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. 68: But he denied saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. (1x) And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. 69: And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is *one* of them. 70: And he denied it again. (2x) And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art *one* of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth *thereto*. 71: But he began to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not this man of whom ye speak. (3x) 72: And the second time the cock crew. [Luke says, “And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.”] And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept. [Matthew and Luke say, “he wept bitterly”—with piercing bitterness]

John 21: 14 This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead 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. 18: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy

hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not. 19: This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

Our Lord told Peter, “The devil has desired to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” Peter had to experience this fall. Like us, he was too proud, thought his love was great, his understanding great, that he was wise to instruct others. He was too self-confident. He boasted that though these other disciples deny you, I never will. He protested that he would die with the Lord but never deny him.

The Lord said *it is written*. There are a lot of falls written for you and me brethren. “We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God.” The Lord told Peter in great detail—“*Before the cock crows twice you will deny me 3 times.*” Then Peter did it: he swear, cursed, denied the Lord three times. Before we are too unkind, remember, all of our sin is a denial of the Lord. It is that bad. The Lord looked at him. It broke his heart. He went out and wept bitterly, piercing bitterness

But we see the unchanging, unchangeable love of God. Christ promised after he arose he would come and comfort them. So the Lord sent word to his disciples—he said for them to tell Peter also. The Lord told them to go a mount in Galilee and wait on him. But all-loving, all-knowing, all-wise Peter got weary of waiting on the Lord. How often do I find myself doing that! Peter said, “*I go fishing.*” The original language is final. He was going back to his prior life. Sadly, six others followed him.

Now, Peter had already been converted by the Lord Jesus—Peter believed the Lord. But now the Lord has come to convert him from this trial, to restore him in love, that he might learn to do the same for his erring brethren whom the Lord entrusted him to minister unto. All this was needful to teach him the Lord’s unchanging love, grace, mercy, longsuffering, tenderness, gentleness, meekness, lowliness. It was needful to teach Peter how to minister the same to his brethren: how to love, be merciful, longsuffering and tender, and forgive sin like as Christ forgave him.

Proposition: In the way that the Lord dealt with Peter, we see Love (personified) restoring in love: by love we mean mercy, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness and so on—that is our Lord, he is Love!

I pray the Lord Jesus teach me to love as he loves, to be merciful, kind, to restore as he does me. I have failed so badly at this. But when we fall Christ lifts us, strengthens and comforts to teach us to do same to our brethren when they fall. This is not something we learn except by the love and grace of our Lord making us experience his love after our falls. But from the first hour to the last, Christ teaches his sheep that “where sin abounds, his grace does much more abound!”

DRAWN IN LOVINGKINDNESS

John 21: 14: This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. 15: So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas...

Despite his denial, despite not waiting, despite leaving his profession, the Lord came and drew Peter to himself. God said, "I loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore in

lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” He never stops. In spite of all our awful sin, the Lord never stops loving us and drawing us in loving kindness.

He does it by first feeding us his gospel, his word. We see it in type in how he provided all for Peter and the others. Christ called them to himself and when they got to the Lord *verse 9, 12* says “*There was hot coals and fish laid thereon and bread...Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine.*”

Christ reminds us all is done! Christ first feeds us with the gospel of his glorious person and work. He is God our Savior, a Man who is like us in every way but sin. He is our successful Redeemer—he finished the work. Christ provided all things for his people—Christ is our Meat, our Bread, Life. He has put away the sins of his people and made us righteous in him. Our gracious Shepherd finds his straying sheep in our sin and draws us to himself and there is nothing to be done. He says to those he redeemed by grace, “*Come and dine!*”

He does this to restore us from every trial as well. He said, “Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you.” He has first got to strengthen us with himself—with his gospel, his word, his presence in our hearts. We never cease needing to be fed Life by him. And he never ceases. What unchanging, unchangeable love of Christ toward his sinful people!

The Lord reminded Peter of his unchanging love by how he addressed Peter—“*So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas...*” That got Peter’s attention. The Lord had changed his name to Peter (Cephas). Here says Simon, Barjonas. Another time the Lord used this name. The Lord asked, “Who do *you* say that I am?”

Matthew 16:16: And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17: And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

This name reminded Peter that the Lord found him dead in trespasses and in sins. It reminded Peter of the Lord’s love and grace that called him out of darkness into light. Here the Lord is doing it again. The Lord taught Peter that to restore a fallen brother, begins with drawing them in lovingkindness and feeding them the gospel of Christ our Redemption who never changes in his grace, love, mercy to us.

LOVE RESTORED

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. 17: He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. 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.

The Lord restored Peter’s love for the Lord by reminding Peter of the Lord’s love for him. The Lord did not ask “Why did you deny Me?” He did not ask, “Have you repented and mourned your sin enough?” He did not ask what doctrine he knew. The Lord asked Peter—“*Lovest thou me?*” This is the issue—“*Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?*”

Do *you* love him as all your salvation? Do you love that Christ alone is your Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption? Do you love that Christ alone gets all the glory in every aspect of your salvation? If so he gets the glory for that too

1 John 4: 19: We love him, because he first loved us.

The Lord's question and answer on each of these is significant. First, the Lord asks, "*Lovest thou me more than these?*" The Lord may have been referring to the boats, nets, because Christ said, "No man can serve two masters; he will love the one and hate the other."

But remember the pride and self-exaltation in Peter's boast? Speaking of his brethren, he said, "Though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." Peter was referring to the other disciples. He was saying that these may leave you but I never! Now, our Lord asks, "*Lovest thou me (more than these other disciples love me)?*"

From his fall, Peter knows now that he does not love Christ more they do. He denied the Lord just like they did. We may be critical of another brother but when the Lord sends the same trial to our own house we find out we are not better in anything than any other sinner. I do not love more, sin less, do more acts of righteousness, serve or worship better than any another brother. It makes us see we will do what any other sinner will do. But now that the Lord showed this to Peter, Peter's answer is from a broken, contrite, penitent heart—"*He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee*" and he left it at that.

So the Lord says, "*Feed my lambs.*" That is important! Remember, the Lord said, "When thou art converted, strengthen your brethren." In each of these questions, the Lord shows the love with which he restores us. He is teaching Peter (and us) the love needful for ministering to fallen brethren. Here the needed thing is humility, lowliness of mind, esteeming myself the least and my brother better. How do we see that? *The Lord's lambs* are babies in Christ. They are bruised reeds and smoking flax. Christ's lambs are not sweet little innocent children. A new believer does not know his sin as he will one day. So babes can be more arrogant, haughty, judgmental, self-willed like Peter was before. We can all be that way at any time. And to feed a brother in that spirit the Lord must bring them down. But our Lord does so in lowliness of mind, with a meek and easy spirit that is easy to be entreated. He deals with us tenderly to teach us to deal tenderly and in lowliness.

Peter is taught this in the meek and lowly spirit with which the Lord is dealing with him. See how tender the Lord deals with Peter. We learn our Lord's spirit by falling then finding out, "He hath not deal with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities, For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. He pities us like a father his child; he remembers we are dust. "He does not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax." He carries the little weak lamb in his breast.

So we see our Saviors unchanging love in his meekness to Peter. After Peter denied the Lord three times, left his apostleship for his former life, lead at least six others away, our Shepherd entrusts Peter with ministering to his little lambs. Peter must have been thinking, "Indeed, nothing can separate one of God's elect from the love of God in Christ Jesus!"

In the second question the Lord leaves out "more than these"—"*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.*" The Lord left out "more than these" because the Lord knew Peter's heart was broken and contrite now. This shows the love of our

Redeemer in how he restores us with upbraiding us, without throwing it back in our teeth when we are repentant and sorry for our sins.

James 1:5: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

The Lord did not cast Peter's sins in his teeth. He did not chide or taunt him, reproach or revile him or judge him. So this time the Lord says, "*Feed my sheep.*" The Lord has lambs but also sheep—young men and women who are in the prime of life and apt to fall into any kind of sin. If Peter will be a bearer of his brethren's burdens then they need to know that they can come to Peter and he will not upbraid them or else they will keep everything from him. Our Savior taught Peter by not upbraiding him, not pushing his sin back at him, once it was obvious Peter's heart was broken and contrite. That is how our Lord deals with us.

Isaiah 55: 7: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

We can confess any sin to our Savior and he receives us in lowliness and upbraids not. To our amazement he has tender mercy upon us and pardons our sins. I want to be that receptive and gentle and forgiving toward you.

Then the Lord asks a third time, "*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?*" The grief Peter experienced was in remembering that it was the third denial when the cock crowed and Peter wept. But it was after that third denial that Peter remembered the Lord had truly known his heart. While it grieved Peter to think on the bitterness of that sin, it comforted him to remember the Lord knew his heart. So look at Peter's reply, "*And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.*" Peter says, "Lord you knew I would deny you before I did. You knew I would go back fishing and where to find me. You told me beforehand you would restore me. And here you are knowing exactly how to do it. Lord, you know all things; you know I love you."

So the Lord said, "*Feed my sheep.*" There are babes in Christ who are lambs, young men and women in the faith who are sheep and there are aged believers who are sheep. The longer in the faith the more you see your sins in everything you think and do. So the more comforting it is to be assured, "*Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*"

Psalm 139: 1: « To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. » O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*. 2: Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. 3: Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways. 4: For *there is* not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. 5: Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. 6: *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot *attain* unto it. 7: Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? 8: If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. 9: *If* I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; 10: Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

It is that trust in the Lord's knowledge and wisdom and understanding that the Lord restores us. It is that same trust in the Lord's knowledge that we need to comfort the Lord's sheep.

The wiser we behold the Lord Jesus, the more ignorant and abased we will become. The more we are apt to hurt with our brethren and remind them, “The Lord knows. He knows your heart.” And that is so needful. It is so needful that we see the Lord as wise rather than ourselves.

Proverbs 3: 7: Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. 8: It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

Romans 12:16:...Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

My grandmother took a fall and is having trouble knowing anything or anyone much less knowing the Lord. But what a comfort, “the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, the Lord knoweth them that are his.” It is food to the Lord’s sheep that he knows everything about me. The Lord knows the heart he has created in me. The Lord knows my sin and how to save me from it. Believer, the Lord knows that about you and yours too! What a comfort!

FOLLOW THOU ME

Luke 21: 18: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. 19: This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. 20: Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following;...21: Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? 22: Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

Remember, Peter vehemently said to the Lord, “I am ready to die with you.” Now, the Lord say when you were younger in the faith, before this trial, you were not ready—you were self-willed, full of yourself, too confident in what you thought you knew. The result? Peter denied the Lord and went out and wept bitterly.

The Lord says “But there is coming a day that indeed you will die for me—you will be crucified—and glorify God thereby. So follow me.” Christ submitted to the Father’s will—“not my will but thine be done.” He says, “Now, Peter follow me in submission to my will.” Christ faced the cross knowing all would forsake him but knowing “I am not alone the Father is with me.” He says, “Now, Peter follow me, cast all your care on me because I am with you, I care for you.” Christ overcame the devil’s tempting by looking to his Father in faith. The Lord says, “Now, Peter follow me. Resist the devil by faith that is in me.” Christ waited on the Father to raise him when the work was accomplished. He says, “Now, Peter follow me. In my time I will exalt you.”

Was Peter cured of himself? No, neither are we. The Lord has graciously taken Peter aside so as not to shame him in front of his brethren. But they look around and see John coming up behind them. Peter said, “*Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.*”

The Lord says, “Peter, stop worrying about your brother’s business, *you* follow me.” The Lord is saying to me personally, “Do *you* see that you cannot boast in your love for the Lord? Are *you* meek and lowly knowing you are not greater than your brethren in anything? Have *you* been made someone your brethren feel comfortable confiding in and leaning on when

they sin because you upbraid not? Have *you* been made to trust the Lord's wisdom rather than your own, the Lord's will rather than self-will? Have *you* been made to lay down your life in submission to his will for the good of your brethren?" These are all the things the Lord is to us in love and mercy and kindness and longsuffering and in his sacrifice for the sins of his people. So the Lord says "*Follow thou me*" in all these things.

In his later years, Peter summed up everything the Lord had taught him in his epistle:

1 Peter 5: 1: The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3: Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4: And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

5: Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 6: Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 7: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

8: Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

10: But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*. 11: To him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever.

Amen.