

**Sermon Series**  
**The Gospel of John**  
**October 11, 2020**

**Title: Jesus Challenges His Disciples**

*Subject: Christian Service, Love for Christ, Feeding, the Word, the Sheep, Shepherding, The Unknowns of Service, Sacrifices of Service, Peter, the Disciples, Providence*

**Theme Text: John 21:15-17 (ESV) <sup>15</sup> When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, 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.” <sup>16</sup> He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, 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 everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.**

**Theme Illustration:** In our text, Simon Peter is brought forward as to the focus of our attention. In the gospel, Jesus uses Peter as a representative believer and spiritual leader. So, our theme of Christian service continues which began in the first part of this chapter. In the first section, we have Christian service displayed corporately by the fishermen fishing for fish and dragging the net full of fish to shore and bringing them to Jesus. In this closing passage, the focus remains on Christian service by God’s appointed spiritual leaders and workers in His kingdom. Peter’s fall, the cause of that fall, and his restoration and the Lord’s means of that fall illustrate the experiences of the Christian and his service along with God’s provision of grace for that life and service.

The issue here is the motivation for service. In our text, the Lord not only challenges Peter and the disciples but all of us to reconsider our motivation

for obedience and service. Peter when called to fish for men began to do so out of duty and his personal energy and strength. As the Lord indicates, our motivation for service must transition from duty to love. We must obey God because we love Him. We now serve His sheep because we love Him and them. This is the vital difference between a Good Shepherd and a hireling, **John 10:11 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** This is an illustration of the highest love. Our Lord is preparing Peter and the other disciples to be put to the test on this issue of love for him in the future. The message to them was if you love me then shepherd or tend or care or feed my sheep.

*Read: John 21:15-25*

**Introduction:** In the first part of this chapter, Jesus reconfirms the calling of the apostles to be fishers of men. To grasp with the full weight of our text today, we must retrace some of our Lord's dealing with Peter. Jesus had warned Peter about Satan's request which was granted by God to sift him as wheat, **Luke 22:31-32 (ESV)** <sup>31</sup> **"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,** <sup>32</sup> **but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."** We need to notice that our Lord did not pray to keep Peter from falling. Our Lord knew best that Peter must come to the end of his self-confidence and his pride must be humbled. Of course, we remember Peter's reply, **Matthew 26:33-34 (ESV)** <sup>33</sup> **Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."** Peter had claimed that his loyalty was superior to those of his fellow disciples. We remember that it was Peter who thrust himself into the water to drag the net full of fish to Jesus.

*Transition: I see three teaching points are text, the motivation for service, the resulting sacrifice of service, and God's providence in service. First, we see our Lord's challenges concerning:*

**1. Motivation For Service: John 21:15-17 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> **When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, 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.”<sup>16</sup> He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”<sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, 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 everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.**

The meal is concluded, Jesus now addresses Simon Peter directly. Our Lord did not address Peter with reproach. But our Lord did address him by Peter’s given, old order name and not Peter, the rock. This is instructive. Jesus was helping Peter to remember his past as a natural man. It was not Peter the rock who fell it was Simon son of John who fell.

Jesus was calling him to remember this event, **Matthew 16:17-18 (ESV)<sup>17</sup>**  
**And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.<sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.** Peter had not been acting as Peter but as Simon son of John. Therefore, the Lord reminded Peter of his boast and now offers him the opportunity to retract his former boast. In his response, Peter is satisfied to speak for himself. Peter is now content to leave the question to Jesus as to his love for the Lord, the Searcher of Hearts. No idle boast will suffice anymore. Here we see Peter’s arrogance replaced with humility and confidence. He is confident that Jesus knows that Peter loves Him.

Our Lord’s response to Peter’s answer displays how marvelous is His grace. Our Lord accepts Peter’s admission and gives him a commission. This commission is our Lord’s way of rewarding Peter’s confession. Our Lord was getting ready to leave the world so here He appoints others to minister to His people. He changes the command from fishing to shepherding, from an evangelist to pastor-teacher. God’s people who have been saved need shepherding, feeding, and defending. In dragging that net to shore to Jesus,

the first mention is to His lambs. These are the weak and feeble of the flock. They have the first claim on the shepherd's time and resources. They are Jesus' lambs. Therefore, Jesus claims the right to appoint His under-shepherds. Not everybody who claims to be a pastor-teacher or under-shepherd has a right to that claim.

Our Lord now drops the more than these and confines Himself to love itself. This is a very searching question. We as believers may know much, talk much, give much, sacrifice much, and yet we are dead before God for want of love. Do we love Christ? This is a great question for all servants of Christ.

Do you love your position in the church or do you love Christ? Without love, we are no better than wax figures in Madame Tussauds Wax Museum. When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, Jesus uses the much stronger word for love, which is sacrificial love. When Peter answered he replied that Jesus knows that Peter was fond of Him. Peter, now having been humbled from statements of superiority, refused to say that he had the highest love.

Jesus's response is to commission Peter to expand his role from a shepherd, which is to rule and discipline God's family to tending them. This word points to a constant preoccupation for the sheep both to feed and nourish them.

In verse 17, Jesus asked the question the third time, but he now uses the weaker term, are you fond of me? Three times did Peter deny His Lord, so three times our Lord challenges Peter's love. In the first question, Jesus challenges the superiority of Peter's love. In the second question, Jesus challenged whether Peter loved at all. Now the Lord challenges even Peter's fondness. Peter was cut to the heart. This is the power of the word. Peter was grieved as he recalled his threefold denial.

Peter, now stripped of any pretensions, defers to Christ. He knows that Christ is God and that as God he saw through any personal clouds of obfuscation. Christ had stripped off Peter's fig leaves and now Peter sees himself. This is a miracle of divine grace. Now Peter owns himself.

The only way to manifest our love for Christ for those called to ministry is to feed His sheep. For the pastor shepherd, only our love for Christ can sustain the discouragements, criticisms, and attacks from Satan. It is only these that Christ has fitted and can feed His sheep.

**Transition:** When Christ appoints to service, we are now being challenged to accept that He determines the scope of that service. Each shepherd each servant is going to be called to some aspect of:

**2. Sacrifice of Service: John 21:18-19 (ESV) <sup>18</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever 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.” <sup>19</sup> (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.”**

The Lord now takes Peter back to his fervent declaration of **Luke 22:33 (ESV) <sup>33</sup> Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”** Even though Peter failed to confess Christ freely when the Lord was arrested, Peter must accept the fact that God will arrange the circumstances by the will of God to have another shot at confessing Christ. Beloved every one of us, our confession that Jesus Christ is Lord will be tested. The Lord reveals an aspect of Peter’s future. Peter will, in the future, be tested by his choice either to confess or deny Christ. Jesus graciously also tells Peter that he will not fail the second time. Peter is going to confess Christ even to his death. It is therefore the lane of every servant of Jesus Christ to glorify Christ in death as well as in life. Despite the circumstances, the command is to follow Christ. We all know what this means, deny self, and take up our cross.

**Transition:** Lastly our Lord rebukes Peter because he must not judge his lane by the lanes that God grants to others. It is the Lord who decides our path and:

**3. Providence in Service: John 21:20-23 (ESV) <sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” <sup>23</sup> So the saying spread abroad 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?”**

Having been informed of his own path, Peter now looks at John and asked the Lord what about him? Oh, how the flesh remains in Peter. Peter is wondering John is being called to the same level of sacrifice. Do we detect ministry envy in him? Why do I have to walk my path when others have in my estimation and easier path, a more successful path, or a more glorious path?

Jesus tells Peter to mind his own business. This is what Paul told Timothy, **1 Timothy 4:16 (ESV) <sup>16</sup> Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.** We are to fulfill our own duty and walk our own lane. We are not to be curious as to the decrees of God concerning the lanes of others. Mind your own lane.

Does not verse 23 indicate that His coming remains a pending event. We as his servants should expect our Lord's return first and foremost, not our death. When we die, we go to be with Christ. When the Lord returns, He comes to be with us. In this gospel, our last view of the disciples we see them with the Lord.

**Conclusion:** We will close our study of this gospel with a reminder of the inadequacy of human words to describe the glory of our magnificent Christ. We would all like to know what is not been recorded. What we have been given, has been given for us to know that John is a true witness and that by believing in him we will have life in his name.

**John 21:24-25 (ESV) <sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. <sup>25</sup> Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.**

As John closes our gaze on this gospel, he believes that every library in the world should be filled with the acts of Jesus Christ. And so, should our minds and our hearts be also filled with wonder, thanksgiving, repentance, devotion, and love.