

Appearance to 7 Disciples in Galilee – Part 2

John 21:15-25

Appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection:

1. Mary at the tomb – John 20:11-18
2. Woman leaving the tomb – Matt. 28:9-10
3. Two followers on the road to Emmaus – Luke 24:13-32
4. Peter – Luke 24:34
5. 10 of the 11 disciples – no Thomas – John 20:19-25
6. 11 disciples – Thomas (8 days later) John 20:26-31
7. 7 disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee – John 21:1-25
8. 500+ disciples and followers in Galilee – I Cor. 15:6
9. James the brother of Jesus – I Cor. 15:7
10. 11 disciples at the ascension – Acts 1:3-11

The first three Gospel records leave us wondering how Peter moved from denying Christ in the judgement hall to the place of leadership in the Book of Acts. In his epilogue, John will tell of the wonderful public conversation that indicated to all Christ's confidence in and call to Peter. This passage gives that conversation and clears up a contemporary rumor that circulated among the early church.

This is Peter's fourth time seeing Jesus after the resurrection. This conversation with Peter will be done before the six other disciples on the shores of Galilee. Peter's love for Christ will be questioned based on his three denials in the judgement hall. This was a very public sin and Christ will restore Peter to his place of leadership before the other apostles and help Peter understand the most important aspect of service to God – Love for Christ!

I. "Lovest thou me more than these?"

"So when they had dined (eaten breakfast), 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." John 21:15

"Simon, son of Jonas," – Here Jesus uses Peter's old name. He is not using the name "Peter" that means "rock" for Peter has not acting or thinking like the foundational leader to the early church. Peter was forgiven and loved by Christ, but Peter was unsure and lacked confidence that Christ could and would use him. Jesus using this name for Peter would have been caught by all the disciples and grieving to Peter.

"Lovest thou me more than these?" – Let's look at the meaning of these words

"Lovest" – Gk – "agape" – self-sacrificial giving to another which originates in the will; this is a high spiritual love; serve at the cost of sacrifice; high love of devotion and sacrifice

"these" – possibilities – 1. "fish and the fishing industry" – both the Greek used in v. 3 for fish meaning expedition and the fact they had all left fishing and traveled with Jesus faithfully leaves this not likely

2. “disciples” – these men were Peter’s friends but this does not fit the setting or what Jesus is ultimately seeking to correct; 3. “Do you love me more than the other disciples love me?” - Remember, this is about the denials – Matt. 26:31-33 Peter will boastfully declare even though all the other disciples deny Christ, he would not! This was a very prideful statement. He certainly did not understand his own weaknesses and fears and proved it in the judgement hall. The disciples still had the sharp word of Peter and the three-fold denials on their minds.

“Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.” – Peter has been humbled! No one can know the conversation between Jesus and him on resurrection day, but most feel that would have been a sweet time of confession and forgiveness. Peter gives no reference to the other disciples. He will not compare himself to anyone, Peter gives only a simple answer. He is done boasting; he is much more modest; he is not willing to compare himself with others! Peter realizes he does not really know his own heart. Matter-of-fact Peter has seemingly lost all confidence in his commitment to Christ. Instead of the word Jesus used, “agape”, Peter will use a much weaker word for love, “phileo” – affection, a spontaneous or natural liking or sympathy for someone, brotherly love, it arises from emotions and responds to what is attractive, pleasing or satisfying, to be a friend, to love as a friend; Peter does not trust himself to say “agape”. Sacrifice is a characteristic of this kind of love and his betrayal showed the weakness of his heart when faced with peril.

Don’t miss that Peter will appeal to Christ to measure his love. “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.” Peter knew that Jesus knew all things including the heart of man. Peter understood the omniscience of Jesus, and that Jesus would know his true feelings though Peter was unsure and fearful to articulate it.

“Feed my lambs.” – Please realize, Jesus accepted Peter’s answer, He knew Peter’s heart and love for Him. Before the rest of the men gathered that morning, Jesus gave Peter this very important commission. “Feed my lambs.” “Feed” – Gk – is provide food, grazing, make sure needs are met; close careful attention, constant feeding and nourishment is the primary duty for “lambs” – little baby sheep; very young; In just a few days, as the church is established, new believers will be added daily. These new converts to Christ will need special care in teaching of the Word of God, directing in God’s way, and guiding in their new faith. Peter is called to this work here! “phileo” love would not have been enough to feed God’s sheep. Acts 20:28; I Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 4:2; I Peter 5:2-4

II. “Lovest thou me?”

“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.” John 21:16

“lovest thou me?” – This time Jesus left out the superior love over the others, while still using the “agape” love word. Let’s remember that it was Peter who drew a sword for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We know Peter deeply loved his Lord! But when it came to true peril, he caved! Jesus loved Peter. HA Ironside said, “he (Peter) was just as tenderly loved by the Lord after his failure as before, I wish we could take that in.” JRRice pg. 412

“Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.” – Again, Peter uses the weaker word for love – “phileo” and will appeal to Jesus’ all-knowing power to search his heart. Peter is unwilling to say that he loves Jesus will the “agape” love that demands sacrifice after his terrible fall in the judgement hall. He did not trust himself.

“Feed my sheep.” – Gk – “Shepherd my sheep” – This phrase is much more about leadership among individual mature believers while the first phrase dealt with new converts. This shepherding focuses on the tending, directing, and providing the daily needs of the older, mature sheep.

Notice: Jesus does not ask Peter to disciple the young and feed the old. In actuality, Jesus asks Peter to do the opposite, feed the young and discipline the old!

III. “Peter was grieved”

“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.” John 21:17

“lovest thou me?” – This is the third time Jesus asks a question about Peter’s love. In the KJV the same English word is used again “lovest”. But in the Greek, this is not really the thought. Here Jesus will descend to the word “phileo” – affection, brotherly love, friendship, the same word Peter has replied back to Jesus twice. Now Jesus seems to be questioning even the level of love Peter felt safe in claiming! “Simon, are you even my friend?”

“Peter was grieved” – So it is easy to see Peter’s grief was not about being asked three times but instead the degree of love Jesus questions this time!

“Lord, thou knowest all things;” – Peter will again appeal to Jesus’ omniscience. “thou knowest all things;”! Peter had seen Jesus demonstrate His omniscience over and over again, both when dealing with the disciples and with others.

“thou knowest that I love thee.” – Peter was confident Jesus understood exactly the level of love he felt for Him. Though Peter was not sure himself. He was so humbled by his boasting and miserable failure.

“Feed my sheep.” – Again, the KJV words are identical to the previous command to Peter, but the Greek words spin a slightly different aspect to Peter’s calls. The first command was centered on the new converts that soon would come to faith in Jesus the Messiah. The second command dealt with Peter’s ministry among the mature believers. This third command is covering all the tasks of a shepherd. This encompasses all the needs of all the sheep! Not only is Peter to be a fisher of men but a shepherd to men. He will have a broad ministry and in reality, all the disciples did.

3 denials = 3 questions + 3 answers + 3 commissions

Christ seemed satisfied with Peter’s humble, thoughtful answer for He commissions him to feed and follow! Jesus did know Peter’s heart, just as He truly knows our heart!

Jesus had spoken to Peter about life and ministry. Yet Peter felt weak, powerless, and lacked confidence in his own endurance in difficulty. Here Jesus will assure Peter of his long faithful ministry and his loyalty in the face of martyrdom.

IV. Peter's Martyrdom Prophesied

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest 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. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.” John 21:18-19

“When thou wast young,” – Jesus reveals that Peter’s ministry of fishing and shepherding men will last many years. He will move about serving his Lord for over 30 years.

“but when thou shalt be old,” – Peter will live to be an old man. In fact, he will live faithfully everyday knowing he would die as a martyr. God would lead him, the Holy Spirit would empower him, and Peter would be given divine strength. Peter was very mindful that his days were numbered and drove him to careful service. He wrote about this revelation from Jesus this morning on the Sea of Galilee in 2 Peter 1:13-16.

“signifying by what death he should glorify God.” – Old Grandpa John was looking back to his dear friend’s death, for by the time this was written, Peter had died for his Lord. He tells us this conversation was ultimately about the martyr’s death of Peter and John tells us that it brought glory to God.

“Follow me.” – Gk – “Begin now and go on following me” After Peter learned about the end of his earthly journey, Jesus asked him to start following Him that direction!

So, what happened to Peter? The Scriptures do not tell us, but every single book I read said the same thing. Tradition says Peter died at the hands of Nero in about 67-68 AD. It is believed he was to be crucified but Peter requested to be hung upside down, not as his Lord had been. What was Peter’s mind on suffering? I Peter 4:14-16, it will bring God glory. And that is what John said Peter’s death did!

This is a beautiful and merciful revelation to a man so unsure of his abilities and heart. Here Jesus confirms his faithfulness unto death and calls him to follow! And the next verse tells us.....He did!

V. “Lord, and what shall this man do?”

“Then Peter, turning (Gk action - sudden turning around) about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? (John goes into detail making sure the readers knew it was himself.) Peter seeing him saith to 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.” John 21:20-22

Peter and John were following Jesus – It seems some movement happened here! Jesus seems to have started to walk away from the conversation site and Peter with John following behind came after Him! But of course, Jesus said “Follow me” and they obeyed! This seems to be a subtle detail into the time and actions the disciples had with Jesus before the ascension. As Jesus walked and taught the disciples before His death, as He walked and taught the two men on the way to Emmaus, it seems likely He walked and taught His followers after the resurrection!

“what shall this man do?” – or “What about this man?” For some reason after Peter realized John was also following, some felt, pure curiosity or a sincere concern for John, Peter became distracted from following and asked Jesus this question.

“what is that to thee?” – Jesus’ answer reveals Peter’s heart. It was not pure in this question. Jesus rebukes Peter for being distracted over John’s future. Peter’s only responsibility was to follow Christ! JW Shephard said of Jesus’ answer, “The reply of Jesus pointed to the individual offices and responsibilities of the disciples.” p. 628 If Jesus would have John live it did not affect Peter’s service or obligation to follow Christ! Jesus is saying, “You be faithful, what John does doesn’t affect you!”

“follow thou me.” – This is the second time Jesus will say to Peter “follow me” ...but this time it is stronger and full of rebuke. The emphasis is on the word “thou”!

VI. “Then went this saying abroad” When discussing this passage, Warren Wiersbe said, “More problems are caused by confused saints than by lost sinners!” p. 319 Isn’t it interesting that even in the early church these types of rumors caused problems among the churches!

“Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” John 21:23

“that that disciple should not die:” – John is correcting this false idea that was circulating among churches during his day.

“what is that to thee?” – These words of Jesus were not a revelation for the life and death of John but part of a rebuke of Peter! This was about Peter and God’s will for him. Peter had to choose to follow it! This had always been a teaching of Jesus- Luke 9:23-24.

This hypothetical statement was for emphasis that Peter needed to live his own life in faithfulness, not comparing himself to others!

So, the narrative of the book of John ends with Peter and John, two men who became foundational stones in the early church, following the Jesus. What a glimpse into those precious forty days with the resurrected Jesus!

VII. “Many other things”

“This is the disciple (here John identifies himself as the writer of the book) which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one (one by one), I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.” John 21:24-25

“we know that his testimony is true” – John, the beloved disciple, was in a unique position to write a collection of events and teachings that could bring someone to belief in Christ.

- John was with Christ from the beginning of His ministry
- John was part of the inner circle of disciples who saw and heard more
- John heard the sermons and discussions
- John saw the miracles and proofs
- John stood at the cross
- John went into the empty tomb

“world itself could not contain the books that should be written.” – The subject of Jesus’ life was not exhausted or nothing else was worth writing. Everything He said was worth remembering, He had no idle word.

Everything He did was worth knowing about, He had no idle act. Every prayer, miracle, teaching, lesson, parable, rebuke was worth hearing about. But these events, words, acts, miracles, prayers, lessons, parables, rebukes, were all chosen to bring someone to believe in Christ the Messiah, the Son of God and finding life in Him.

Believer's Application:

1. Jesus didn't ask, "Do you fear me?" or "Do you honor me?" or "Do you admire me?"

Jesus asked, "Do you love me?" A Christ follower must first love Christ!

The Life Application Bible states, "It's one thing to say you love Jesus, but the real test is willingness to serve Him." p. 1789

When we have love for the Master our love for the unbelieving soul will be in place. When we have love the Master our love for the brethren will be true. When we have love for the Master our love for service will be evident. Be careful, we can labor without love. Service can become a duty, habit, a culture. Without love for Christ man can stand for right. But all without love for Jesus! Rev. 2:2-4

The more we get to know our sweet, gentle, kind, loving Savior, the more we love Him. I John 4:14-5:2

2. Keep your eyes on Jesus, and don't worry about others. Peter had a history of taking his eyes off Jesus. In Luke 5 he looked at the great catch of fish and began to fear Christ; in Matthew 14 he looked at the waves and began to sink; now he looks behind him at John and asks a foolish question! Peter would have done better just to keep his eyes on Jesus and not to be concerned with these other things. **Peter's only responsibility was to follow Christ.** We, like Peter, like to compare ourselves with others; rationalize our level of devotion or question God's justice and goodness between ourselves and others. Peter received Jesus' rebuke for seeking to understand God's will for another man. Jesus simply said, "what is that to thee?" When we are tempted to compare what God is doing in our lives with that of others, "what is that to thee?" should ring in our ears! But don't forget the last of Jesus' words recorded in this event "follow thou me." Let's be committed to keep our eyes on Jesus, not worry about Christ's other faithful ones, and be careful to be obedient to Jesus' last command in the book of John, "follow thou me." 2 Cor. 5:7-15

3. "There is one way into this world and many ways out. Every good follower of Jesus should desire to glorify God in death." Matthew Henry -1712

John recorded these words about Jesus' prediction to Peter concerning his death, "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." (John 21:19) As we live serving the generation that God has us among, and glorifying His name, one of our long-term goals should be to glorify Him in death as well. A follower of Christ must be prepared to suffer and die. Many have given their lives in service to God; others have died as a martyr. Paul's thoughts on death are found in Phil. 1:20-21.

When I found the quote by Matthew Henry, my curiosity was aroused. So, how did Matthew Henry die? Matthew Henry had become a famous preacher in England. He studied and wrote much from his extensive research into the original Biblical languages. His practical applications and simple explanations were popular with both laymen and ministers. He started putting together a collection of all his notes to form a large set of commentaries. Matthew Henry became a pastor in a large church in London but never forgot his first place of ministry in the countryside. He had returned to that former church to preach when he became ill. He returned by horse back to London but when he arrived home, he was so sick he fell from his horse. He died the next day. The year was 1714 and Matthew Henry was 51 years old. Only Genesis through Acts of his precious commentary was completed but his friends worked to finish Romans through Revelation so we, over 300 years later can be taught and challenged by his commentary set. Matthew Henry was a man, though not perfect, who glorified God in life and death.