

## Do you love Me? (John 21:1-25)



Peter was gloriously transformed when he met Christ. Peter's unique personality and gifts didn't change, but everyone who follows Jesus changes profoundly and permanently. Peter too changed, from an impetuous carnal person who wavered at critical times, into a spiritual man who followed the Lord to the very end. It took a lifetime commitment, but Peter changed from a 'reed' shaken in the wind to an immovable 'rock' the early church needed. Jesus commissioned Peter as the first shepherd in the early church. Note, Peter was NOT the first pope, but the first shepherd under the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### A. Jesus appears to Simon Peter

1. On the Resurrection Sunday, an angel appeared to a group of women and told them Jesus has risen from the dead. *'Go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him.'* (Mark 16:7) The Lord was particularly concerned for Peter. He wanted Peter to understand He'd risen from the dead. But when the news reached the disciples, it *'seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.'* (Luke 24:11)
2. But *'Peter arose and ran to the tomb.'* (Luke 24:12) Peter was always the first one to act. John was someone who thought through things, but he also took off after Peter. John was younger, so he overtook Peter and arrived at the tomb first. But he looked in from the outside until Peter got there (John 20:5). Peter ran straight into the empty tomb. So, Peter became the first man to go inside the tomb.
3. Peter observed the linen clothes lying there. He left the tomb wondering what this all meant, just as John came in (Luke 24:12). John too saw the grave clothes lying there neatly. John knew no one else had been in the tomb, and he believed that the Lord had risen from the dead (John 20:7).

That morning Peter went somewhere. Nobody knows where. It is one of the greatest untold stories. That morning Jesus showed Himself to Peter. Peter met Jesus face to face. Simon Peter was the first man Jesus appeared to after he rose from the dead. Why? Perhaps because Peter was the first person to confess his faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God? The Lord only knows. Peter doesn't speak about this encounter. Perhaps it was too sacred to openly share. (C.f. 2 Cor 12:1-5)

*How do we know Jesus appeared to Peter that morning?* Later on, two disciples met the Lord on the road to Emmaus. They got so excited they ran all the way back to Jerusalem and told the apostles they'd met the Lord that night. The apostles replied, *'We know. The Lord appeared to Simon.'* (Luke 24:34; c.f. 1 Cor 15:5)

Peter's world had caved in just three days ago when Jesus was crucified. His last eye contact with the Lord, whom he professed to love even to death, was at the very moment of his betrayal when Peter denied knowing Him for the third time that terrible evening. Can you see why the Lord wanted Peter to know that He rose from the dead? The Lord never told anyone about Peter's denial. He never mentioned it to Peter. Not even once.

### B. Why did Jesus send His disciples to Galilee? (v1)

1. Jesus told His disciples to go to Galilee where it all started, but the disciples were very slow getting there. It took Jesus appearing to them in Jerusalem twice to get the disciples moving (C.f. 20:19-23, 26-29). Chronologically, this was Jesus' seventh post-resurrection appearance (C.f. 20:11-18; Matt. 28:8-10; 1 Cor. 15:5; Luke 24:13-32; John 20:19-23, 26-29). The disciples needed a good push from Jesus to even be at the sea of Galilee.

Why Galilee? Maybe, the Lord didn't want to open the fresh new chapter with His dear friends in Jerusalem, where there has been so much pain and trauma in the disciples' memory - the open hatred and hostility, controversy, personal failures, and the heartbreak. We can easily imagine why the resurrected Lord wanted to meet His disciples in Galilee. John calls it the sea of Tiberias. It was a beautiful lake set in green hills.

2. Jesus gets His disciples away from all the heartache, *'Get away from all of it - the personal ambition, betrayal, and failures - all that has made your heart sick. Go back to simplicity. Go back to the beginning. And let's start again in the very place, where it all began.'*

Jesus was going to meet them once again, on the same shores of Galilee where He'd called them three years ago with just two simple words, *'Follow Me.'* No conditions, no if's, no but's, and no thrones to fight for. Jesus was about to call them once again, *'Follow Me just with a simple heart.'*

### C. The disciples went fishing (v2-3)

1. The disciples were now miles away from the place of trouble and painful wounding. They probably felt more secure here in the rural Galilee where they grew up. The memory of the crowd and miracles of Jesus are flooding back into their mind. Judas Iscariot was the only one missing from the Twelve.
2. John 21 opens with Peter present with Thomas the Twin, Nathanael, James and John - the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples. *The Magnificent Seven?* Peter spoke up, *'I am going fishing.'* (v2) Why? Was it Peter's temperament that he couldn't sit still? Did he need money? Or was it simply a pull from his old life as a fisherman? Remember Jesus has shown Himself alive to Peter. Peter knows Jesus is alive and well. Why then was Peter going back to fishing?

*Perhaps Peter thought he could never become 'a fisher of men' after the traumatic failure of denying the Lord three times, so Peter was simply going back to being a 'fisherman'.*

3. That night they fished all night, and they caught 'nothing.' It is highly unusual for the fisherman of their calibre to catch zero fish after a full night of toil in the sea of Galilee. Galilee is a well-stocked lake even to this day. Peter must have wondered if he'd become completely useless now. Now he can't even catch a single fish all night!

### D. Jesus appears on the shore (v4-8)

Suddenly Jesus appeared on the shore, but the disciples did not recognise Him. Maybe it was still dark, and the morning light was yet to dawn, or Jesus could have appeared in a different form. (C.f. Mark 16:12)

1. Jesus called out, *'Children, have you any food?'* (v5) *'Paidion'* (παιδίον) means little ones, boys or lads. The disciples were mostly young men in their late twenties. So why did Jesus call them little children? Perhaps He knew His disciples felt 'old and tired' after all they had suffered. In Greek, Jesus' question expects 'no' as the answer, i.e. *'Children, you don't have any food, do you?'* It was not a tactful thing to say to a group of young professional fishermen. But the Lord knew their failures – all of them. And He knows all your failures, too.
2. What was even more tactless thing to do? It was to give the professional fishermen advice on fishing after they were done for the day. Jesus told them to *'cast their net on the right side of the boat.'* He added, *'You will catch some fish there.'* (v6) It was illogical advice. And it is hard to know which was *the greater miracle*. To keep the fish away from them all night, or to send the fish to the other side of the boat to be caught all at once! Incredibly they cast the same net just six feet away and caught 153 large fish! *'They couldn't even draw in the net because of the multitude of fish.'* (v6)

*Nothing changed between Jesus and the disciples, even though they all deserted Him and let Him die alone. The risen Lord was still their friend, and He could still help them to catch fish as He did before. (c.f. Luke 5:1-11)*

3. At this point, John became the first to recognise the Lord. He said to Peter, *'It is the Lord!'* (v7) Peter's temperament comes to the forefront again. He threw on his outer garment (he wanted to be presentable before the Lord) and dived into the sea. Peter was the first one to run to the tomb. Now he is the first one to jump into the water. The fish could wait, but Peter couldn't. He had to get to the Lord. John records Peter was about 200 cubits from the shore, which means Peter swam 90-100m to get to the Lord.

4. What was the difference between Luke 5:1-11 and John 21? This time the net did not break, but held together. After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, the disciples could cope with 3,000 conversions in one day! The brand-new church of 120 members absorbed 3,000 new believers. Shortly after they caught another 5,000!

#### E. Jesus cooks breakfast for the disciples (v9-14)

1. Now everyone has come ashore, and Jesus was making them breakfast! This was not a mystical experience or a group vision. All five senses were involved, taste, smell, touch, hearing and seeing. They counted 153 large fish.
2. The traditional site of this event is 'Tabgha' on the northwest shore between Capernaum and Gennesaret. Jesus already had some bread, and He was barbecuing fish over the charcoal fire. Jesus tells the disciples to bring some fish that they had just caught (v10). He grills the fish and invites them to the seaside barbecue breakfast (v12).
3. Only two occasions mention 'charcoal fire' in the Scriptures. Here, and when Peter denied Jesus three times outside the high priest's courtyard (C.f. John 18:18). Peter cursed and swore that he did not know Jesus. Without any need for words, Peter was transported to that unforgettable night.

Luke records, *'...while he [Peter] was still speaking [denying Jesus], the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So, Peter went out and wept bitterly.'* (Luke 22:61-62)

Now over the charcoal fire, their eyes met again. Without one word of condemnation, Jesus was taking out the painful razorblade-like memory of that betrayal from Peter's sick heart.

#### F. Jesus asks Peter the question (v15-19)

1. Jesus affectionately calls Peter by his other name, *'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?'* (v15) What are 'these' Jesus is referring to? Fishing? Other disciples? Earlier Peter said he would never forsake Jesus even if all other disciples forsook him, *'I will go to prison and even to death for you!'* (c.f. Matt 26:33; Mark 14:29; Luke 22:33).

Now Jesus was asking Peter, *'Simon, do you agape 'sacrificially love' Me?'* Peter could no longer answer, *'Yes, Lord. I agape 'sacrificially love' You.'* But he could say, *'Lord, I phileo 'like' You,'* i.e. *'I am very fond of you.'* Simon knew himself better now. He no longer claimed to be more who he was. Jesus tells Peter, *'Feed My lambs.'* (v15)

2. After taking a bite or two, Jesus asked Peter the same question again, *'Simon, son of Jonah, do you agape Me?'* (v16) Peter answered Him the same way, *'Lord, I phileo You.'* Jesus said, *'Tend My sheep.'* (v16) They went back to eating breakfast.
3. Then Jesus asked Peter a third time, *'Do you phileo Me?'* i.e. *'Are you fond of Me?'* (v17). Jesus met Peter at his level. And Peter's heart was broken, *'Lord, you know all about my heart, You know that I am 'fond' of you (v17). I won't claim more than what I now know of myself.'*

This was when the little fisherman became a fisher of man and a shepherd. *Jesus can use ordinary people like us when we are real and honest about ourselves.* Do we mean what we say, and say what we mean? God only gives the responsibility to 'real' people.

Jesus said to Peter, *'Feed My Sheep.'* (v17) Three times the Lord tells Peter to shepherd 'His sheep'. Jesus is the Good Shepherd (10:14). Jesus was healing Peter's broken heart and installing him as the first shepherd after Himself (1) 'to feed the Lord's sheep'; (2) 'to tend (take care of) the Lord's sheep.'

## G. Peter's future (v18-25)

Just as the Lord knew everything about Peter's past, He also knew everything about Peter's future.

1. The real problem in Peter was the self-will. Peter had claimed he would follow the Lord even to death. He had great confidence in himself. That self-confidence caved in that night the rooster crowed. Now the Lord tells him, 'Peter, it will be different from now on. When you come to the end of the road, someone else will take you to a place you don't want to go, and your hands will be stretched out like Mine were,' (v18) signifying by what kind of death Peter would glorify God (v19).

What changed? Instead of Peter claiming, 'Lord, I will die for you!' now it is the Lord telling Peter, 'Peter, one day you will die for Me.' Peter receives it calmly and quietly. Years later when Peter was taken to be crucified, he only made one request. To be crucified upside-down because he was not worthy to be crucified just like the Lord. Clement of Rome wrote of Peter's death as a martyr (1 Clement 5:4; 6:1, ca 96 AD). This was Peter the Lord could use.

2. *Jesus then told Peter, 'Follow Me.' (v19)* I.e. to 'keep on following Me.' The old Peter surfaces again briefly. Pointing to John, he asks, 'Lord, what about this man?' (v21). Jesus said, 'If I want him to stay alive until I come back what is that to you? You follow Me! [You just keep on following Me].' (v22) We are not called to run anybody else's race. We are called to run our own race that is set before us. (Heb 12:1ff)

That day Peter got up and began following Jesus afresh. John also got up and began following the Lord all over again. So did all the Magnificent Seven, and the Twelve. They started following Jesus again, and the history of the world changed.

## H. Consecration Prayer

1. What is Christianity? It is following Jesus. *How many of us would be here if the Lord didn't take us back to the beginning, and gave us a fresh start with a personal invitation, 'Follow Me.'* Peter denied the Lord three times, but the Lord restored Peter by getting him to confess all over again his love for the Lord three times (18:17, 25, 27). No matter how limited or imperfect Peter's love for the Lord.

Would you like to confess your love for the Lord as you dedicate yourself to Him afresh today? But rather than making a rash profession of great love for Him, let it be the words of truth rising out of your heart.

2. As we present to the Lord our bodies as a living sacrifice, let us remember that the Lord who knows everything about our past, also knows everything about our future. Whether young, old, educated, uneducated – those things are not important.

As the Lord receives your life, let the Lord also direct your future and make you a fisher of men.

3. May the Lord raise up many shepherds after His own heart who will feed His lambs and take care of His sheep - the one and the two He sends. Will you rise to receive the mantle of Jesus the Great Shepherd?
  - i. Is your commitment to love the Lord honestly, and not exaggerate your love?
  - ii. Do you have an absolute commitment to stick to the Word of God without diluting it?
  - iii. Will you feed and care for one another with the word of the Lord?

May the Lord raise up multitudes of faithful shepherds in GI, who are not wilful, but yielded and dependant on the Lord, who knows that God's people fully belongs to Him and not to them, and who will faithfully feed His sheep with the truth of God's word, and care for one another until Christ returns.

Amen.