

LOVEST THOU ME?

JOHN 21:15 • TV122B

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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.”

I want you to open your Bible today to the book of **John**. We are going to be reading from **John 21:15**.

I will be speaking on this subject: **“LOVEST THOU ME?”**

In **John 21:15** the Scripture says: *“So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas; lovest thou me more than these?” He said unto him; yea Lord thou knowest that I love thee and Jesus saith unto Simon, then feed my sheep.”*

I thank God that the Scriptures, unlike the biographies of men, do not just give the good points of God’s people. You can read the biographies of men and you would think that they have never failed, they never erred, they never doubted, they never feared.

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But God almighty to encourage folks like you and me and to reveal His mercy and His grace to sinners tells the truth about even His choice servants.

Now, Abraham was a man of faith and his faith is clearly revealed throughout the Scriptures. God told him to leave his father's house and go to a land that he would show him. Abraham believed God and he went.

God told Abraham that he would have a son when he was over a hundred years old. He didn't know how, but he believed God. Then, God told him to take that son and sacrifice him on Mount Moriah as a sin-offering to the Lord and Abraham did that too, not knowing why.

So, he was a man of strong faith and all of us envy the faith of Abraham. He's called "*the father of the faithful.*"

When our Lord identified Zacchaeus as being a believer or one of God's chosen, He said: "*he also is a son of Abraham.*" But, the Bible not only reveals Abraham's faith and Abraham's integrity and Abraham's honesty but it reveals Abraham's doubts and Abraham's fears.

When Abraham journeyed through the land of the heathen king with his beautiful wife Sarah, he feared for his life. Couldn't the same God that delivered you (Abraham) from your father's house and took you to a land of promise, couldn't He protect you?

Well, Abraham felt he ought to help God out a little bit you know. So, not once but twice, he denied that Sarah was his wife. He was willing to give her up in order to save his neck.

God didn't hide that. God just let it be put right there in the Bible for everybody to read. That's Abraham's shameful act, but there it is.

Then Moses, Moses' meekness; we are always talking about the meekness and humility of Moses. He was perhaps, the world's most humble and I guess, meekest man. But, Moses had a temper. I was reading it Sunday morning in my message at 13th Street Baptist Church, how that "*Moses anger waxed hot.*"

Moses had just spent some time in prayer before God, an intercession for a sinful people and came right down off the mountain and just took the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God Himself. This was the work of God Himself. Moses in his anger just threw them on the rocks and bashed them to pieces.

Then, Moses was a man who smote the rock in the presence of God as God said: "*you didn't sanctify me. You gave a display of your temper before the people.*" God killed him and wouldn't let him go into the promise land.

There you have it, Moses' meekness and humility, strongly, strongly recorded in God's Word and yet his temper and his flesh and his humanity are all right there in the Scripture.

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Then David; there's not a more devoted man. The Scripture says: "*He was a man after God's own heart.*" It doesn't say that about anybody else.

John the Baptist was the greatest man born of woman and talked about Solomon being the wisest man and talked about Job being a patient man, but David, twice it says: "*he's a man after God's own heart, (devoted and consecrated).*"

But, what we find as we read some of the acts of David, he was a fleshly man, a sensual man. He was a man who defended himself, even to having a man murdered to defend himself, to protect his reputation, to protect his name, to protect his throne.

So, as you read the Bible, the Word of God shows us the faith of God's people and the honesty and integrity but it also lets us see the other side too. That encourages folks like you and me. That shows God's mercy and grace.

And Job, Job's patience; Job's faith are evident but so is his self-righteousness and so is his claim to piety and so is his self-defense.

He defended himself to the point that where he almost laid the responsibility of his condition at the feet of God. He almost came to the point where he blamed God for the shape he was in; he said that he didn't deserve it.

Then the Master didn't hesitate to rebuke Phillip, he said: "*Phillip; have I been so long time with you that you haven't known me?*"

And Thomas, when Thomas said: "*I won't believe that he is raised from the grave unless I touch the nail prints in his hands and the scars in his side.*" The Lord said, "*all right Thomas, do what you want to do, touch the nail prints and don't be an unbeliever.*"

He rebuked all of the disciples; he called them: "*men of little faith. O ye of little faith, how long will I be with you?*"

Then the apostle Peter; I want to take just a few moments and run down the life of the apostle Peter. Our Master seems to single Peter out for his highs and lows, his wise words and his foolish words, his good points and bad points, his impulsiveness, his imperfections, his impatience, and his indiscretions. His improprieties are just so obvious in the Word of God.

And yet, when the Lord arose from the grave and the disciples were up there in the Upper Room, the angel was instructed to tell the women to take this message to the disciples that the Lord had risen and that he was gone before, that he would meet them in Galilee and this is what the angel said; you can read it yourself in **Mark 16:7**, when the angels said to the women:

"Go tell his disciples; (there were eleven of them, but the angel names one, the angels said): go and tell his disciples and Peter, that he has gone before you and he will meet you in Galilee."

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You see, Peter was the impulsive one. Peter was the bad boy. Peter was the fellow that made the mistakes. Peter was the fellow that rose high and sank low. Let me give you some examples of that if you will.

When the Lord Jesus asked the disciples: *“Whom do men say that I am, well, the disciples said: some just say that you are John the Baptist, some Elijah, or one of the great prophets.”* He said, *“But whom do you say that I am?”*

Who made Peter the spokesman? He did! Who made Peter the one to speak for the rest of the disciples? He did himself; he stepped forward and he said: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

And then, it was Peter who on the Mount of Transfiguration when our Lord, the glory of God, encompassed the blessed Master and Moses came down representing the law and Elijah came down representing the prophets.

They talked with the Lord about His death and *“the glory of God shone about them and God’s voice spoke from heaven: this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”*

It was Peter, who after it was all over said to the Lord: *“Let’s don’t leave here, let’s just stay here. I tell you what we are going to do; we are going to build three tabernacles here, one for the law, one for the prophets, and one for the Lord Jesus. We will just have three tabernacles up here on the hill.”*

That’s Peter, all wrong, misunderstanding the whole situation. They were there to talk about His death, redemption, the way that God was going to save sinners and here Peter was going to build some tabernacles and just by-pass the cross.

Then, it was Peter who said to Christ out there on the water: *“Let me walk on the water.”* He saw the Lord coming towards him on the water. None of the others disciples made a request like this but Peter did. That was characteristic of him.

And it was Peter who refused to allow the Master to wash his feet. All the other disciples submitted humbly and willingly. None other of the disciples argued but when the Master came to the apostle Peter and would have washed his feet. Peter said, *“You are not going to wash my feet.”* The Lord said, *“If I don’t wash your feet, you have no part with me.”* He said, *“Lord; wash my head, my hands, my feet, and my whole body.”* That’s Peter.

Then, it was Peter who drew his sword and cut off the high priest’s servant’s ear. It was Peter when the Lord Jesus announced that He was going to Jerusalem there he would be killed and would be buried and rise from the grave.

Peter said: *“Not so.”* He took the Lord by the arm, aside, the Scripture said. He took Him aside from the other disciples and Peter said: *“that’s not going to be, that’s just not going to be; you*

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are not going to die.” And our Lord said, *“Get thee behind me Satan; thou savourest not the things of God.”*

And then it was Peter who sat by the fire. He followed the Lord right up to the Judgment Hall. He got as close as he could get. The other disciples, I suppose, had fled but Peter had to be where the trouble was. He had to be where the action was. He had to be where the goings-on were.

So, he got just as close as he could, even to sitting with the enemies of God. There he is with all the enemies crying for the blood of the Master and he’s warming his hands with all of them. One of them said: *“Well, you are one of the disciples; what are you doing here?”* He said: *“I’m not one of them:*

“Well, your speech betrays you. I know you are one of the disciples.” He said, *“No; I don’t know the man.”* A little girl said, *“I saw him with the disciples.”* Peter cursed and swore, and he said, *“I don’t know the man.”*

That’s the apostle Peter. It was Peter who in **John: 21:3** resigned from the ministry and his resignation affected the whole, the whole group of the apostles; they were sitting up there in the Upper Room.

You know, his life was fishing, nets, boats, and sea. That was his life and he figured the Lord’s kingdom was done, you know.

They couldn’t see the kingdom by way of the cross. They only saw a Jewish kingdom on the earth in Jerusalem, reigning from David’s throne. They couldn’t see the cross and the tomb and the crown and the glory and the second coming, the redemption of sinners.

Peter said: *“I’m quitting; I’m going fishing. I’m going back to the way I made my living all my life.”* And the other disciples, they followed him. He was a spokesman and they said: *“well, just wait and we all will go with you.”*

And then, when the Lord appeared to them on the shore, just before our text here, when he appeared to them on the shore and the disciples were out there a hundred yards from shore, 300 feet from shore, they hadn’t caught anything and the Master said:

“Children, do you have any meat?” They said: *“No Lord; we have fished all night and caught nothing.”* So He said: *“Cast the net over here,”* and they did and drug in the fish. Peter said, *“Why it’s the Lord.”*

He just jumped in the water. He left the others with the care for the fish, the net, the boats, and everything else. What if they all had jumped into the water? But no, he jumped in the water thoughtlessly, in a hurry and swam to shore.

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I congratulate him. He wanted to get to his Lord, I see that but he left others and his responsibility. He was impulsive; that's the way he was, and he swam to shore.

And it was Peter who wanted to know what would become of John. You know, the Lord told him, He said: "*You are going to die. You are going to be crucified,*" somebody said: "upside down." That's probably so.

But Peter, instead of dwelling on that and thanking God and asking for more information, he spun around and looked at John and said: "what's this fellow going to do? If I'm going to die, what's he going to do?"

The Lord said: "It's not any of your business what he does. If I will that he stay here on this earth until I come back again, what's that to you? You go back and do what I told you to do."

But Peter was always stirring things up. Here he singled out the special attention right here in this instant, in this instance. All the disciples had sat there and had their fish and their bread and the Master talked to them.

Then He called Peter aside. He went over there and sat down and he looked him in the eye and he said: "*Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?*" And Peter answered: "*Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.*"

Here's a confrontation between the Lord and His servant. There better be a confrontation between you and the Lord and this is the issue that better be settled right here.

When it all comes down, when all of the highs and lows, and doubts and fears and so-called professions and rededications, and consecrations, service, and all of these things, you know, the good, the bad, and all the rest of it, the success and the failure, when it all boils down to this fact. The Lord God, no soul-winner in between, no preacher in between, nobody in between, no Cardinal, or Bishop or priest, or nobody else, the Lord Jesus dealing with you: "*do you love me;*" that's what it all boils down to!

"If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed; the Lord's coming, let him be accursed." A man who does not love Christ cannot love God. A man who does not know Christ cannot know God.

This is what it all boils down to; I don't care whether you are a patient Job or a beloved David or you are a humble Moses or whether you are a steadfast Paul or whether you are a courageous Stephen or whether you are a beloved John.

I will tell you; Simon Peter was faced with the issue of issues. He was faced with the question of all questions. He was faced with a rock, dead-rock foundation, a need of every man, and that is to love Christ.

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I want us to look at these three things. Every one of these things occurred three times; three times the Lord asked this question: “*do you love me, do you love me, and do you love me?*” Three times the apostle Peter gave this good answer: “*You know I love you, you know I love you. You know all things; you know I love you.*”

Three times the Lord gave this command: “*Feed my sheep, feed my sheep, and feed my sheep.*” I know that one of them is, “*feed my lambs*” but that’s not my subject right now: “*feed my lambs.*”

Somebody out there will say, “Well, one of them you said: “*feed my lambs.*” You will get sidetracked and go try to find out what it meant by “*feed my lambs instead of feed my sheep*” and miss the whole message.

Folks like to knawel on bones; goats like to chew on tin cans but I am calling your attention to this, the covering of the whole thing; our Lord three times said: “*Peter, do you love me?*” And Peter three times said: “*You know I love you.*” Three times Christ said: “*feed my sheep.*”

Now, let’s look at these three things right here:

First of all: There’s a solemn question!

The question wasn’t for the Lord’s information. The Lord doesn’t ask questions for his information. “*Adam; where art thou?*” That’s not for the Lord’s information, that’s for Adam’s realization.

“*Cain, where’s your brother?*” That’s not for the Lord’s information. He knows where his brother is. That’s for Cain’s examination.

When the Lord Jesus looked at Peter and said: “*do you love me,*” and when He looks at you today and says: “*do you love me;*” the question is not for Him or His information; it’s for you to search your heart, it’s for you to find the answer, to settle the issue. Our Lord raised it. It will be settled once and for all: “*Do you love me?*”

What have you got to say? The question is not about faith. “I will tell you Lord; I’ve got a lot of faith.” The question is not about faith; Christ didn’t say, “do you believe in me?”

Peter believed in Him or he wouldn’t have tried to walk on water. Peter believed in Him or he wouldn’t have said: “*you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

Peter believed in Him or he wouldn’t have believed what he saw on that mountain. He believed but Christ didn’t ask him: “do you believe?” He said: “*Do you love me?*”

The question was not about his works. He didn’t say: “Are you serving me, are you willing to serve me?” Peter would have served Him if he had set up a kingdom on this earth. Peter said:

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“We’ve left our homes and our families and our fishes and our boats and everything. What are we going to have when you come into your kingdom?”

So, he was serving Him but that’s not the question. The question was not about his fears and failures: “are you sorry for your sins?” Christ didn’t ask him: “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself Peter?”

The Lord didn’t sit him down there and say: “Now, aren’t you ashamed that you have denied me?” No, that’s not what he asked him, He just said: *“do you love me, do you love me?”*

My friend; that’s where it all is: *“Though I have the gift of prophecy or the gift of tongues (and oratory and I can speak like an angel or a gifted man) and have not love, I’m a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy and knowledge and I understand the mysteries and have not love; it profiteth me nothing:*

“I may give my body to be burned. I may bestow my gifts to feed the poor. I may have faith to move mountains. If I have not love, it profiteth me nothing.” I am nothing. *“Peter; do you love me?”*

“Have you decided for Jesus?” That’s not the question: “Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ,” is the question. “Have you made a profession of faith?” That’s not the question. “When did you get saved?” That ain’t the issue. “Are you a church member?” That’s not the issue. “Have you been baptized?”

Simon Magus was baptized. Judas was a church member and Demas was a preacher and they all missed heaven. Ananias and Sapphira were big workers in the missionary circle; they all missed Christ.

The issue is: *“Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?”* That’s the issue. If you love Christ everything else is all right. If I have love I have everything I need, love for Christ.

Love is the evidence of faith, love is the motive for service, love is the cover for sins and love is the greatest of these: *“now abideth faith, hope, and love; the greatest of these is love.”*

I tell you my friend, be warned; Satan is the great religious imposter. He does his work not in honky-tonks and beer-joints and dives; he does his best work in church pulpits. He’s an imitator and every sign and evidence of religion he can imitate perfectly, but love, he cannot produce.

He hates God and everybody who knows him hates God. He’s a liar and a father of liars and Christ Jesus said to Pharisees, *“Satan’s your father and you are a liar like he is.”*

But, he’s an imposter. He deceives. You say: “Well, he can’t deceive me.” He deceived your mother Eve. That’s right! “He can’t deceive me.” He deceived the Galatians: *“O foolish Galatians, who hath deceived you?”*

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“Well, he can’t, he can’t do anything with me.” He could handle Peter pretty well. “Well, he can’t hurt me.” He took care of Job pretty good. I tell you my friend; love for Christ, that’s where it is.

That’s the reason we bring this whole thing right down here beside a sea shore between a Master and His disciple and He looks Him in the face and He says, this is the whole issue; “*do you love me, do you love me?*”

All right; here’s a pretty good answer; the apostle Peter said this to the Master: “*You know I love you, you know I love you.*”

Now, our Lord asked Peter this, He said: “*Do you love me more than these?*” What was He talking about, more than the disciples? I can’t believe that. I can’t believe the Master setting one disciple against another.

I don’t think the Lord is saying: “Peter, do you love me more than John does?” God doesn’t deal that way. He doesn’t deal that way.

We may say, “Maybe you love me more than you love somebody else.” We may think along those terms because we are flesh but our Lord didn’t, He said: “*Peter; do you love me more than these?*”

I will tell you, if you would ask him that, there was a time when Peter would have said “yes.” There was a time, not now, but there was a time. Do you remember when the Lord said: “*all of you will deny me?*” He said, “*I won’t; these other fellows may.*” That’s in **Matthew 26:33**.

He was a proud fellow then but God brought him down now. He had been whittled down. He had been stripped and broken. He had been smitten. He had bitten the dust.

There was a time when the Lord said: “You love me more than anybody?” He said: “I sure do, I sure do.” But our Lord is saying this: “*Do you love me more than these,*” and He was pointing to those boats and those nets in that sea and those fish.

That was Peter’s life before he met the Lord. That was his life out there. That was his livelihood. That was his profession. That was his hobby. That was his enjoyment, which was his daily; he spent all day and all night out there. Our Lord came down to this: “*Peter; do you love me more than these?*”

There was a time when Peter would have said “yes I do,” but he didn’t now. He didn’t say that. He didn’t say: “I love you Lord more than these other disciples.” He didn’t say to our Lord: “I love you more than anything on earth.” He just said: “*Lord; you know I love you.*”

That’s a humble answer; that’s the best answer. That’s the answer that came from the heart and he said it three times. Three times Christ asked him and three times he came back with the same answer: “*you know I love you, you know.*”

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I don't have to convince you that I love Christ. I don't have to convince my minister, I don't have to convince my wife or my friends. Jesus Christ knows that I love Him. My feelings and my life have sometimes cast a doubt on my profession but I can always say, Lord; you know I love you:

**“I love you in life
I love you in death
I'll praise you as long
As you give me breath.**

**And when the death dew
Lies cold on my brow
My Jesus I'll love thee
As as I love thee now.”**

That's the answer: *“Lord you know. You know all things, you know all things. You know I love you.”* Then our Lord gave the command: *“Peter do you love me? You know I love you.”*

The starch had been taken out, the brag had been taken out, the boast had been taken out, the pride had been taken out, and now the humble disciple looks up at his Lord, he says: *“you know I love you.”* The Master said, *“Well, if you do, feed my sheep.”*

Now, my friend; our Lord didn't say “entertain my sheep”. Our Lord didn't say “shear my sheep.” There are a lot of folks doing that. I see preachers today who are spending all their time entertaining, what they call, “the sheep.”

They are putting on a lot of shows. They are carrying on a lot of foolishness. They are giving away a lot of prizes and they are raising a lot of dust. They are entertaining the sheep. Our Lord didn't say to “entertain my sheep.” He didn't say “shear my sheep.”

I hear preachers who just cut the sheep of Christ to pieces. I hear them say: “Well, I just wish Christians would pray.” Christians will. “I sure wish Christians would tithe.” They will. “I wish Christians would witness.” They will, Christians will.

He didn't tell you to shear His sheep or to beat His sheep or weed out His sheep. I know a lot of fellows that put so much emphasis on church discipline; they always want to kick somebody out.

Well, I will tell you this: I am anxious for folks to come and hear me preach the Gospel. I don't want a one to leave. I don't care how sick they are. Please don't leave; stay here. It won't do you any good to go outside.

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You are not going to hear the Gospel out there; don't kick a fellow out. He's not going to be fed out yonder; he's going to be fed here. If he repents it will be here under the Gospel. If he comes to know Christ, it will be under the Gospel; it won't be out yonder.

He didn't tell you to weed out His sheep. He said: *"Let the wheat and the tares grow together."* God is the only one who knows the difference, you don't.

But He says: *"Feed my sheep."* How do we feed His sheep? How do we take them by the *"green pastures and lead them by the still waters."* What is it? It is the Word of God. That's how you feed God's sheep; you feed them the Word of God.

His Word, by the Word of God men are convinced of sin. By the Word of God men are born again: *"Of his own will begat he us with the Word of truth."* By the Word of God men receive faith: *"Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."*

"How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

We don't need 25 minutes of music and five minutes of preaching. We need 28 minutes of preaching and one minute of music. We can sing at home. We can sing at other times.

The church is built on the preaching of God's Word. It's by the Word of God that men grow, *"Desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby."* By the Word of God men are comforted. It's the Word of God that comforts me.

Somebody said: "What shall I say; I don't know what to say." Try to say nothing and preach God's Word. By the Word of God men are kept from sin: *"thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee."*

"Peter do you love me; you feed my sheep!"