

John 21

21st April 2019 am Hill and Arcadia

Love for Jesus

Last time we witnessed Jesus using a duplicate experience of a miraculous catch of fish **as a means of nudging** these disciples to get back on track... We saw:

- men doing their own thing
- the fruitlessness of such efforts
- the Lord re-directing their efforts
- the Lord's gracious provision for His servants

But Jesus **is not done** with His focus on nurturing his disciples to obedient dependent discipleship.

The event reaches **a climactic moment** in the interrogating conversation that takes place between Jesus and Peter regarding the state of Peter's heart for Jesus.

Read John 21:15-23

To get a better grip on what is unfolding in this passage between Jesus and Peter we need to **go back to the time** when Jesus washed the disciples' feet.

It was there on that occasion that Jesus **exposed Judas** as the traitor (*John 13::26f*).

That shocking revelation is followed by **another worrying comment** from Jesus to His disciples that He will be leaving them; making it very clear to the disciples that ...*John 13:33b ... "Where I am going you cannot come."*

Peter **wants to know** where Jesus will be going...

John 13: 37 Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." 38 Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

Luke gives us a little **more detail** regarding the warning Jesus give to Peter...

Luke 22:31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." 33 Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." 34 Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me."

There is a clear disconnect between Peter's **stated uncompromising loyalty** to Jesus and what he does just a short while later by denying Jesus when the pressure is on.

Peter is adamant that he will do anything in support of Jesus including being willing to suffer and die; only to deny him a few hours later.

Where did Peter go wrong? Why does he end up going from **unbending devotion** to Jesus to cowardly and completely disowning and failing Jesus?

Why has that and why does that happen **to so many** outspoken followers of Jesus? What prospect do you and I have of remaining faithful if someone like Peter could fall?

Any one of us is in danger of falling **if like Peter** we have a...

1 Self-confident approach to discipleship

Having had some opportunities to drive, as young boy, sitting on my dad's lap on sand roads, **I often bragged** about my driving abilities especially to my older sisters who didn't know the difference between the clutch and the brake.

Until one day when I confidently jumped behind the wheel to reverse my dad's car out of the driveway. It would be **a piece of cake** to get the car out and onto the street. I started the car, engaged the clutch, found reverse gear and smoothly moved backwards...

Only to hear **the crunch of folding metal**... in my self-confident haste I didn't notice the back door on the passenger side was open. The door ended up being ripped off its hinges and wrapped around one of the poles supporting the carport.

The chorus **response** from my sisters, "*how the mighty has fallen*"; an incident and response that quickly brought me back to size.

Solomon is spot on in his stated wisdom... *Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* This is Peter's problem.

Did you notice that in *Luke 22* **Jesus does not pray** to keep Peter from falling? He does pray that his *faith does not fail* and he prays for what he must do after he has been sifted as wheat; that is, to *strengthen the brothers*.

Jesus allows Satan to sift Peter as wheat. **The fall is necessary** to reveal to Peter the condition of his heart; to show him the worthlessness of self-confidence and to humble his proud spirit.

Peter had **a need** to be sifted; "*Lord I'm ready to go to prison and die for you*", is nothing other than pride.

Jesus' prayer for Peter is ...*Luke 22:32b ... and when you have turned again, strengthen...* there is a need in Peter's life to turn from self-confidence to a consciousness of his inability to trust himself.

It is also like **the preacher** today always needing to step into the pulpit; consciously turning from confidence in his exegesis, Greek or Hebrew grammar, clever structures, and eloquence to awareness that apart from the Spirit of God working all of his effort will fall on deaf ears.

It is a **husband or wife** realizing every day that their faithfulness to each other in their marriage is a pipe dream unless the Lord builds the house.

It is the parent and the missionary and the Bible Study leader and the deacon and the elder and the evangelist and any other serving believer constantly and repeatedly turning and running from any self-confidence to a consciousness of inability to trust self or self.

Peter must learn as each of us needs to repeatedly learn that we are not only vulnerable **to heart disease** but have a tendency **to bluff ourselves** that we are in fact in good spiritual shape.

For any one of us **to avoid** or **to turn from** self- confidence in serving and following Jesus we need to...

2 Face soul searching interrogation

Any meaningful soul searching **consists of asking** the appropriate hard questions.

Jesus asks Peter **3 penetrating questions** regarding his love for Jesus. Each question has a particular emphasis with a specific purpose.

The first question: *John 21:15 ... "Simon Son of John, do you love me more than these?"* requires Peter to think about and assess his assertion that Matthew records regarding Jesus warning to them that

Matthew 26:31 ... "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' ...33 Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."

With those 3 words "*more than these*" Jesus is reminding Peter of his **over-confident assertion** that others may turn their back on Jesus but he never would do anything like that.

It is nothing other than **Peter exalting himself** above the other disciples; congratulating himself that his love for Jesus surpassed that of the other disciples.

He needs **to learn that** bravado does not lift him above his sinful and fallible nature.

You will notice that Jesus addresses him as "*Simon son of John*" reminding him of his past **as a natural man** fraught with sin; a sinful nature that so easily leaps at any opportunity to exalt self – leading him to foolishly think of himself more highly than he ought.

The second question: *John 21:16 ... "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"* requires Peter to think about his love specifically for Jesus. Who does he really love? What does he actually love?

Addressing Peter by his pre-discipleship name is **an indication** from Jesus to him that sin is still crouching at his door.

Was his following of Jesus over the past years and all of his expressed devotion more because he loved what Jesus did or what Jesus taught or being with a prominent leader...?

For any us here today... **JC Ryle:** *"we may know much, and do much, and give much, and go through much and make much show in our religion and yet be dead before God, from want of love and at last go to the pit"*.

Do you actually **love Jesus?** That is such a challenging soul searching question that needs brutal honesty.

Do you love Jesus **or do you love** being a preacher or church set up or campus outreach or being a decision maker or your culture...

Without love for Jesus there religious practice but no vital Christianity. **JC Ryle:** *"we are no better than painted wax figures, lifeless stuffed beasts in a museum, sounding brass and tinkling cymbals"*.

There is no life where there is no love. You and must have personal feelings for Jesus; feeling that we do not hide but are willing to openly express.

The third question: *John 21:17 ... "Do you love me?"* sounds exactly the same as the second reading it in English, but it is different in the Greek.

In the 1st and 2nd question **Jesus uses** the strongest word for love – *agape* – meaning to love much. In both instances Peter responds using the weaker word for love – *phileo* – meaning to be a friend.

And then when we get to the 3rd **question** Jesus uses the weaker word – *phileo*.

At this point after the third time being asked about his love for Jesus, **Peter's response** is one of grief.

He was deeply sorrowful, **as he remembered** his 3 fold denial; having acknowledged that nothing is hidden from Jesus and that he now sees himself more accurately.

Peter now **knows** he is no better than the rest.

At this point so **emptied of self** that in this process of being interrogated by Jesus bravado is gone, pride has evaporated. He has reached place where he no longer claims that his love is of superior quality.

The needed point is reached; the strong man **is converted to** weakness is now fit to strengthen his brothers.

The soul searching heart exposing interrogation has achieved **the desired outcome**.

Peter's **heart disease** has been treated. He and any one of us disciples must serve in Gospel ministry by...

3 Loving Jesus with humble weakness

It is this "other than worldly" condition of loving Jesus with **humble weakness** that qualifies Peter and any other disciple of Christ for fruitful God glorifying service.

Three times we find **Jesus saying to Peter**, "Feed" my flock: once "Feed by lambs" and twice "my sheep".

The 3x repeated charge was to once more **commission Peter** to do the work of an Apostle, notwithstanding his recent fall.

Stier: "As Peter descends step by step the ladder of humiliation, step by step the Lord follows him with assurance of the work for which he is destined."

Peter **has learned** and all the church down through the ages must learn that...

JC Ryle: "Usefulness to others is the grand test of love, and working for Christ, the great proof of really loving Christ. It is not loud talk and high profession, it is not even impetuous, spasmodic zeal and readiness to draw the sword and fight, it is steady, patient, laborious effort to do good to Christ's sheep scattered throughout this sinful world, which is the best evidence of being a true-hearted disciple."

Conclusion

AW Pink summed up this section of John 21 with the statement that "we are taught what is the only acceptable motive for service; it is love for Jesus"

He is right. Why do I do what I do? Why do you do what you do?

But can we always honestly say that the **one single driving motive** for serving Jesus in ministry is love for Him?

Sometimes its duty and obligation, sometimes for recognition, sometimes we serve grudgingly, sometimes even unwillingly...

God does challenge us regarding our love for Jesus in this passage but at the same time we see the abundant grace and forgiveness Jesus gives to Peter.

We must question our love for Jesus. We should be concerned if there is no affection or feeling for Him.

But we like Peter will fall and fail. We are weak and fallible people. And when we fall and fail don't run from Jesus but go to him "grieved" by your falling looking to Him for forgiveness and restoration.

Remember Peter's words to Jesus, "Lord you know everything".