

## **John #58: Do You Love Him? (John 21:15-25)**

### **PRAY**

Do you love Jesus? Are you sure you love Jesus? No, do you really love him?

Whether or not we love Christ will shape so much about how we live, and how we're doing  
We know we're meant to love him because he first loved us

Yet we so often fall woefully short... We know something is off, or broken, between us  
Therefore, we need restoration... To be restored, we must come to him to receive his love again

So maybe start with this question today instead: Does Jesus love you?

For if he loves you enough to die for you, there is all the hope in the world for restoration

*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so...* So let's go to the Bible right now

Please **OPEN** the Scriptures with me, one last time to the gospel of Christ according to John

We'll be in the final passage in the final chapter, John 21 [page #907]

It's been just about 2 years since we began this series, and I have loved our journey through John

It's fitting that, after all the focus on who Jesus is and what he's done,

We'll end by considering our response to him, and whether or not we love him

Remember how the story went last week... The disciples went fishing on the Sea of Tiberias

They weren't catching any fish, until Jesus showed up on the shore with unique advice,

And then they catch more than they could handle... John identifies Jesus: 'It is the Lord!'

Peter jumps in the water to swim to shore, desperate to get to Jesus

And then Jesus meets them all around a fire, and serves them breakfast... And throughout:

Jesus revealed himself in powerful help, merciful welcome, and caring provision: **READ v.14<sup>1</sup>**

And now, to wrap things up, we get a remarkable conversation between Jesus and Peter:

**READ v.15<sup>2</sup>**... Flashback to not too long ago, to the night before Jesus died:

Peter had boasted, in front of all the disciples: "*Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.*" and "*Even though they all fall away, I will not.*"

Thus, if he was to be truly reinstated, and if he was to ever be trusted by the others again,

His restoration as a disciple would have to happen publicly, too... And so it does

[tr] His restoration, and our restoration, is made possible by the gospel: *By grace we are restored*

If Jesus hadn't died for Peter's sins, they couldn't ever be truly forgiven

If Jesus hadn't risen from the dead, he wouldn't have even been there to restore him

So please don't lose sight of the fact, that as we talk about how much we should love him,

The only way this is even a possibility for us is because Christ died and rose again

The prerequisite for Peter's love was the restorative love of Christ, who returned for him

So we'll see this major, big idea throughout our text today:

### **Restorative love from Jesus leads to a reciprocal love for Jesus**

[r] When Christ restores us, it produces or generates our return love for him

[r] Restorative love from Jesus leads to a reciprocal love for Jesus

The Lord took the first step to appear on the seashore, cook breakfast, and welcome Peter there

It's in the context of his clear care and love for Peter that Jesus asks him: **READ v.15b<sup>3</sup>**

On one hand, this question may've seemed unnecessary: Peter left everything for Jesus!  
On the other hand, it was totally fair, considering Peter's recent denials of Christ

Those called everything into question: Did Peter really, truly love the Lord?  
So Jesus now probes at his heart: 'Simon, just how much *do you* love me?'  
He doesn't ask about his loyalty, his obedience, his purity, or his spiritual disciplines  
Jesus knows that if our love is properly aligned, everything else will fall into place

When Jesus asked "Do you love me *more than these*?", we aren't positive what he's referring to  
Did Peter love Jesus more than he loved his friends, or his fishing gear?  
Or, did Peter love Jesus more than the other disciples loved Jesus? That's most likely  
Especially considering Peter's earlier boasts that he'd be more faithful than the others

**READ v.15b-c<sup>4</sup>**... You might picture Peter's eyes falling, ashamed, knowing his failures  
He's been humbled... And yet he still feels sincere affection for Jesus: **READ v.15c<sup>5</sup>**  
That seems to be true... Jesus doesn't correct him or ask, 'Then why'd you disown me?'  
Just: 'Do you really love me, Peter?' [sigh] 'Yes. [sadly] You know I do.'

And any true believer can confess the same... Even when you feel weak, fearful, or unstable  
You may have all kinds of doubts about faith, you may be seriously battling against sin,  
Yet you could still answer: 'Yes, Lord, I do love you'  
You might quickly add that you don't love him as much as you ought  
But that's every single one of us... There's always more love we can return to him

Instead of disagreeing with Peter, Jesus gives him a challenge, 'OK... Then, feed my lambs.'  
In John 14:23, Jesus had told them: "*If anyone loves me, he will keep my word...*"  
So: 'Peter, if you love me in your heart, show it by obeying me and feeding my lambs'

More on that soon... But first, imagine Jesus sitting by you and asking you the same question  
Insert your full name into where he says 'Simon son of John'... Even write the question down:  
Like, "Matthew Rudd, son of Ron—yes, you, do you truly love me?" [ ] Sobering, right?  
How would you know whether or not you do? After all, love isn't only a feeling or internal vibes  
Love for Jesus is not *less* than a feeling—it *is* an affection and desire...

And if we have *no* feeling for Christ, that should cause alarm bells to go off  
But love is also *more* than a feeling: It's a devotion, an active faith, a faithful obedience  
"Do you love me?" is a very simple question on the surface... Little kids can understand it  
And yet it's easier said than done, as J.C. Ryle says: "*We may know much, and do much,  
and profess much, and talk much, and work much, and give much, and go through much,  
and make much show in our religion, and yet be dead before God from lack of love.*"

So be honest with yourself: Does your life display a true love for the Lord Jesus?  
Nothing is more vital than loving him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength

Then we need to ask: Do I love him "more than these"? I want to! Do you?  
I want to love Jesus more than anyone else around me—more than any of you  
Though in reality, plenty of you put me to shame  
I'd want this, not for bragging rights, but because Jesus is that worthy of my love  
He has loved me and restored me to himself... I want to reciprocate his love back to him

But Jesus continues in v.16: **READ v.16<sup>6</sup>**... Peter must've been a bit confused now...

'Did he not hear me the first time?' 'Did I not answer satisfactorily?'

Speaking of, many people have thought Peter's answers weren't what Jesus was looking for  
Because he uses a different word for 'love' than Jesus did... So they think Jesus asked something like, 'Do you truly love me?' And Peter responded, 'I really, really like you'  
The problem with this idea is both words for love are used interchangeably throughout John—  
And throughout the rest of the Bible... So while it's possible, we just don't know

If getting asked twice was puzzling, getting asked thrice was upsetting: **READ v.17<sup>7</sup>**

Peter was like, 'Why do you keep asking me? You didn't even need to ask me in the first place—You know everything there is to know... You've *got* to know that I love you!'

He wasn't wrong... Jesus knows whether we love him or not, even better than we know ourselves  
But in hindsight, we can tell why Jesus asked him the same question 3 times:

Peter had disowned Jesus with 3 denials... So now Jesus asks Peter for 3 affirmations  
And in so doing, makes his restoration just as clear as his failure had been

We all need restoration... We know we've all fallen so far short of God's standards for us  
We all need restored, again and again... If you don't today, you may very well tomorrow

But do you see? Failure is not final... We may fail, and fail repeatedly, and still there's hope

We can pray along with David's great confession in **Psalm 51**, and know God's reply:

*"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love... Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me... Restore to me the joy of your salvation..."<sup>8</sup>*

The Lord loves to do these things... The cross proved that restoration is his beating heart  
And if we still doubt it, we need look no further than this precious interaction with Peter

While we should never sin so that grace may abound, grace yet abounds to us sinners

I don't know if you've experienced this, but some of the times I feel *most* love for the

Lord are after I've sinned, confessed my sin, and received his grace—I've been restored

Restorative love from Jesus instinctually leads to reciprocal love for Jesus

Whoever is forgiven little, loves little, and whoever is forgiven much, loves much

Have you been forgiven? How much? Have you received Christ's immeasurable love for you?

Do you know the magnitude of your restoration? Because that is what will most fuel love

Peter knew he had betrayed Christ worse than the rest

Therefore, he knew the grace of Christ more fully, and thus loved more truly

A story is told of the courts of the ancient ruler of Persia, Cyrus

One of his general's wife was tried for treason, found guilty, and sentenced to die

But as she was sentenced, her husband came running to Cyrus and pleaded:

"Please let me take her place!"... Cyrus marvelled and told his court:

"Can we terminate a love as great as this?", before pardoning the woman

As the couple left the court, it's said the husband asked his wife: "Did you see the benevolent look in Cyrus's eyes as he pardoned you?"... To which she answered:

"I only had eyes for the one who loved me enough that he was willing to die for me."

Friends, who do you have eyes for in this life today? What owns your heart's deepest devotion?

Think of Peter sitting at the fire on the shore, his eyes burning with emotion

All he could see was the one who loved him enough to die for him: “Yes, I love you”  
Can you put yourself there, and see Jesus’ heart for you too? Let that stir your love

[tr] But practically speaking, what should this love look like? What does love for Christ require?

Well, start with his commands to Peter to care for his sheep

Leaders are called to a higher standard of this, but I believe all believers are called to this

Restorative love from Jesus leads to a reciprocal love for Jesus... Which shows itself in:

➤ **Caring for his people (v.15-17)**

[r] We reciprocate love for Jesus by loving and caring for his people

**READ v.15b, 16b, 17b<sup>9</sup>**... Variations on the same theme: ‘If you love me, love them’

Jesus was the Good Shepherd... His sheep are his people—we are the sheep of his pasture

But sheep are dumb animals that need cared for... We need to be fed, and we need tended to

How do we get fed? I think this would mainly refer to us being fed the Word of God

And how are we tended? Through being loved and cared for, as Christ cared for us

In other words, loving people in truth and speaking the truth in love

Again, this is something that church leaders, like pastors or elders, are *especially* called to do

But also something we should all be doing for each other, every chance we get

If we love Jesus, we should show it by loving one another... Feeding and tending to each other

Are you feeding other believers in your life the Word?

In your family with your spouse or kids, in your small group, in encouragement notes or messages you send to others, or maybe by teaching in a ministry

And are you tending to the various needs of others around you in God’s flock?

In serving in church, in giving of your finances and time, in jumping to help when someone is in need—with a meal, with a move, with childcare, with a visit...

God brings us so many opportunities to share *his* love with his people

And make no mistake: they are his people before they are our people

He tells Peter: “Feed *my* lambs” and “Tend *my* sheep”

This truth helps us to keep perspective in ministry and motivates us to care well

Leaders must never use or abuse people, treating them however they want—they’re not ours

Also, we can love people yet hold them loosely, knowing God cares for them more than we do

And super key: The right motive to serve (in whatever ministry we are called to) is Christ’s love

—Understanding Christ’s love for me, not mustering up my love for others

Rick Reed, my pastor growing up, points this out: “Notice Jesus didn’t ask, “Peter, do you love my sheep?” Instead, he only asked, “Do you love me?” If our primary motivation for [ministry] is a love for people, we will struggle when people are hard to love. After all, sheep can wander; sheep can bite. But when ministry motivation arises from a genuine love for Christ, we have good reason to stay faithful... While there are many worthy motivations for ministry, the greatest of these is love. Love for Christ strengthens our souls to faithfully feed Christ’s sheep.”

Many of you already serve faithfully here at Calvary or in the community

Some of you will even be voted into new elder or deacon roles today... So remember:

We don’t serve for what others can give us... We serve because of what Christ gave us

Once Peter was restored, he became a leading undershepherd in Christ's church  
And he was able to pass on the message to many others... In his letter of 1 Peter, he says:  
*"By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."* (1 Peter 2:24-25)

He knew this well, as he'd walked this path of straying and returning himself  
And the Good Shepherd was there, waiting to welcome and restore him  
He then challenged all fellow undershepherds in the church, in 1 Peter 5:2-4: *"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."* ...I expect this could all be traced back to that morning on the beach

[tr] If we love Jesus, we need to learn to love his sheep, our fellow believers  
But that's not the only way love for Christ is shown... I see another in the verses that follow:

Restorative love from Jesus leads to a reciprocal love for Jesus... Which shows itself in:

➤ **Following him in life and death (v.18-23)**

[r] If we love him, we will be willing to follow him, personally, in life and death

Right after telling Peter to feed his sheep, Jesus explains how much this calling would cost him:

**READ v.17c-19<sup>10</sup>**... "Truly truly"—This was going to happen... Peter was on a path now  
When he was young, he had freedom to wear whatever he wanted, or to go wherever he wanted  
But in contrast to that, a day would come when his freedom would be lost

And others would take control of his fate, dressing him and leading him—to death  
By the time John wrote this book, this had likely already happened, and Peter had died  
When Jesus says Peter's hands would be stretched out, that's likely referring to crucifixion  
It's believed that Peter did, in fact, die on a cross, likely in Rome under Nero

But remember: Before Jesus died, Peter had sworn that he would die for Christ

Now Jesus prophetically assures him that one day, he would fulfill that promise  
This must've been strangely comforting to Peter,  
To know the next time his life was on the line, he wouldn't fail... He would glorify God!

Also, notice: Peter had just told Jesus *"You know all things"*... Indeed, he does know all things!

He even knew what Peter's future held for him, down to the way he would die  
He knows your future and my future too... So when dark days come for us, remember:  
This was foreseen by our Good Shepherd... And even in the valley, he is with us  
And even our deaths, too, can bring great glory to God... Like Christ's did... And like Peter's did  
*"For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."* (Romans 14:8)

*I'll love Thee in life, I will love Thee in death, and praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath*

Having communicated the stakes, Jesus then tells Peter: *"Follow me."*

Now, in that moment, he may've simply been inviting Peter to take a little walk with him  
But we know there's more to it: When Jesus first met Peter, he'd called him to "Follow me"

And that was a call to come with him, to follow his way of life, to learn from him  
In short, it was a call to follow him in life

But now he commands him to follow, with the same words... And it takes on new meaning:

At this point, Jesus had laid down his own life and risen again

And now he's asking Peter to keep following him faithfully, even through death

This might've been unsettling to Peter... But he found it so worth it in the end... As he says:

*“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:10-11)*

The Lord *himself* will: Restore. Confirm. Strengthen. Establish.

He was doing this for Peter right here in John 21... And he'd do it again one day in glory

At some point, Jesus and Peter got up to go for a walk along the shoreline... And: **READ v.20<sup>11</sup>**

Think about that: John could've saved a lot of ink, and just said Peter 'saw John following them'

Instead he uses 25 extra words to identify himself, while never using his name! Why?

Well, for one, to say once more how much his identity was shaped by Jesus loving him

He was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'—That mattered more than anything

(I've got a feeling that John would hate that we named the whole book after him!)

But this long description of himself does a couple other things as well:

Like establishing his credentials to write this book, as one of Jesus' closest disciples

And recalling the scene at the last supper tells us he was close to Peter, too

Peter was who prompted John to ask that question about betrayal

And that closeness makes sense of the question Peter now asks...

**READ v.21<sup>12</sup>**... Maybe he was prematurely envious, thinking John may get a better fate than him

Maybe he was anxious about his friend, worrying he may face the same high cost as him

Or maybe he was just curious... So, 'What about him, Jesus? What does his future hold?'

Jesus nips this whataboutism in the bud: **READ v.22<sup>13</sup>**... The 'you' is emphatic: "*You follow me*"

In other words: 'His future is none of your concern... Mind your own business.'

'Maybe I'll have him stay alive until I return. What would that change for you? Nothing'

Regardless of what would happen with John, Peter had his own calling to follow

If Peter knew God's will for John, it wouldn't be helpful, and it may've even been harmful

The same goes for all of us today... Each one of us has our own calling and our own destiny

We're called to walk our own path—no one else's

There is no need to measure our life against anyone else—positively or negatively... Like:

If you're given something hard, don't think everyone else should get that too

And if you're given something good, don't get prideful or self-righteous

If someone else gets something hard, don't think of yourself higher than them

And if someone else gets something good, don't get jealous of their blessings

In *The Horse and His Boy* from C.S. Lewis' Narnia,

Aslan, the Christ figure, tells the boy, Shasta, how he had always been at work in his life

And as Shasta ponders all this, he asks about whether Aslan had hurt another character

Aslan confirms he was behind her injury, and Shasta goes: "But what for?"

The answer: '*Child, I am telling your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own.*'

In the end: Peter had a calling to eventually die for Christ

And John had a calling, as far as Peter knew, to live for Christ

Both of them were to show their love for Christ by following him in life and death

[tr] In v.23, we find out that there was a rumour spreading around, based on this conversation  
John feels the need to correct the false narrative: **READ v.23<sup>14</sup>**... So fake news isn't new  
But it made some sense: Peter had died, John hadn't... And he was getting older and older  
So if Jesus had said John wouldn't die, it would imply one of two things:

Either Jesus would return really soon, before John died

Or: John would die, giving their faith a rude shock, discrediting his gospel,

And even, arguably, proving Jesus wrong

So John wants to stifle the rumour before it could do some real damage

And in John's words, here and to end the book, we see one last literal labour of love... See:

Restorative love from Jesus leads to a reciprocal love for Jesus... Which shows itself in:

➤ **Testifying about what he has done (v.24-25)**

[r] Once loved by Jesus, we love him in return by testifying about his greatness—what he's done

Peter's response to Jesus' love was to care for Jesus' flock... They were both to follow him...

And John's response to being the disciple Jesus loved was to bear witness: **READ v.24<sup>15</sup>**

He's like, 'Everything you've read in this book, I was there; I saw it with my own eyes'

'I was loved... We were loved by Jesus... And our lives were forever changed.'

He then takes a kind of oath: 'I've told the truth and nothing but the truth'

This book can be trusted as reliable testimony

So, returning again to John's purpose in writing this: Do we believe?

Have we joined the ranks of those who know John's testimony is true?

And do we now trust Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Do we have life in his name?

If so, then will we become witnesses of Christ, testifying to all who will listen to us?

For his greatness—and the great things he has done for us—cannot be fully recounted

Look at the final verse: **READ v.25<sup>16</sup>**... Now, this is obviously using a bit of hyperbole:

If you wrote down every act of Jesus during his time on earth, it would take many, many books

But the world certainly could contain them all... We shouldn't take this literally

## CONCLUSION

Except that, if we remember who this book has revealed Jesus to be, maybe we should!

He is the One and Only Son of God... He is the Son of Man... He is the Holy One of God

He is the Christ, the King of the Jews, the Prophet to come, the Teacher, the Master

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world... The Saviour of the world

He is the Bridegroom of the church... He is Brother and Friend to his people

He is the giver of living water—the sender of the Holy Spirit... He is one with the Father

In his own bold claims: 'I am the Bread of Life... I am the Light of the World... I am the

Door of the Sheep... I am the Good Shepherd... I am the Resurrection and the Life... I am

the Way, the Truth, and the Life... I am the True Vine... And before Abraham was, I AM'

Remember way back to how John began: He is the Word—the ultimate self-disclosure of God

The Maker of all... The Light of life... The Word that became flesh

And then near the end: He is my Lord and my God

v.25 is only hyperbolic for his short lifespan on earth

If we take John's testimony as a whole, this book *is* just the tip of the iceberg

How could books ever contain the full catalog of the greatness and wonderful things done  
by the great I AM, the pre-existent Word, the eternal Son, and the living God?

So... it's actually true! **READ v.25<sup>17</sup>...** Jesus has done more than we could ever describe!

Our words will never be enough... Yet, we will use them anyway to spread his praise!

Who do you believe Jesus to be? What has he done for you?

And so, do you love him?

## **PRAY**

## **Benediction: prayer, 5min,**

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<sup>1</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

<sup>2</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>3</sup> "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

<sup>4</sup> do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

<sup>5</sup> "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

<sup>6</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>7</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

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 51:1, 7, 10, 12

<sup>9</sup> Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep

<sup>10</sup> Feed my sheep. 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." (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."

<sup>11</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>12</sup> When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

<sup>13</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>14</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?"

<sup>15</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>16</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.

<sup>17</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.