

Exalting Jesus Christ

"Do You Love Me More Than These?"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. As Americans, we all take a certain pride in the English language.
 - A. Of course, English didn't originate with us, nor did it originate with the English.
 1. The English language traces its beginnings to the Germanic people of Western Europe known as Anglo-Saxons who migrated to the eastern coast of Great Britain during the fifth century.
 2. Of course, many of our English words are of Latin and Greek origin since Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire and Greek was the common language of the day.
 - B. However, one of the biggest drawbacks to English is that a certain word can sometimes have dozens of meanings.
 1. For example, the word "love" can be defined any number of ways.
 - a. A man might say he loves his wife, and then moments later say he loves his dog.
 - b. You can imagine how confusing that sounds to someone trying to learn English.

- II. The ancient Greeks solved a lot of these issues by having different words to describe different kinds or types of love.
 - A. In fact, *koine* Greek – sometimes called "common" or "Biblical Greek" – had five separate words for love:
 1. The first three words for love are not used in the Bible. They are:
 - a. "Mania" – an unhealthy obsession of one person to own, possess, control or manipulate another person.
 - b. "Eros" – an erotic, sexual, or sensual love that is purely emotional and lacks substance and depth of feeling.
 - c. "Storge" – family love, such as the love of a child for their parents or the love of a parent for their child (like "motherly love").
 2. The last two Greek words for love are frequently used in the Bible. They are:
 - a. "Philos" or "phileo" – defined as "brotherly love," or "friendship."
 - b. "Agapeo" or "agape" – the purest form of sacrificial love, such as God's love for us, our love for God, or for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and the sacrificial love of a husband that seeks to nurture and cultivate the best in his wife.

- III. As we continue in our series "Exalting Jesus Christ" – our journey through the gospel of John – we want to return to the 21st chapter of John where the word "love" is used different ways.
 - A. More specifically, we want to take a close look at the dialogue between Jesus and Peter.
 - 1. What we're going to see in these verses is an interesting play on words when Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love Me?"
 - 2. We will discover that Jesus used one form of the word "love" while Peter deliberately used another.

BODY:

- I. When we open our Bibles to the 21st chapter of the gospel of John and begin reading at verse 15, we come upon a scene that takes place on the shores of the Sea of Tiberius – also known as the Sea of Galilee.
 - A. Jesus and His disciples are sitting around an early-morning campfire, enjoying breakfast of some freshly-caught fish.
 - 1. John allows us to listen in on the dialogue that now takes place between Jesus and Peter.
 - a. **John 21:15-17** – *So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, 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." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, 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 all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

- II. To better understand what's happening here, let's go back three years earlier when Jesus first met Peter and chose him to be a disciple.
 - A. Peter and his brother Andrew were fishermen in Galilee – a vocation that was not only dangerous, but one that required long hours and back-breaking work.
 - 1. When Andrew brought his brother Peter to Jesus, we're told:
 - a. **John 1:42** – . . . *Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).*
 - b. In an earlier lesson, we mentioned that Jesus apparently saw something in Peter that perhaps no one else saw – perhaps

Jesus saw in Peter those inner qualities of courage, strength and loyalty.

c. Therefore, Jesus said, *"You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated A Stone).*

B. A year later, Jesus and His disciples were going through the region of Caesarea Philippi.

1. **Matthew 16:13-16** – *When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" 14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

a. Without any hesitation whatsoever, Peter boldly proclaimed his absolute, complete faith and confidence in the deity of Jesus – *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

C. Two years later, on the evening before His crucifixion, Jesus met one last time with His disciples in an upper room.

1. During the course of the evening Peter once again boldly proclaimed his faith and devotion to Jesus.

a. **John 13:37b** – *"I will lay down my life for Your sake."*

2. But Jesus replied:
 - a. **John 13:38** – *"Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times."*
- D. Shortly after that, Jesus and His disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane.
 1. Here, once again, Peter shows his courage and commitment to the Lord.
 2. As Jesus was being taken into custody, we read:
 - a. **John 18:10-11** – *Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. 11 So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"*
- E. But during the hours that followed, Peter's courage and commitment all but evaporated.
 1. On two occasions, when people recognized Peter as a disciple of Jesus, he immediately denied knowing the Lord.
 2. And then came the third time someone recognized him:
 - a. **John 18:25-27** – *Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also one of*

His disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not!" 26 One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" 27 Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.

- b. **Luke 22:61-62** – *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." 62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly.*

3. Peter's confidence and self-esteem has been shattered into a thousand pieces.
 4. The man who was so sure he would never waver in his faith and loyalty toward Jesus is now crushed by the weight of his own arrogant pride.
- III. Now, let's return to the shores of Galilee and let's see how Jesus helps Peter regain the confidence and self-esteem he lost just weeks earlier on that fateful night.
- A. There are four things the Lord will do to help Peter.
1. First, Jesus will force Peter to confront the truth about himself. Peter must see himself for who, and what, he really is.

2. Second, Jesus will show Peter that, despite his past failures, he still has a purpose to fulfill as a disciple of the Lord.
 3. Third, Jesus will reassure Peter by giving him a glimpse of how faithfully he will serve the Lord in the future – even to the point of persecution and death.
 4. And finally, Jesus will help Peter focus on the unique tasks for which he alone was chosen as an apostle of Jesus Christ.
- IV. Peter may have felt he was no longer worthy to be a disciple of the Lord, but that's not how Jesus saw him.
- A. So, as I said earlier, before Peter could be of any use to the Lord, he had to see himself for who he really was.
1. Therefore, twice, Jesus asked Peter to admit the level of his love – "Do you love Me with an agape-kind of love?" – the highest, purest, self-sacrificing kind of love.
 - a. In fact, Jesus even challenged the claim Peter once made that he would remain faithful to the Lord even if all the other disciples fell away.
 - b. And so, Jesus asked Peter if his love for the Lord was greater than all the other disciples.

2. But each time Peter replied, he used the word "phileo" – describing the level of his love as being that of a friend.
3. Then the Lord asked Peter one more time.
 - a. **John 21:17** – *He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, 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 all things; You know that I love You."*
4. This grieved Peter deeply – not because the Lord had to ask him a *third time*, but rather *how* the Lord asked.
 - a. The word Jesus used this time was "phileo" – asking Peter if he even loved Jesus as friend.
 - b. Once again, Peter could only claim a phileo-kind of love for the Lord.
5. Peter was forced to confront his real self – forced to confront who and what he really was.
 - a. Peter had to admit that he was not the brave, courageous disciple he had so often boasted of being. He was just as vulnerable as the next man.
6. Coming to terms with who and what we really are is always the first step to recovery.

- a. How can a person possibly change if he's not willing to admit he needs to change?
- B. Also, did you notice that twice Jesus reassured Peter by showing him he still had a purpose to fill in the Lord's kingdom?
1. Jesus first told Peter, "*Feed My lambs*" (v. 15), and then said, "*Tend My sheep*" (v. 16).
 2. Peter would be given two critically important tasks: to "feed" and to "tend."
 - a. The word "feed" in verse 15 describes the responsibility of a shepherd to provide proper nourishment to his flock.
 - b. Whereas, the word "tend" in verse 16 speaks of the shepherd's responsibility to guide, protect and defend his flock.
 3. In the years to come, Peter would be called upon to faithfully and courageously perform both tasks as an apostle and shepherd (elder) in the Lord's church – the flock of God.
 4. Peter's remarkable contributions in feeding the flock of God can clearly be seen in his first and second epistles.
 - a. He encourages struggling, persecuted first century Christians to maintain their faith and purity, while at the same time live

every day knowing the Lord could come any time and bring this world to an end.

5. Peter's courageous defense of the flock is seen in his fearless confrontations with the very people who crucified Jesus.
 - a. Nothing would stop him from proclaiming the gospel of Christ, even the threat of his own imprisonment and death.
 - b. Imagine how his courage served as a model for others.
 6. Peter may have thought that denying Jesus meant he was finished as an apostle of Christ. But Peter's work as an apostle and as a shepherd in the kingdom of Christ was only beginning.
- C. Jesus then reassured Peter by giving him a glimpse of the future – telling Peter that he will someday courageously give his own life in service to Jesus Christ.
1. **John 21:18-19a** – *"Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." 19 This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.*
 - a. The man who hid in the shadows on the night Jesus was arrested, and the man who denied knowing the Lord – not

once, but three times – would be the same man who would someday glorify God in his own death.

2. Peter is said to have been crucified during the reign of Nero around AD 67 – perhaps just a year after the death of the apostle Paul.
 - a. Tradition says Peter asked to be crucified upside down because he felt he was unworthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus Christ.
3. Regardless of how Peter died, there should be no doubt about the fact that he glorified God through his death.
 - a. The psalmist wrote: **Psalm 116:15** – *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*
4. Peter's influence among the saints would not end at his death. His life would be a living memorial:
 - a. **2 Peter 1:12-15** – *For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. 13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, 14 knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. 15 Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.*

5. It seems only fitting that Jesus would reassure Peter by once again giving him the same invitation the Lord had given this fisherman from Galilee three years earlier:
 - a. **John 21:19b** – *And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."*
- D. And finally, Jesus encouraged Peter to remain focused on the work the Lord had planned for him alone, and not be concerned how God will work through others.
 1. **John 21:20-23** – *Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" 21 Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me." 23 Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?"*
 2. Peter was obviously asking about John.
 - a. Some commentators feel Peter may have been asking if he would be the only one to die for Christ – perhaps even being a little envious that John might escape such a terrible fate.

- b. But others have seen this in a more positive light – suggesting Peter wanted to know if his dear friend John would have to suffer the same fate.
 - 3. Either way, the Lord didn't give Peter the answer he was seeking.
 - a. Worrying about the future of others was not his concern.
 - b. Instead, Peter simply needed to focus on the tasks the Lord had for him to fulfill.
- V. I think Peter's life, and especially this encounter with Jesus, serves to teach us some wonderful lessons. Time limits me to mentioning only two:
 - A. First, stop pretending to be someone you're not!
 - 1. Peter serves as an example of how the Lord can take a simple "fisher of fish" and turn him into a dynamic "fisher of men."
 - 2. But first, Peter needed to see himself for who, and what, he really was.
 - a. Peter wasn't the man he thought he was, or maybe even pretended to be.
 - b. He finally realized that painful truth when he denied knowing Jesus three times.
 - c. Peter was suddenly stripped of his self-esteem as well as any arrogant pride that may have been hiding in his heart.

- d. But when Peter was finally emptied of pride, and confronted his past failures, the Lord was able rebuild him into the man he was meant to be.
- 3. People who pretend to be someone they're not live every day fearing they will be exposed for who they really are.
 - a. As long as they're spending all their time and energy protecting their phony self-image, they will never be effective in serving the Lord.
- 4. So, admit your flaws and failures.
 - a. Admit you're not more faithful than, stronger than, or better than any other member of the body of Christ – and you really don't love the Lord more than others.
 - b. Admit that you are often weak and afraid, and that you have tried to depend on your own strength to remain faithful, but have failed.
 - c. When you finally face who, and what, you really are, that's when the Lord can start making you into the man or woman He wants you to be.
- B. Second, glorify God with your own unique talents and abilities.
 - 1. Don't concern yourself with how the Lord uses the talents and abilities of others in His kingdom.

- a. There are things I can do in serving the Lord that may be difficult, or perhaps impossible, for you.
 - b. But I can also assure you that there are things you can do to glorify God that far exceed my abilities.
2. So, take a personal inventory to identify your own unique God-given talents and abilities, as well as your deficiencies.
- a. Start immediately to use every one of your unique talents and abilities to serve the Lord and the Lord's people.
 - b. And, in the meantime, work on improving your deficiencies.
 - (1). If you succeed in turning deficiencies into talents, then great!
 - (2). But if not, don't feel ashamed. Leave that work for someone else.
 - (3). Use the talents and abilities you have to serve the Lord in other ways.
3. If the Parable of the Talents teaches us anything, it tells us far too many members of the body of Christ have buried their talents.
- a. They see all the talents and abilities of others and feel they can't compete – so they bury their talent.
 - b. Don't do that! If all you have is just one talent, use that one talent every single day to glorify God.

- c. I can promise you that if you use that one talent to glorify God, He will give you more,
- d. How do I know? Because that's the very point Jesus was making in that parable.
- e. So don't try to use talents and abilities you don't have – use the ones God has given you, and glorify Him in the process.

CONCLUSION:

- I. If the Lord were to ask you to define the depth of your love, what would your answer be?
 - A. The two choices are an *agape*-kind of love, or a *phileo*-kind of love.
 - 1. Would you be able to say your love for Him is an *agape*-kind of love – a deep, intense, self-sacrificing kind of love that not only seeks what is best in others, but is totally devoted to serving the Lord every way you can every day of your life?
 - 2. Or would you have to admit to having only a *phileo*-kind of love – a warm, caring, nurturing friendship, but not the kind of love that would motivate you to sacrifice your time and energy serving the Lord every way and every day?
 - 3. Be honest with your answer – because you can't change your life until you're willing to admit there is a need for change.

B. More than anyone, Peter understood that we have a common enemy who wants nothing more than to destroy us, and rob us of our reward.

1. In fact, Peter gave struggling Christians in the first century this warning:

a. **1 Peter 5:8-9** – *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

2. However, Peter also knew this is a battle we can win – but only with the Lord's help.

a. **1 Peter 5:10-11** – *But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

C. Jesus once warned Peter that Satan would sift him like wheat. That happened the night Peter denied the Lord three times.

1. If Satan has sifted you like wheat as he once did to Peter, there's still hope.

2. You can win the victory by *resisting him*, and by *remaining steadfast* in the faith.

- a. The first step to winning that victory is to admit you've been overcome by the enemy, and need the Lord's forgiveness and strength, and the prayers and the encouragement of faithful saints, to get up and get back into the battle.
3. But, if you've never enlisted in the conflict because you have never given your life to Christ, then there is a first step for you too.
 - a. Your first step is to come to Christ in faith, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Him, and be baptized into Him for the remission of your past sins.