

Feed my sheep

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[0:00] A few summers ago when I was studying, I lived with some housemates. I lived with about eight different housemates. It was a big house that we got to live in.

And during that time, one summer, one of the housemates had agreed to look after some friend's cats. And we all knew about it. He told us that he was happy to do this favor for them, but he hated cats.

He found them quite annoying, but he was willing to do it because he loved his friends. Three days into the two weeks, he was just really finding, looking after cats quite hard.

And so he asked some of us to help him out. We loved our housemate. He loved his friends. We wanted to make sure these cats were looked after and fed and still alive by the time the friends came back.

And so we were very willing to make sure that happened. In this passage, as we have read, that we have read, we see Peter.

[1:13] And as Mark has said, he is instructed to look after, to feed Jesus' sheep. But as he does that, he's got to be someone who loves Jesus.

And that's what Jesus makes sure is the case first for Peter. Three times we're going to see the question from Jesus, Do you love me?

And out of that place of love for Jesus, then Peter can go on with that task of feeding, of looking after Jesus' sheep. We're going to see three things.

Love Jesus. Feed Jesus' sheep. Follow Jesus. So first of all, love Jesus. The first question that Jesus asks is there in verse 15.

After they had finished eating, after they had finished that, I'm sure, delicious breakfast, those warm fish sandwiches on the beach with Jesus. After that, Jesus said to Simon, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

[2:32] More than these what? Do you love me more than these? It could be fish. He was a fisherman. More than these boats.

More than the nets that you have to fish. More than the fish sandwiches that they ate. Do you love me more than these?

Or maybe it's this. Do you love me more than you love these other disciples? These friends of ours. But do you love me first?

Or do you love me more than they love me? Compared to their love for me, do you love me more? Not quite sure which one Jesus is referring to.

Maybe he's referring to all of them. But I think the big point is for Peter, out of everything in life, do you love me first?

[3:39] Out of everything and everyone that you could love, do you love me first, Peter? This is Jesus.

Don't forget who he is. He is the risen son of God. The one who's died for Peter's sin. The one who's standing with him, walking on this beach after this breakfast that he's fed to them.

The one who's provided this miraculous catch of fish. The glorious risen son of God. Do you love me, Peter? Peter. And Peter answers.

And when he answers, he doesn't say, Lord, you know I love you because I've swum 100 meters from the boat to see you. That's two Olympic-sized pools.

That's an extraordinary amount. Of course I love you, Jesus. I've swum all the way to you. The other disciples, they didn't do that. Of course I love you, Jesus.

[4:50] No, he says to Jesus, you know. Yes, Lord, he said. You know that I love you. Jesus, the son of God, the one who knows all things.

Peter thinks, surely you know that I love you. Why do you even have to ask me, Jesus? But then the question comes again.

Verse 16. Again, Jesus said, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And he answered, yes.

Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus, you know all things. You know that I love you. And you've asked me this twice already. Is there really any doubt?

And then the third time comes. Verse 17. The third time he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

[6:03] And Peter was hurt. Peter was hurt that Jesus would ask him three times.

Why was Peter hurt by this? I guess some of us may have heard sermons preached on this passage. And they tell us the answer is because of the Greek.

There's two Greek words used for love in this passage. The first two are one word. And the third one is a different word. The two words there, phileo and agape.

And people make much of that. But actually, as I've read some of the commentators this week, they say, actually, those two words in John's gospel, they're used interchangeably.

He means kind of the same thing. So he's not hurt because of Greek words. Actually, I think the answer is pretty plain in the text.

[7:10] Verse 17. Verse 17. The third time he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And it says, Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time.

And the third time is significant. Why is it significant? Well, Peter is here, as we've said, after Jesus has given him this wonderful breakfast, this wonderful warm fish sandwiches, after that miraculous catch.

And they've enjoyed them around a warm fire. And the last time Peter was around a warm fire in John's gospel was those verses that we read from John 18.

That night when Jesus was arrested and he was put on trial, Peter was not so far away and Peter himself was being questioned.

Aren't you one of his disciples too? No. Aren't you one of his disciples? No.

[8:30] Didn't I see you with Jesus? No, I am not. I don't know him. Three times Peter denied that he knew Jesus.

Just as Jesus told him he would. And now three times Jesus says to John, do you love me?

Do you love me? Three times. Of course he's hurt. He realizes, I deny Jesus three times and now Jesus is saying three times to me, do you love me?

It's going to hurt. Jesus is kind of exposing Peter's sin. It's uncomfortable, but doesn't Jesus do it masterfully?

He doesn't say, you denied me three times, repent. No, Jesus graciously and lovingly and tenderly as the good shepherd of the sheep, he says, do you love me?

[9:42] Do you love me? Do you love me? Gently and graciously restoring Peter.

Peter. He is the friend of sinners. The friend of even Peter who would deny him on that night, that dark, dark night.

Says, do you love me? Because you can love me. Because you can find forgiveness from me. It must be unpleasant.

It must have hurt Peter. We've told that it hurt Peter. You know, before Peter went and denied Jesus three times, we get this statement, bold, bold statement from Peter in John 13.

John 13 verse 37. Peter said to Jesus after Jesus explained that he was going away and you cannot go where I'm going.

[10:53] Peter said, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. It's full of so much courage and bravery.

And they're not long after this. The courageous, brave, bold Peter isn't quite so brave and bold.

Doesn't say, yes, I follow Jesus. He says, no, I don't know him. And now he's being humbled as he realizes what Jesus is doing.

As he realizes Jesus is restoring him. He's made a mistake, he's mucked up, but Jesus is lovingly and gently restoring him.

I had a really good friend when I was at college some years ago in Crawley. Made a really great friend. I prayed for a good friend on this course that I was doing and God provided wonderfully.

[12:03] I made a mistake. I did something wrong in our friendship and he didn't speak to me for a few days and the next time we saw each other and kind of spoke it was very awkward.

And I realized that I'd done something wrong. We chatted about it and it was painful. But eventually he said I forgive you.

And that was amazing that he would do that. So gracious and we're still friends today. But that was a bit of a painful time.

It was a bit awkward. I'd mucked up. Peter had done wrong. He'd mucked up. It must have been a bit awkward.

This conversation. But Jesus the friend of sinners is lovingly drawing Peter back in.

[13:13] Peter is being shown that his love for Jesus isn't all about how enthusiastic and courageous he is. he showed so much courage.

Lord I'll die for you. But actually Peter needed Jesus to die for him. Early on in our time in John's Gospel we would have read chapter 3 chapter 3 and verse 16 that verse that we know so well God so loved the world that he gave us his only begotten son that anyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

See we need God to love us first. We need Jesus to come down and give up his life for us because we cannot save ourselves.

we need him to love us first. Peter needs to see that Jesus is the one who lays down his life for him before Peter then can follow him and maybe lay down his life for him in service as he follows the one that he loves.

I don't know how you've come to church this morning. maybe some of us have come this morning feeling rather guilty of sin struggling with sin you know you've failed you know you've mucked things up a little bit again we come this morning and we see Peter who had mucked things up a bit denied his Lord knowing him but here we see Jesus the friend of sinners who is full of so much grace who is bringing his wandering sheep back into his vault know that you can and you need to come back to Jesus and he is full of mercy and grace but maybe some of us are a bit like how

[15:33] Peter was before he denied Jesus maybe some of us are feeling kind of a bit proud of how life is going at the moment we're riding high life seems to be going well we don't seem to be too troubled by sin there's that phrase isn't there pride comes before a fool we need to remember that it's Jesus who has loved us first we need to remember that it's Jesus who laid down his life for us the Christian life starts first with God loving us and we love him for that secondly feed feed Jesus' sheep as

Jesus graciously and tenderly restores Peter here by asking him those questions do you love me after Jesus each of Jesus' responses Simon Peter's responses even Jesus gives Peter a job to do and that job that commission is to go and feed and to care for Jesus' sheep so we see the first one in verse 15 Jesus said feed my lambs in verse 16 take care of my sheep and in verse 17 feed my sheep Jesus has seen that Peter does indeed love him Peter loves Jesus and as someone who loves Jesus he can entrust

Jesus can entrust the care of his sheep to him knowing that Peter is going to serve out of a place of love for Jesus as we look at these verses remember first that this is specific to Peter this is his call to go and feed and to care for the sheep that's specific for Peter first as an apostle Peter along with the other apostles are called to go and continue Jesus' mission into the world and the task that Peter is being called to here is to feed the sheep to take care of the sheep notice who these sheep belong to Jesus says in each of these calls my sheep my lambs they're his they're his people people who he has laid down his life for people who have had

Jesus' blood shed for them these are Jesus' people and they are precious loved bought at a price Peter please care for them Peter please treasure these sheep of mine back in March I was asked by my future mother and father-in-law to look after their house whilst they were away for a week it felt like a big responsibility looking after your own house the place you live normally that's a

responsibility and hopefully we take it seriously looking after someone else's house that takes it to a whole new level I felt the weighty responsibility I love these guys that I'm looking after the house for every time

I left I think every time I left more or less I would go back at least once to check the door was locked and the windows were shut paranoid I don't want anything to happen to this house that's being entrusted into my care it's a weighty responsibility Peter here is being entrusted with the care of Jesus' people it's a weighty responsibility Peter along with the other apostles are called to do that to go and preach the forgiveness of sins to go and continue the mission of the church and if we were to flick over a few pages we'd read the book of Acts we'd read that great sermon of Peter's we'd read of numbers being added to the church and Peter has the responsibility along with those apostles to feed to look after those people and they then call others other elders other shepherds to do that too to look after different groups of

[21:01] God's people as the church grows and Peter he interestingly I think writes in his letter in his first letter 1 Peter he writes to other shepherds to other elders have a look at it with me if you can 1 Peter towards the back of our Bibles and chapter 5 verse 1 and 2 Peter writes to fellow elders to fellow shepherds elders of God's flock to the elders among you I appeal as a fellow elder and witness of Christ's suffering who also will share in the glory to be revealed be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care watching over them not because you must but because you are willing as God wants you to be we could read more but notice

Peter writes as an elder as a shepherd under the great shepherd of the sheep the Lord Jesus he writes to others who are going to be involved in shepherding in looking after and caring for God's people the apostle Paul in the book of Acts speaks to the elders in Ephesus Acts 20 verse 28 you can look it up or maybe just listen to this one verse Acts 20 verse 8 Paul says keep watch over yourselves and all the flock all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood elders leaders of God's church are called to be shepherds a bit like how

Peter is called here to feed to look after the sheep God's people and it just so happens that this evening we're looking at eldership in a bit more detail so do come back tonight we'll hear more I guess we'll hear of how elders are involved in teaching the Bible that's how sheep are fed how elders are to protect the sheep from wolves people false teachers who will come in who may come in and try to do damage to sheep they need to protect them need to be involved in pastoral work come back this evening we'll hear more but I think from this passage I think the big thing we need to see is that this work that Peter's entrusted to do needs to involve!

Peter first loving Jesus and as he loves Jesus hopefully he will be able to love the sheep that Jesus places in his care ultimately it's not about his his own courage he said I'll go and die for you ultimately the sheep won't be fed the kingdom of God won't grow by Peter's own courage has he failed no he needs to firstly love Jesus nor will it grow by his own resources we saw that last week as they head out fishing and their nets are empty they have nothing and then Jesus comes and fills the nets with fish Jesus will grow the church he will use Peter he will use the others but ultimately it's about

Jesus and his work and they need to love him they need to keep looking to him and so as people as someone who's going to feed the flock he just needs to make much of Jesus make sure he is growing in love with Jesus and as he teaches people make sure that he points them to Jesus make much of Jesus this gracious saviour that we see here who gently restores!

[26:04] If an elder in this church or if a perspective elder in this church doesn't love Jesus if they're not leading us to him away from themselves and to him our great risen glorious saviour then I don't think he should be an elder yes elders will be imperfect they will fail but they must have a love for Jesus because they could be and scarily there are people in positions leading churches who don't really love Jesus they love themselves more and they want a platform to be able to put forward their own views or ideas or maybe they want to do it because they want to be well liked by people rather than simply love

Jesus and look after these sheep in their care Peter and all those who are involved in looking after the sheep they must love Jesus first and there are ways in which some of us in this room have responsibility for feeding for caring for the sheep we're not in a position of being an elder maybe we're involved in teaching the Bible to children or maybe we get to chances to preach at church whatever those times may be make sure you're loving Jesus first and then look after those who you're called to serve called to feed and for all of us let's be praying for those involved in this be praying for for elders in our church be praying for those who teach the children and others who will preach here it's in your interest that you do pray for them pray that they love Jesus first pray that God will be equipping them to serve us by feeding us with the word of God! God and Jesus does call Peter here to follow him verse 18 very truly I tell you when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God then he said follow me Peter's not being told that he won't be able to dress himself because he's going to get an old man and go into a care home he's told about the death that he's going to face and history shows us that Peter was crucified probably crucified upside down he told Jesus he'd be willing to lay down his life for him and after Jesus laid down his life for Peter Peter is called to follow Jesus even to the point of dying for knowing and following Jesus Peter loved Jesus as we see that here and Peter did take up that call to go and feed and look after the sheep we've seen that in that letter of his and he's called to follow to follow whatever that may mean and it's going to mean a death on a cross for Peter I think Brighton and Hove football fans have had to suffer a lot over many years I remember times when I was at the with Dean stadium it was horrible it rained it wasn't the best introduction for me to watching live football but wow hasn't Brighton gone on leaps and bounds since then nice new stadium flying high in the Premier League FA Cup final today but I think for those who are following

[31:13] Brighton and Hove Albion today whether it will be a win or a lose they're going to keep following Brighton and if they just give up following Brighton because they lose this afternoon then what kind of a follower is that they will follow through all the highs and all the lows and Peter he's being called to follow Jesus through all the highs and through all the lows follow Jesus that your risen glorious saviour who you love follow him and so for us in our lives whether through pain or sorrow joy and happiness whatever life is going to throw away we are called every day to follow Jesus every day to take up our cross and follow him whatever that may mean follow

Jesus our great great saviour chiketer it was at a conference this week and during the conference was reminded in one of the talks of a guy called C.T.

Studd who was a cricketer great cricketer by the sounds of things but he gave his cricketing career up to go and follow Jesus onto the mission fields to go to China India and the Congo and he said this I know that cricket would not last and honour would not last and nothing in this world would last but it was worthwhile living for the world to come maybe he would add to that living for the saviour the Lord Jesus he was willing to follow Jesus he was willing to even give up his successful cricket career to follow Jesus wherever it may lead him but I wonder as we hear of Peter who was crucified for following the

Lord Jesus as we hear of someone giving up a cricketing career to go and be a missionary it's great isn't it but maybe we kind of feel like compared to them never going to be remembered like that well Peter here he compares himself with someone too and actually Jesus tells him not to so have a look verse 20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them this was the one who had leaned!

back against Jesus at the supper and said Lord who is going to betray ye when Peter saw him he asked Lord what about him he's talking about John who we get revealed really to us in verse 24 this is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down John the writer of this gospel one of the other disciples of Jesus and Peter says Lord what about him you've told me this is going to!

[34:42] to me what about him how's he going to die is he going to die alongside me is he going to have a worse death than me what's going to

happen to him well Jesus answers and says this verse 22 if I want him to remain alive until I return what is that to you you must follow me because of this the rumor spread among the disciples that this disciple would not die but Jesus did not say that he would not die he only said if I want him to remain alive until I return what is that to you Peter tries to compare himself with another disciple but Jesus simply says if I want him to remain alive what is that to you you must follow me whatever and wherever we have been called to serve the Lord Jesus we must simply follow him okay they're serving over there you can't do that you don't feel gifted to do that but you would love to do that you're jealous of them but no

Jesus has called you to serve and follow him in the way that he's gifted you simply be faithful to that simply be faithful to following your Lord Jesus whether John dies whether he dies the way Peter dies whether he dies in peace whether he's still alive when Jesus comes what is that to you Peter you must follow and all of us must follow the Lord Jesus too and it starts first with loving Jesus do do you love Jesus are you willing to serve him in the way that he's called you to serve are you willing to follow him whatever that may mean wherever that may lead John's gospel ends with the call to follow

Jesus and it kind of begins with a call to follow Jesus I was looking chapter 1 earlier this week and reading there in chapter 1 and verse 35 the next day John was there again with two of his disciples when he saw Jesus passing by he said look the Lamb of God when the two disciples heard him say this they followed Jesus there we see the beginning of some of the disciples following Jesus and at the end of this gospel Jesus is saying you must still follow me I'm leaving this well but you must still follow me we've been through together over this last year as a church some of us may have been here every week some of us only one or two but we have seen

Jesus we have seen these disciples following him we've joined with them in those great miracles of Jesus the feeding of the 5,000 the walking on the!

we've heard his amazing teaching we've seen him journey to the cross we've seen his glorious resurrection we saw that wonderful scene last week of the breakfast on the beach that miraculous catch we've seen so much and you know what John ends this by saying much more could be written verse 25 Jesus did many other things as well if every one of them were written down I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written but we have this we have John's gospel we have so much glorious riches in just this gospel alone and we have in it Jesus Jesus the glorious son of God who was there at the beginning of time who was there at the creation of the world come down to be here with us and we're called to follow him we're called to love him love him the friend of sinners let's pray

[39:23] Father God we thank you so much for John's gospel we thank you so much for the time that we have to spend over this last year looking into it understanding more of it but first and foremost we thank you that we have seen Jesus and we thank you that though we don't see him physically in front of us now we have your word so clear and we can believe in him and we can have life in his name and we pray father that you would help us to grow in our love for you you would help us to pray for those who care for us as elders in the church that you would help those who are elders in the church to care for the sheep to love

Jesus first and then care for the sheep and we pray that you would help each one of us to follow Jesus wherever that may lead whatever that may mean to follow him because we love him and we ask this father in Jesus name!

Amen! We're going to sing