

Love me? Follow me!

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[0 : 00] Amen. We looked this morning at Breakfast with Jesus, John chapter 21, verses 1 to 14, in this rather!

Simon Peter. And I'm going to say two things that Jesus says, love me, do you love me? And he also says, follow me. So if you're struggling with concentration, those are the two things.

Do you love me? And follow me. So that's it. So you've heard it. You're allowed to, well, you've got the main part.

So I'm going to say more than that. First of all, by way of some introductory remarks. This passage has quite a bit of things going on with words.

Substituted words and synonyms. A synonym is two words for the same thing. So I wonder if I can think of two words for the same thing, like door and portal.

[1 : 29] Or, oh, I don't know. Somebody help me with this. Synonyms. Wind, breeze. Ocean and sea.

Things like that. Yeah. Synonym. Two different words for the same thing. And in this passage, you get this quite a bit. So if you care to look carefully.

So Jesus does this question and answer thing three times. And in the answer, Jesus says in verse 15, feed my lambs.

So he uses a word, feed. Feed my lambs. And then the second time round, he says, verse 16, take care of my sheep.

Feed. First word is a word which I think means feed. The second is one word which means shepherd. Well, what do shepherds do? They feed the flock.

[2 : 31] So it's a synonym. First he says feed. Then he says take care of or shepherd. Third time round, third time round, he says the first word again, feed.

So feed, shepherd, feed. Another set of synonyms for the woolly creatures that are being referred to.

In verse 15, Jesus says lambs. In verse 16, he says sheep. And in verse 17, third time round, he says sheep.

So you see there's a combination. And he goes through all the different combinations of feed, shepherd, lamb, sheep. So he does that. And he also does it with the word for love.

Now I mentioned the first two. I mentioned those other two first because you might not otherwise put this into a proper context.

[3 : 36] Jesus does the same thing with love. There are two words used. Agape, agape, and philo.

Agape is the, it gets to be a particular Christian word for love. But philo is a decent word for love as well.

Now I know that C.S. Lewis wrote a very famous book called The Four Loves or Three Loves? Four Loves. And he uses these different Greek words.

Agape, philo. Eros. And something else. Okay, well what he does is he says in classical Greek, you can take these words in four or however many different directions and they mean something different.

I don't think this is what Jesus is doing here. I think he's using them as synonyms. And that does make a little bit of a difference of the way you interpret it.

[4 : 51] And in particular, it makes a difference about your translation. So my translation says, verse 15, Simon, son of John, do you?

I've got truly love. Now, what the translator has done is taken agape and said that is truly love. Anybody got a different translation there? What have you got, Rachel, for that? Verse 15. Are you an NIV person? Right, ESV says.

Do you love me? It just says love, which I think is probably more correct. It is a synonym. Love, love, two different Greek words, not a huge amount of difference.

I don't think it's meaning a huge amount of difference between them. So I'll tell you, Jesus says, do you agape, me, more than these? And Peter says, you know that I philo, I love you.

[5 : 55] And then verse 16, do you agape, do you love me? And verse 16, Peter answers, yes, Lord, I philo, I love you. The third time, Jesus says, do you love me, philo, do you love me?

And Peter answers, why do you ask, do you philo, do you love me? Lord, you know all things, you know I philo, love you. So I think it's a threefold question, so that's pretty strong.

But I don't think he's making a huge distinction between the agape and philo. You're entitled to disagree with me if you like, but I did look it up.

And Don Carson thinks that there's not a huge amount of difference anyway. Not much difference. So that's the first thing, there are synonyms.

And it isn't just the agape thing, it's a synonym, there's other synonyms going on there. Another introductory thing is how it concludes. It concludes, this is where it gets to, of John himself, the beloved disciple, verse 20.

[7 : 10] Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. And it concludes by telling us that he is a true witness. It's there in verse 24.

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. And other people, I presume other people say, we know that his testimony is true.

I'm not quite sure how that would work in a written version of the Bible. I know it would work on conveyancing and things like that. That you write my name, da-da-da-da, sign so-and-so.

And your neighbours or somebody comes in and says, yeah, I agree with that. And they witness it, don't they? They say, they put their signatures there too. We agree. Now, I'm not quite sure how that would work in this text, but I think that's the sort of thing that's going on.

But John himself writes, this is me, I'm signing off, and I'm putting my name to this. I've seen all these things. I was there, wanting to know that.

[8 : 16] And I'm passing it on to you, and I'm writing it down, and you can trust me on this. It is how I said it was. And other people, I don't know who they are, as it were, sign up as well and say, yeah, this is right.

We know that his testimony is true. That's what I think is happening. But there's something going on there to say, it's all real. It isn't made up.

This isn't fiction. This isn't by Enid Blyton or whoever it was that wrote Harry Potter. Who wrote Harry Potter? J.K. Rowling.

It's not like that. It's like the BBC News, you know, where, oh dear, I can't think of a name.

Somebody says, you know, this is John Simpson reporting to you from Tripoli.

And there's Tripoli in the background. You know, he was there, he saw it, and he signs his report off like that. This is what John's Gospel is saying. I was there, I saw it, and that's what I'm asking you to trust in.

[9 : 17] It's not make-believe. And he also refers to the riches of his original material. 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.

That's worth pondering, isn't it? The richness of the original source material. In those three or whatever it was years, I suppose it can't be much different to three years, Jesus said so many things, and did so many things, and met so many people, and had so many conversations, that you could spend a lifetime writing them down, and linking them up, and pondering them.

It's quite a thought, isn't it? I suppose it says something about the richness of Jesus' personality.

You know, that John might be saying, do you remember that time that he met that beggar?

No, not the one in, you know, the other people, that other beggar. Do you remember what he said to him? That was amazing, wasn't it? Shall I write that down? Oh, if I keep writing things like that, I won't have room. And do you remember when he met that woman?

It wasn't even what he said. It was just the timing of the way that he turned his face towards her.

You know, that will always stay with me. There was something really special about that. Shall I write that?

[10 : 35] No, I don't think I will. Do you know, just imagine the richness of the personality and the character of Jesus in the way that he interacted.

I, you know, I'm speculating now. I don't think there was ever a dull moment with Jesus, if you see what I mean. There was never an interaction where you say, well, that was pretty predictable. You know, not much happened today. You know, dear diary, Jesus was in town as normal. You know, it just wasn't like that. Anyway, I just find that a tantalising thought.

It tells, John tells us that he selected the material that was significant. So, again, I'm just on the introduction here. In order to understand what's going on in this bit, we need to remember that Jesus, sorry, that Peter denied Jesus three times.

That's a significant thing. It's predicted in chapter 13, verses 37 and 38. Please turn to that. John 13, 37 and 38.

[11:45] Peter asked, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Which seems a typically rash Peter sort of thing to say. Bless him.

And then Jesus answers, will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth before the cock crows, you will disown me three times.

Now, disowning Jesus is a very serious thing. Because he's made it that our relationship with him is via a personal relationship.

It's of trust. That's how it works. Why does God make it work like that? I don't know, but he does. He says, if you come to me and put your trust in me and, if you like, give your life to me, then that's how I'm going to relate to you.

And that's how my blessings come into your life. It's a person-to-person relationship. And disowning is a breach in that relationship. And so Peter said, oh, well, you know, I'm so spiritually strong, I can lay down my life for you, Lord.

[13:04] And Jesus is saying, well, I'm ever so sorry to tell you that you're really miscalculating your own personal strength because you're going to disown me.

Three times. Come to chapter 18, verse 17. This is near the charcoal fire.

And this is under the intimidating interrogation of a servant girl at the door.

And she says to Peter, you're not one of this man's disciples, are you? And the girl at the door asked Peter. And he replies, I am not.

And there's the fire. Jesus has lit a fire in the bit earlier in the chapter. Peter warms himself.

[14:13] Chapter 18, verse 25. As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, you're not one of his disciples, are you? And he denied it.

And he said, no, no, no. No, I'm not. I'm not. I am not. Jesus has been saying, I am. And Peter says, I am not. One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said to him, didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?

Again, Peter denied it. And at that time, a cock began to crow. So this is exactly what Jesus says.

Three times before the cock crows, you will deny me.

And he did so in public. It wasn't just a secret thing where he let the Lord down in secret. It was very definite. And it was repeated.

And it was a catastrophe. And I'm thinking about the way as Christians we let the Lord down.

[15:17] As we do. That's what sin is, isn't it? Sin is saying, I'm not going to follow you, Lord, at this particular point, in this particular area.

And yet, I think there's a distinction somehow between the sin that we, you know, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.

And this, which is more like apostasy of publicly and definitely and repeatedly saying, I'm not, I'm nothing to do with him. Maybe we could discuss that in a moment.

Three times Peter denied Jesus. And that, I think, is why three times Jesus asked him this question about love.

And here it is. Do you love me more than these? This is presumably a reference to the other disciples because Peter had sort of seen himself as being a cut above the other ones.

[16:22] And Peter says, Lord, you know I love you. Feed my lambs. Again, Jesus says, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? He answered, yes, Lord, you know I love you.

Take care of my sheep. The third time he said to him, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? Peter was sad because Jesus asked him the third time, do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things.

You know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my sheep. And that's my point. That Jesus says to Peter, do you love me?

And then he gives him a work to do. But the qualification for doing the work is first of all answering this question.

Do you love me? And I don't think I've got anything to say to enlarge on that. That's the point. It's a good question from Jesus.

[17:26] It is the fundamental question, isn't it? Of all the things that you're doing and all the things you've done in the past and of all that you like to do and all that you think of yourself and all that you perhaps misjudge about yourself, either in one direction or another, let's just get to the heart of it.

Do you love me? Says Jesus. Can't get around that question. I've got lots of qualifications now. I'm not asking you that. I'm asking, do you love me? I work really hard. I'm not asking you that. I'm saying, do you love me? Point number two.

It's about following. And we next have the conversation about verse 18 and 19 about the death that Peter would die.

And Jesus wraps that whole thing up with the words, follow me. Verse 19, follow me. And in verse 20, the disciple whom Jesus loved was following.

[18:58] But that incisive question, do you love me? Can't get around that one. And then this fundamental command, follow me.

It's interesting that following Jesus meant different things for different people, as we shall see in a moment. It doesn't mean the same thing for everybody.

There's something particular individual for it. You, follow me, says Jesus. That's the important thing. Now, let's fill that out a little bit.

For Peter, it was going to mean suffering, if you like, persecution, and persecution that would lead to his life being taken from him.

So, verse 18, I tell you the truth. When you were younger, you dressed yourself, you went where you wanted. When you were old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.

[20:01] Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. John's used that expression, on at least two other occasions, about the kind of death, actually the kind of death that Jesus would die.

When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself. He said this to indicate the kind of death he was going to die. But here is Peter. So, for him, this means persecution, persecution to death.

And interestingly, I don't know what you think about this. He says, when you're older, it becomes more of a serious issue. When you are old, then it will really be a challenge to you to follow me.

I don't think that's quite, well, I don't know whether interesting is the right word. There's so much emphasis on the importance of youth and young people and the vigour of youth and the enthusiasm of youth and, if you like, the passion of youth, the intensity of youth.

And here he says, the point is not what you do when you're young. The point is how you will be when you're old. Because when you're older, you will find the demands of discipleship really do make a difference to you.

[21:31] He says, well, that's the case. Put it all under the heading, follow me. Follow me. Follow me.

Now, what about, so that's Peter. Now, what about John? Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. This is the one who leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, Lord, who's going to betray you?

And Peter saw him and he said, well, what about him? You just told me that it's going to be really tough when I get older and I'm going to die in some way which is not what I would have liked.

Or, well, what about him? And then Jesus says, well, I'll tell you about him. If I want him to remain alive until I come. So he won't be persecuted to death.

Suppose I said that. Suppose he won't be persecuted. He will remain alive until I come. Suppose I said that. What difference does that make to you?

[22:29] You must follow me. Interesting piece of logic there, isn't it? Whatever. Okay, suppose whatever. Suppose I have something very different in store for him.

To make the slightest difference to you, you follow me. And then apparently there had been a misunderstanding about this. That the rumor had spread or the word had spread among the brothers that the disciple would not die.

But Jesus didn't say that. He only said, if I chose that he should. If I wanted him to remain alive until I return. What's that to you? A little bit of misunderstanding dealt with there.

For John, it might well be to remain till the coming of Jesus. Certainly he has a role as a witness. He tells us about that. I have a particular calling to remember these things.

To write them down. And to testify. He has a particular calling to do that. So my first point was this question which I'll just repeat.

[23 : 40] Jesus says, do you love me? Follow me. And my second point is that Jesus says to each of us, follow me. And I can say, follow me without looking sideways.

See what I mean? Follow me without looking sideways. Well Lord, what about those other people? What about that other family?

Well, Jesus, well suppose I, suppose. My plan for that other family is that they all grow up to be Christians and to be missionaries and serve the Lord in some wonderful way.

And everybody says how wonderful they are. What difference does that make to you? You follow me. Whatever family I give you. Or, you know, you look at other believers and you say, well Lord, look at the way you've dealt with them.

Look what you've called them to. You know, I don't know what might be going on in each of our individual minds. Look at, you know, look at the health of those people.

[24 : 46] I struggle with health. But look at the health that you've given them. And the Lord says, well, okay, suppose I've given those people such health that they are running marathons until they're 99 years old.

And they go on platoon camp every weekend, cold showers, killing deer with their bare hands, eating raw meat, all that sort of thing, whatever they're going to be doing.

So, I suppose, and you struggle well. What difference does that make? You follow me. You could look at it sideways in all sorts of ways, couldn't you?

Well, look at the big church they belong to. And look at all the young people. And look at the bank balance they've got. And look at the missionary involvement they've got and everything else.

And, oh, don't you think, well, the Lord says, well, okay, that's what I chose for them. What difference does that make to you? You follow me where I've put you.

[25 : 45] You follow where I call. You go where I tell you to go. And, you know, that's discipleship, isn't it? But, Lord, what about my brother?

What about my sister? What about what's going on here? What about what's going on there? Jesus says, well, So what?

You, what is that to you? You follow me. It's quite challenging, isn't it? In a way, it's quite encouraging. Because it stops us having to worry about, you know, whether we're quite in the right place because it's so much better somewhere else.

Jesus says, well, maybe it is, maybe it isn't. Your job is to follow me. Full stop. Well, not quite full stop because I'm going to say, he does say, follow me.

And I think it's worth pointing out that the me is a person. So what we're following, I think it's very healthy for us to just rehearse this in our minds.

[26 : 57] What we're following is a person. Now, we can get this muddled up because we think, perhaps we think we're following a timetable.

And maybe following Jesus does involve following a timetable. But it's not following a timetable for the sake of following a timetable.

What we're actually following is Jesus. If we get this right. Jesus says, follow me. Follow me. Follow me.

Whatever I call you to do, it might not be the same as Peter. It might not be the same as John. You follow me. You follow me. So I'm going to use the preacher's law of the excluded middle or whatever it is and say, here's some things that he doesn't say.

He doesn't say, follow Calvin. Actually, I'm a big fan of Calvin and I love the Institutes and I've got loads of his commentaries and I've even read some of them.

[28 : 05] But he doesn't say, follow Calvin. Jesus says, follow me. And he doesn't say, follow Terry.

Now, for those of you who don't know who Terry is, I'm not going to tell you. But for many people, Terry is a big name and he doesn't need a surname because everybody knows who's meant by the first name.

But, and I'm sure Terry would agree with this, Jesus doesn't call us to follow Terry. He calls us to follow Jesus. And you could put any number of names there.

You could put Tim Keller. I'm sure about that one. And I think Tim Keller's sure about that one as well. But it is worth pointing out, isn't it? That for all his gifts and talents and used, the way that God has used him, Jesus doesn't say, follow Tim Keller.

I mean, he does in a subsidiary sense, the same way that Paul says, imitate me as I imitate God. But the primary focus of who we're following is Jesus.

[29 : 17] And I'll put John Piper there just for good measure. So I just, that's the point I think is being made here. And that's the point I'm trying to pass on.

Those two things, they're very fundamental. They're very searching. They put us, put us, put things in the right perspective, I think. The risen Jesus says to Peter, here's the fundamental question.

Do you love me? And he says, and I think he says that to us. And he says to Peter, as to John, this is what's your number one agenda, is to follow me.

Amen. Thank you.