

John 21:15-25

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[0 : 00] Today's from John chapter 21, verses 15 through 25. Please stand for the reading of God's word. 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. 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 to my sheep. 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. 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.

[1 : 04] 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? When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man?

Jesus said to him, if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? 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? 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. Now, there are also many other things that Jesus did where every one of them to be written. I suppose that the word itself could not contain the books that would be written.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, it's great to have you here today. And as Ben mentioned earlier, we've been in John's gospel for some time.

[2 : 06] This is the 53rd and concluding sermon that we have sat under as he has been our tutor and our teacher.

So for a year, we've given ourselves to this. We did take a couple of breaks at the midway point of the gospel. We walked our way through the book of Nehemiah. And we also spent time at Advent, last Advent, on the women of Christmas and Matthew's genealogy.

But here we are now finally bringing to conclusion something that we began some time ago. If you want to know where we're heading as a church, next week we're going to begin a series up till Advent that will take us into the Sermon on the Mount.

It's a collected aspect of Jesus' teaching contained in Matthew 5 through 7. And we just feel that given all that is taking place in the world today, it will be wonderful to sit down for some time in this great ethical and spiritual teaching of Jesus on what should a Christian be looking like and what should they be engaged in in the things of this world.

That will take us up till Christmas. But today, we find our way to the end of John's gospel. Our Heavenly Father, I now pray that my words would fly like arrows to the minds and hearts of all listeners, and that we might learn together through this passage how we might rightly follow you.

[3 : 49] To the glory of your name, to the good of our own soul, to the well-being of the city in which we live. In Jesus' name, amen. Personal experience teaches us that people become Christians, generally speaking, only after their questions about Jesus have been sufficiently answered.

In other words, when it comes to getting faith in Christ, your questions are in the driver's seat. Let me put it to you this way.

Let me put it to you this way. People make progress in following Christ only as his questions of them are sufficiently worked out.

Let me put the parallel as clearly as possible. When it comes to following Christ, it will be his questions of you and me that are behind the wheel.

I've been following Christ after an initial commitment to him some four decades now. my own personal experiential witness is this.

[5 : 17] That his questions of me are more penetrating and profound than the ones I asked of him before making a commitment.

That his questions are more challenging and probing than all the perfunctory ones put together that I made before making a commitment.

You know, we love to come to the scriptures with our questions. When you come to the end of John's gospel, it's Jesus questions to which we come.

I don't know if you noticed that in the reading. Two questions Jesus has for Peter.

One question really for each of the two paragraphs read. The first question is, do you love me?

[6 : 22] And then the second paragraph, what is that to you? Two questions.

Incredibly penetrating. In fact, that first set, do you love me? Comes with three occurrences. Did you notice that? It's as if this single question on following is primary.

The second question, what is that to you? Comes two times. And so the writer is closing the gospel, having concluded an argument that would lead one to belief in Christ, to setting out for Christ and switches all the questions having been answered.

This is what it looks like to follow Christ. Do you love me? And what is that to you? I love the way our text last week finished.

It said in verse 12, now none of the disciples dared ask him any more questions.

[7 : 36] They knew. They had come to know. Jesus was resurrected. And now in light of that, Jesus' question of Peter is behind the wheel.

And it will be behind the wheel for us. Do you love me? Interestingly, if you look at the first one there, more than these.

The antecedent to these is obviously the disciples of the previous text. The question that then is given to the follower of Christ is, do you love Jesus more than these?

It's a question of primary allegiance. If you have come to faith in Christ, he will question you concerning your primary allegiance.

More than these? And you and I certainly can fill in the blank. You know, many people have made much of something here that's quantitative.

[8 : 52] Did you notice that he asks the same question three times? Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?

And some people have, I think, rightly pointed out this quantitative insight that parallels Peter's quantitative three-fold denial, which was prophesied in chapter 13, unfolded in chapter 18, and having fallen three times, his reinstatement is quantitatively covering all the ground of his frailty.

I think they're right in pointing that out. I'm just not quite sure what to do with it. Some people make much not just of the quantitative nature of this statement, but the qualitative nature of the word love. They would point out for you that in the original languages, there are distinct words used here for love. It's not a strict repetition of the same etymological word. And therefore, they would argue that the question to Peter about primary allegiance is qualitative love he is after.

Although many have pointed out that the semantic range of these words is so widespread that it probably doesn't do much to say that the intent of Jesus' question is qualitative.

[10 : 33] He just wants to know, do you love me? I guess I want to spend a few minutes, not necessarily then on the quantitative aspect of three times over, or the qualitative aspect of a degree of love, but a line of different inquiry.

Not how many or how much, but simply, what does it mean?

What it means is simply this. It's in Jesus' answer. Feed my sheep. Tend my lambs.

Feed or tend my sheep. If you have faith in Christ and you are now to follow me as the text will lead you to, then this is what it means.

where real love is how tough is it well look what Jesus says to Peter in regard to the difficulty of this task he says in verse 18 truly truly I say to you when you were young you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted but when you're old you'll 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

Peter prove your love for me by caring for my church that's the logic of the argument even when it leads to a difficult end for you you know there's a tradition in church history and in historical records outside the scriptures on Peter's death we hear of it initially through Eusebius who speaks about him being inverted on a cross Jerome himself will write at Nero's hands Peter received the crown of martyrdom being nailed to the cross with his head toward the ground and his feet raised on high asserting that he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner of his Lord

[19:03] Tertullian even earlier says the budding faith Nero first made bloody in Rome there Peter was girded by another since he was bound to a cross there's some clear indication through the transmission of the story that Peter himself died a very difficult death having been led by others to perhaps outside of Rome on the Ostian Way and crucified in an inverted position proving this prophetic word that followed his own proving of his love for his Lord do you love me that's Jesus' question for you and do you love me even if it will lead you to a difficult end that's how you make progress the second question really comes in the second paragraph which is there and I'll spend a little less time on it but it's obvious that when Peter heard this difficult word he turns to the disciple whom Jesus loved following them he's like well you can almost sense the sense the the anxiety within him rising

Jesus you know I love you but now let's talk about the one you love what's going to happen to him what about this man and that's where Jesus says to him in verse 22 if it's my will that he remain until I come what is that to you you follow me and then it's repeated again at the end of verse 23 if it is my will that he remain until I come what is that to you I mean you can see the clarity and the beauty and the pristine symmetry of the text I mean it's right there you are to love me even unto a difficult end and what is it to you if others have no difficult end not death but life bestowed on them the parallelism in the text is profound and here's what it means for you and me because we like Peter want to compare our lot with the lives of others that's just the way it works and if you notice whenever you compare your life with the life of others you always compare up not down it's always what other people have that you don't have or places that he puts them that he did not put you or difficulties that you're in the midst of that they don't seem to be entertaining and Jesus' question to you in following is simply this what is that to you this is a profound question that has worked its way out into my own life over 40 years let me put the whole text to you with its balance you love Jesus by caring for others even unto death stop comparing your life with others even if it gives unto them life stop comparing the difficult circumstances of your own life with the relative ease of others this is how you follow him notice the emphatic nature of the following in this part verse 22 it isn't just follow me as we saw in verse 19 it's you you follow me you take your eyes off the purported ease of others in Christ and follow me this is profoundly personal for all of us at different seasons of life in other words if the first thing of loving

Jesus is going to require fortitude this is going to require real focus you've got to go through life like a plow horse with blinders on and you walk to the end of the field and you turn around and you walk back and you do what he's called you to do without wallowing over your shoulder but what about them it's challenging and it has its own upside as I get ready to close because John the writer is most certainly the disciple whom Jesus loved and in verse 24 the one who is bearing witness about these very things in other words just as there was a prophetic call on Peter's life unto death John is almost saying and the book you have in your hand not to mention perhaps even the book of Revelation this was the work I was given to do see I actually think the complexity of this question isn't so much on bringing clarity at the end of the gospel to the author of the gospel I actually think what's going on something here much more profound it's not giving clarity on the authorship of this gospel it's providing confidence that what John asserts about Jesus in this gospel can be trusted John is saying I did what he asked me to do and the church has been living off the fruit of John's writings for centuries and Peter is able to say and I did through my proclamation what Jesus asked me to do even though it ended in an inverted and shortened death tradition has it that the apostle John is the only one of the twelve that does not meet a violent death he seems to be the one that got the long life he seems to be the one that had his cake and ate it too but for Peter and for me and

for you don't compare the circumstances of your life with all their difficulty with the lot albeit relative ease that he's asked others follow me you follow me how prove it it will be proven by your care of one another it will be proven by a church that stands erect and without any sense of pouting with no comparison of our life and the lot of others and with that his gospel is complete our heavenly father as we conclude this book which was meant to allow our questions to drive us to belief all the way to chapter 20 30 and 31 we praise you that it did not stop there but it went on from belief knowing we have assurance in that belief and from that assurance to following and
[27 : 58] Lord for our church for me for us collectively and each one of us individually may we learn to care for your own and not compare our life with others and thereby demonstrate that we're making progress in how to follow you in Jesus name we pray amen