

Do You Love Me?

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Date: 11 June 2000

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 11th of June 2000. The preacher is Phil Muleman.

His sermon is entitled, Do You Love Me? and is from John chapter 21 verses 15 to 25. Well keep your Bibles open at John 21.

As we look at these verses in particular I'm focusing on verses 15 through to the end of 19. Let me pray. Our Father we thank you for your word.

We pray that as we hear it preached now that you would open our hearts and our minds to understand what it has to say to us. And may we live it out in our lives for your glory.

Amen. Amen. How do you know if someone really loves you? Is it on the strength of their actions?

[1 : 03] Love can be demonstrated in our actions but not always. You see when we do something for someone our motives could be false and impure. The things we do for someone could be done for our own selfish gain.

For example, you could help someone with their uni assignment or their school work. And the motive on the surface looks honourable and good, doesn't it? But your motivation might be purely for the benefit of getting to know that person better in the hope that they might become your boyfriend or girlfriend one day.

Your motives can be impure. So love cannot be based purely on the strength of our actions. Can you know then if someone loves you in the use of his or her words?

Certainly our love and devotion for someone can be expressed in words. There's no doubt about that. But again, words can be shallow and meaningless.

Look at the instance of marriage breakdown within our society today. If people really took the words that they say to each other on their wedding day, words like I said, for example, when I got married, these words, I, Philip, in the presence of God, take you, Barbara, that's my wife, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live.

[2 : 41] All this I vow and promise. If we took those words seriously, then there should be no marriage breakdown within our culture.

But people, sadly, often don't take those words seriously. They say them, they say those words without even giving a thought to them.

They say it just for the sake of tradition, just so they can get what they want. So then love cannot be expressed solely on the strength of someone's words either.

Love cannot be expressed on words and on actions. Well, maybe then, love is expressed in our feelings.

And if you have these feelings of love, if you have those feelings of love for someone, you might conclude that they must have the same feelings for you too.

[3 : 45] But feelings aren't always mutual though. And the feeling that we might have one minute may be gone the next.

I had a really good feeling this afternoon that the swans were going to beat Essendon until about the 15th minute of the third quarter. Feelings aren't always mutual.

Listen to these words that Britney Spears wrote in a song. Who's Britney Spears anyway? She wrote these words. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. No, no. She did. It says it here. She wrote those words about 10 times. And then she writes this. I think I did it again.

I made you believe we're more than just friends. Oh, baby. It might seem like a crush. But it doesn't mean that I'm serious.

[4 : 46] Because to lose all my senses, that is just so typically me. Oh, baby, baby. And then she goes on with some other tripe. But anyway. Words, feelings aren't always mutual.

Now, there are thousands of songs with similar lines that have those sorts of lines, aren't there? There's thousands of songs that have been written throughout the years. Now, movies can easily also give us the impression that love is just feelings.

And the classic storyline goes something like this. The boy meets girl. The boy likes the girl. The boy has a good feeling about the girl. And the girl, she likes the boy.

And the girl has a good feeling about this boy. And their warm, fuzzy feelings draw them together. And life is fabulous. They're on a high.

Nothing can stop this feeling. They're on a high, that is. Until something breaks the feeling. Either by a word, or an action, or by something else.

[5 : 53] But friends, that's not love. That's not love either. Because those sorts of feelings can be attained through the illegal use of drugs or excessive use of alcohol.

And let me tell you, that's not love. Well, if actions, words, and feelings don't adequately describe love for us, how is Jesus in this chapter here, chapter 21, how is Jesus going to know if Peter, who by the way had failed in each of these areas, how is he going to know if Peter really loves him?

And how is the apostle Peter going to demonstrate his love for Jesus? Now, among all the disciples, Peter is the one who had protested his devotion to Jesus most strongly.

Earlier in John's Gospel, he had promised to follow Jesus even to death. But within hours, just a few hours of saying those words, we discover that he denies any knowledge of Jesus when questioned by the crowd that's outside Pilate's home where Jesus is put on trial.

Why does he deny Jesus? Because it's out of concern for his own safety. Now, in this particular passage, verses 15 through to the end of the chapter, Peter is once again face to face with the risen Jesus.

[7 : 26] Jesus has gone the way of the cross. He is face to face with this risen Jesus whom he had denied and abandoned. And once again, as on the night he denied Jesus three times, Jesus looks at him across a charcoal fire, we're told earlier in this chapter, and three times, Jesus presses the simple yet painfully searching question, Do you love me?

Notice in these verses here, in verses 15 through to 20, that Jesus does not address him as Peter, which means the rock, the foundation.

He doesn't address him as Peter at all, for he had failed to live up to that name. He addresses Peter by his old name, Simon, the name that he had before Jesus called him to follow him right back in the early parts of John's Gospel.

So in verses 15, 16 and 17, Jesus says to Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And in verses 15 he says, Do you love me more than these?

Referring to the disciples. And three times, Peter answers him with an affirmation of his love. Yes, Lord, you know I love you.

[8 : 52] But an affirmation that rests its confidence, not on the strength of his own love, but on the sureness of Jesus' knowledge. So in verses 15 and 16, he says, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

And in verse 17, he says, after he's been asked a third time, he says, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. How can Jesus be sure if we really love him?

The answer is not in our actions, words, or even in our feelings. The answer lies in what we profess and know about him.

And that is that Jesus knows everything. Peter says, Lord, you know everything. And he does.

This Jesus knows everything. He knew that Peter would deny him three times. And he told him so. The night before he died, he told him that Jesus would deny him three times.

[10 : 00] Jesus knew that he was going to suffer and die on the cross and rise again three days later. In the other Gospels, he talks about it several times on the way to Jerusalem, that he's going to die.

He's going to be handed over. He will be crucified. And three days later, he will rise. And Jesus here knows whether or not Peter loves him without even having to ask him.

Yet, he still asks him. And the answer that Peter gives to Jesus' question shows us his love for him. Lord, you know everything.

You know that I love you. Jesus knows whether or not Peter loves him. Please notice here that Peter affirms his love for Jesus three times.

Now think about this as a really hard question. How many times did Peter deny Jesus? Three times. Gosh, well done, Kathy.

[11:06] Now as he publicly affirms, as Peter publicly affirms his love for Jesus in front of the other disciples, for we are told that they shared breakfast with Jesus as well. They were all there at the same time.

Peter, as he publicly affirms his love for Jesus, Peter, in a sense, is undoing his denials of Jesus on the night before he died. He's publicly stating his love and loyalty to Jesus as he had done previously.

But this time, now that Jesus has risen from the dead and things make a bit more sense for him and so on, this time there is a greater sense of conviction and understanding with what he is doing. It sort of makes sense what he's doing. And until he can publicly reaffirm his love, Peter is not ready to be a follower of Jesus. The barrier of failure and sin has not been removed.

It's still hanging over him in a sense. And I think, thinking through that, there is a principle there for us to follow. Before Jesus can be followed and served, the sin in our lives has to be addressed.

[12:18] And Jesus is insistent on this, even to the point of Peter's being hurt. He asks him in verse 17 a third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter is hurt. Because Jesus has asked him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? It's a cultural thing. It's a great sense of hurt and pain for him.

The point is this, before Jesus can be followed and served, the sin in our lives has to be addressed. Now, Peter didn't forget this principle either when he preached the gospel to others.

On the day of Pentecost, when he preached his first sermon, the crowd that heard and gathered there on that day and they heard his sermon, in Acts chapter 2 we're told, were cut to the heart. And they said to Peter after he preached his sermon, what shall we do? And Peter's response was this, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven.

[13:30] A relationship with Jesus begins when in his presence we face up to all that grieves and contradicts God's will in our lives, whatever that cost may be.

Now, sin is something that we are very light on in our world today. We don't like to use the word for fear of offending others near us.

Or the word sin is just a joke word. You know, we think it's okay, you can go out and have a good time and sin a lot and all those sorts of things. We just turn it into a joke word.

Well, let me tell you this, the Bible takes sin seriously and it tells us that we are all sinners. It tells us that we have all done wrong, not just a few of us, but that we have all done wrong.

It tells us that we all fall short of the mark. And we offend others with our sin. But most importantly, we offend God who knows everything about us.

[14:41] Jesus here knows everything about us. And you know what? He hates it. He hates sin. And he punishes sin by cutting out those who have sin of any sort of relationship with him whatsoever.

But he forgives sin. He will forgive sin when the sinner turns to Jesus, turns to Jesus, God's son who died on the cross for our sins.

He forgives us when we submit to him just as Peter did when he reaffirms his love for Jesus. And when the sinner does that, that relationship with God is restored.

When we do that, submit ourselves to Jesus, we are restored to a relationship with God. And the experience of being forgiven is an experience you know nothing of until you take up the generous offer of forgiveness that is found in Christ Jesus.

And the experience and knowledge of being forgiven clears the path for a right relationship with God and indeed the freedom to serve Jesus out of grateful thanks for what he has done for us.

[15:58] Now here in this passage, we see that Peter is restored in his relationship with Jesus. He's recommissioned to serve Jesus. And Jesus' concern here is not just for Peter's welfare and his self-confidence, important as they may be, but Jesus' concern is also here for his church.

So Peter is directed to his work. In verses 15 through to 17, again he says, Jesus says to Peter, after each time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Jesus says, first of all, feed my lambs.

Then in verse 16, I think he says, tend my sheep. And in verse 17, feed my sheep. Following Jesus and loving Jesus means accepting responsibility for Jesus' people, something which needs to be desperately heard in this day and age.

You see, commitment to Jesus means commitment to his church. Jesus Christ is not a single person in the sense that he comes to us without other attachment.

As the Bible tells us in the book of Ephesians, the letter that Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he is a married person. He comes to us with a bride. The church is his bride.

[17 : 20] And that bride is whom he loves and for whom he sacrificed himself. To be in a relationship to Jesus while ignoring or even despising his bride, that is the church, is no more acceptable than a person who ignores his friend's wife, his friend's spouse perhaps is a better word.

far lesser because the relationship with Jesus has infinitely greater dimensions. Genuine faith or belief in Jesus Christ means not only turning to and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, it also means turning to and accepting his bride, that is, the church, his people.

Jesus' love for the church remains steadfast even though the church may have its own failings in the way it goes about things.

And let's face it, the church does make mistakes, it does have failings, the church is clunky, but it is still his bride, the people whom he died for and who are therefore the burdens of his concern.

So he speaks his word today to those who will hear it. Jesus speaks his word to those who will hear it. He says to Peter, feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.

[18 : 52] If we say we love Jesus yet we don't think it's necessary to be a part of a church or part of his church, then I think that we're fooling ourselves and indeed we're making a mockery of his bride, the church.

There are many people today who say that they are Christian and yet refuse to take up their responsibility within God's church. They keep their faith private and personal.

They say oh it's not to be shared. We don't talk about our faith because we all have a different way of believing. It's safe to be like that. We keep it private and personal. Well if you think like that then you have a counterfeit faith.

It's flawed and you've been fooled by the culture of this world. You are what I would call a cultural Christian. Christians who believe the Bible though don't live by their own ideas or things that the world might want them to believe.

They live by God's word if you really take the word Bible believing Christians seriously. They live by God's word the Bible and apply it to their daily lives.

[20 : 08] They are people who are involved in the church Christ's bride meeting regularly with other Christians for the building up and support and care of other Christians and seeking also to bring non-believers into an active faith with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord who knows everything. Bible believing Christians are people who follow Jesus no matter what circumstances they may find themselves in.

Now in Australia it is easy to say you are a Christian but in many parts throughout the world it is illegal to be a Christian and the cost of following Jesus in particularly those parts of the world can lead to immense suffering and even death exclusion from your family all sorts of horrendous things can happen for being for professing faith in Christianity in Jesus Christ.

Yet Jesus calls his followers to follow me even though that path may lead to persecution and death and Jesus tells Peter here in verses 18 and 19 the kind of death and suffering that he will endure in years to come yet at the same time he urges Peter to follow me.

Why? Because the riches the pleasures and the ambitions that we may have for this world are only fleeting things. The money we may have stored up now is pointless when we die.

[21 : 46] We can't earn our way to heaven. We can't take that sort of thing with us. And the pursuit of pleasure and worldly ambitions in a sense I think if you pursue those sorts of things it leads to lust greed immorality and a life which ultimately only leads to destruction.

Following Jesus though leads to a life in eternity which is wonderful and glorious. Well in love here Jesus reinstates Peter and commissions him to do the work that he is to do.

He calls him to follow him and in love Jesus calls us to follow him as well. And out of love out of grateful thanks and the knowledge that Jesus knows everything about each and every one of us Christians follow Jesus and are a part of his church supporting and building up others as well as seeking to bring others into his church.

What is your answer when Jesus asks Simon Peter do you love me? If you don't know then ask someone who does. Ask me, ask Warwick, ask Paul, ask someone else from the ministry team. Make sure you know if you love Jesus. Let me finish with a prayer. We thank you God for your word.

[23 : 21] Thank you for the many things that your servants wrote about you, not least in this gospel of John. Thanks for the chance to follow you and serve you.

Forgive us for the times when we have hated and despised your church. Forgive us when we have had a flawed love. Please give us willing hearts and bodies to serve you in your church to help build it up and welcome into it those who do not know you.

Please strengthen and sustain us by your Holy Spirit to keep on loving and serving you faithfully.

Thank you God that you hear our prayers.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.