

Feed My Lambs

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[0 : 00] Let's turn just for a little to the chapter we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 21. John chapter 21, I'm reading at verse 15.

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.

Now, everybody, I think, who has any knowledge of the Bible and fondness for Scripture loves this particular passage. There's something really attractive, really drawing, where Jesus reveals himself to the disciples on the shore of Galilee. It's one of the powerful scenes in Scripture. And these meetings that Jesus had with his disciples, particularly these meetings after the resurrection, were very powerful. In fact, any meeting with Jesus is powerful. Every meeting with Jesus is life-changing. And every person in here who has come to faith in Jesus Christ knows the reality of that. Because today, if you're following the Lord, you're following him because you have met with Jesus, or Jesus, to put it more correctly, has met with you.

The manner in which this may be might not be completely understood by you. You might not be able to define moments and such like. But what you do know is that the Lord has worked in your heart. And the Lord has changed things in your life. And that's what the Lord always does when he meets with people.

And there are times, as we go along in our Christian life, where the Lord will draw particularly close. And these are always moments where there is an impact upon us. And these are life-changing experiences.

[2 : 31] Now, this was quite a powerful moment because we find some of the disciples are going fishing. And it's Peter who had initiated this. And he says, I am going. We find that in verse 3. He says, I am going fishing. And there could be a hint in it that I'm going back fishing. Whether he was meaning he was going back full-time fishing, or whether he was going back just for a wee while fishing, we're not altogether sure. But he was saying, I'm going fishing. And there are various reasons, I suppose, for that.

One being, Peter, of course, was married. And there would be, there were maybe his family. Certainly, there would be mouths to feed. He had to make provision. And there were another half dozen or so disciples there with him. And they said, oh, well, we're going to go along with you. And it's quite interesting how the Lord has picked from his, those who were his immediate followers. There were a few of them were fishermen. And again, some people suggest, while we know that what a person's background is ultimately has no overruling impact upon what they are in their Christian life, fishermen at one level, at a human level, make or should make great fishers of men. Because, as everybody will know, fishermen will often face difficult times. They will face oppositions, you know, in wind and in waves. There will be times they will be fishing and they will get nothing. And they'll have to go back again and again and again. It'd be very easy for fishermen to be discouraged. But they've got to keep going. There will be times where they will get a great catch. There will be boom times. But there will be times where it's going to be very difficult. And yet, they've got to keep going and keep going and keep going, irrespective of what. And that is so true in the work of serving the Lord. Because there will be times where the Lord will bring forth fruit and where it will be very obvious that these are times of plenty. But there will also be times when some of God's servants are having to labor in very, very, very difficult situations and circumstances. But they've got to be faithful. And they've got to go out and sow and sow and sow and sow, even where there's not any sign or indication of any fruit being born or growing. But we're all part of a great work that is going on. And so, from a human point of view, you can understand why the Lord has taken fishermen. Because there are many similarities in the letting down of the natural nets to

catch fish and also the spiritual nets to fish for people. So, at a human level, we can understand. But of course, this is at a spiritual level. Now, again, when Peter says, I'm going fishing, some have suggested that Peter is, when he's saying, really, and it's hinting, I'm going back fishing. Whether it is for a little time, some are suggesting that Peter is saying, well, I might as well go back fishing. And why, or what is underlying here in Peter's mind is the fact that Peter feels, because of his denial, because of what he's done, because of the way that he denied his Lord in such a public and such a powerful way, remember, with these oaths and with these curses, that he would no longer be able to follow the Lord as he did before. And so, Peter was probably thinking that these days of great opportunity and days of great service were over.

But they weren't. In fact, this was going to be the dawn, as it were, of a new beginning. It was going to be, yes, a continuation, but it was, in a sense, a new dawn, and it was going to break out for Peter in an even greater way than before. And you know, that's one of the wonderful things about the Christian life, that while it is all part of a continued journey from the moment that we begin to follow the Lord until we arrive at the destination of glory, it is one continuous journey, yet it is a journey that often brings with it new dawns, new beginnings. Because there are times when God's people stumble, there are times they slip, there are times they fall, and there are times, no doubt, when they sit in darkness, that they think they will never see the light again. There are times, probably like Peter, where they think their days of service and fruitfulness are over, but the Lord has other ideas. And that's what was just about to happen in Peter's experience. David himself, who knew all about stumbling and falling. David knew what it was like to grovel in the ground. David knew what it was like to see the fruit of his own sin and the pain of his own sin in his heart, but the great pain above all was what he had done before the Lord. And David was able, in an earlier Psalm, not 51, but he said in Psalm 37, the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. And though he fall, he will not be utterly cast down, because the Lord holds him with his hand. Isn't that lovely? Just in the same way as a parent will hold a child, so that even if the little child stumbles and is appearing to go headlong to the ground, won't go all the way down, because there's a firm grip in the hand. That's what the Lord does.

[8 : 32] And David was able to rise from the ashes. And we find that that's what Micah himself says, though I sit in darkness and although I fall, he says, I shall arise. Well, here we have again this wonderful experience for Peter. And it's great the way the Lord deals with Peter, because if there's one thing, well, there's many things, but if there's one thing that in a sense catches your mind here, is the gentle way that Jesus deals with Peter. Yes, it is very probing, and in a sense, the Lord doesn't leave any stone unturned, because he gets right to the heart of the matter. Jesus was great for doing this right to the heart of the matter. But the way he restores Peter is lovely, because what does he do?

He, first of all, he allows him to dry out, because Peter's been in the sea. He then feeds him. He fellowships with him. And then, after all that, it's then that he turns, and he begins questioning. It's not a heavy-handed approach. And maybe the church could take a lesson from this in the way in which it deals, where we see how our Lord deals in bringing his own back and restoring his own back in such a gentle way, where, as we say, he's first of all allowing him to dry out. Then he's feeding him, come on and dine, have breakfast, and then fellowship, and then he deals with a matter.

Great lesson for us there in how we should deal with one another. And as we're sitting there, enjoying one another's company, we find that Jesus turns to Peter and begins to question him. But you know, the wonderful thing here we have, before we just look at this question, here is the resurrected Lord. He has risen from the dead. He is triumphant over death, over the grave, over hell, over sin, triumphant over all these things. He has risen. But here he is back, and he is showing his care, his compassion, his love, his interest in his people here on earth. For three years he walked with them, and protected them, and led them, and taught them. But even although he's been put to death, that does not stop. Jesus is showing here his continued interest in his people. And it's the same today. This Jesus, who has risen from the dead, who is triumphant over all, is interested in your well-being, and my well-being today. And that's a tremendous comfort and consolation. Irrespective of what you're going through, irrespective personally of whatever battles, or issues, or problems, or temptations, or trials you're facing, he is not somebody who is remote and distant and unconcerned. But somebody who is there for you. And you and I know that is one of the special things in life, to have somebody who is there for you. You know, you can think back to what

everybody can, of times where you may have had difficulties and problems in life. And there was somebody there, or people who were there for you.

[12:15] You'll never forget. Well, Jesus is there for you and for me today. And so the Lord is saying here, he invites, in verse 12 he says, Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. In a sense, I'm not going to stop here just now, but in a sense Jesus is saying the same thing to us all today. Come and eat. Come and eat.

That's the invitation. Come to me. And can I say to anybody in here today, who may be here at this service, who has never come to the Lord Jesus Christ, today with all the authority of Christ, his invitation to you today is come to me. Him that cometh unto me, Jesus says, I will in no wise cast out.

And so he says, come and eat. Come and taste. Taste and see that God is good. Come and feed on me. Just as we need physical food for our life, so we need spiritual food for our life.

We need spiritual nourishment because we have souls that are never ever going to die. Souls that need feeding. And Jesus is saying, I am that food. I am the bread of life.

So please, if you're without Christ today, hear these words where he says, come and eat. So anyway, as Jesus is fellowshiping with the disciples and they're enjoying this time and Jesus took the bread, we read in verse 13, and gave it to them and so were the fish. This is now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

[14:07] And as Jesus is probing into Peter, he's probing right to the very heart. Peter, have you got love for me? My friends, that's the key, love. If we don't have love in our heart, if our Christianity is not a Christianity of love, then there's something wrong. To follow the Lord based on anything other than love will produce a legalism, a harshness, a coldness within our heart. There has to be love. And that's why Jesus is getting right to the very heart of the matter. Jesus spoke about this so often. He was saying to the church, if you want to witness for me in this world, love has got to be the predominant theme.

Love one another, he says. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another. And we need to hear that message over and over again, and not just hear it, but live it. And if we're not living it, we need the grace of God in our heart to enable us to enable us to live it. It's one thing, you know, we can talk about love all day in the same way that we can talk about prayer all day. Some of these things are so easy to talk about. It's another thing to live it. It's another thing to hear it and say, oh yeah, that's true. And not do anything about it. If our life is not manifesting love, the love of God in our heart for all that is God's in this world, and for his people in this world, if love is not at the forefront of our Christianity, we've got to examine ourselves. Because the word of God tells us that when Jesus comes into a patient's heart, that the love of God is shed abroad in our heart. Shed abroad. Lovely description. And so that's why Jesus, as he is probing with Peter, he gets right to the very heart of the matter, and he says, Jesus, Peter, do you love me? And before we go any further, can I ask that question of yourselves? I must ask it of myself. Jesus is saying to you today, you put your own name in it. And he's saying to you, you have to answer him. Do you love me? It's a very simple question, but an incredibly profound question. Do you love me? And indeed he asks, when he asked

Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? And I know that when Jesus asked that particular question of Peter, it must have gone into his heart like a knife. Because there was another day, you remember, when Jesus, before his death, he was telling his disciples what was going to happen.

And he said, you know, I'm going to be, he told them all that was going to happen. And then he said, you know, you're going to, you're going to leave me, you're going to forsake me, and you're going to run away. And Peter said, Lord, you've got it wrong there. That's really what Peter was saying to Jesus.

He said, supposing all will forsake you, I won't. Peter is saying to Jesus, see the other, these other disciples, what you're saying is maybe true of them, they may forsake you. They may run away, but I won't. Because I so love you. And Peter said, I'm ready to go to prison, and I'm ready to die.

[17:59] And that's when Jesus said to Peter, you know, he said, before the cock will crow twice, you will deny me three times. And so when Jesus is saying to Peter, Peter, do you love me more than these? Peter's mind would go back to his proud boasts, where he was telling the Lord, these, they may forsake you, because they don't love you the way that I do. But you know, as Jesus is

probing into Peter, Peter, there's no doubt whatever that this is hurting his own heart. Because we find that Peter was grieved, it tells us that in verse 17, when he asked him the third time. Peter was grieved because he said to him, the third time. And Peter had to say at the end of the day, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. And you know, there's often times like that, that's what we have to say to the Lord as well. Because there might be times where we feel that we're not the kind of Christian we ought to be.

And I'm sure you feel that, and I feel that at times. And we say to ourselves, I'm not what I should be. And sometimes we question our own relationship to Jesus. But you know, when and then we strip it down, and we have to say just like Peter, but the fact is, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. And that's what Peter was saying. And then Jesus says to Peter, when Peter had said, yes, Lord, you know that I love you, he said to him, feed my lambs.

And it's very interesting that the Lord tells Peter to feed the lambs before even he tells him to feed the sheep. And I'm quite sure also that the Lord is saying to Peter, Peter, here's your job.

Now, of course, we know the leading role that Peter had in the early church. Feed the lambs, Peter. And if there was anybody who was fit for feeding the lambs, it was Peter. Because Peter was learning through his own fall how weak and frail he was. And that's an important thing, however painful, to discover how weak we are. And if you're here today thinking that you're a really strong Christian, and that you can stand anything, oh, my friend, beware. Let him that standeth beware, lest he fall.

That's what the word tells us. Well, Peter learned the pain of falling. And so he was more equipped to teach the lambs. Now, I believe primarily here the lamb, of course, speaks about the young converts, those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. Not necessarily young in years, but young in Christian years, young in spiritual years, whatever their age naturally. But it's so important to be understanding in our feeding of the young. And in the whole way here, I think what we've got to take on board, and sometimes we can be guilty of expecting lambs to be acting like mature sheep. Well, when you look out at lambs when they're born, they don't act like mature sheep. Lambs are running about.

[21 : 33] And when you look at children, if we pride, today we're just going to baptize little, little, little children. When little children begin to learn to walk, and they take their first stumbling, tottering steps, and maybe their little knees go or they fall. We don't say, oh, that's awful.

Can't you walk properly? If you saw any parent dealing like that, you would say to yourself, that parent needs to be seen to. There was something wrong with them. And you know, I think it is, we could almost say it's the same in the church. When somebody comes into faith, it's so new. Yes, the Lord will help us. But you know, I believe that we should be there for one another to help one another. Not to sit in condemnation or to point a finger and say, oh, let's see how they got on now. We'll see. We'll see if this is a real work of the Lord. We'll just allow them to go on their own. You know, when children start walking, often the parent will just even have their finger there. So the little one will hold on.

So many lessons to be learned. Jesus was always using not the natural world to teach spiritual truths. And I think the church has to take these things on board, to be there, to nurture our young, to help our young along, to help them to walk, just as we do in the natural world, so we should do in the spiritual world. And the Lord is a special place for the lambs. And we see that it's at the beginning, before even the sheep are fed. And so we must always remember this. Now, while I believe that it speaks primarily here of the lambs as being those who have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I also believe that we could extend this to those who are brought up within the visible church, as we have today, to the young within the visible church. And it is so important that these young are nurtured within the church. Our Lord has such a place for the young. He doesn't expect that the young will one day just arrive and everything will go well. The whole Old Testament was built in a particular way so that the young would be asking questions which young people do in order that they might be taught. The Lord said of Abraham, I know that he will instruct his household.

The Lord said regarding the Passover, your children are going to ask you, why do you do this? And you will tell your children all the whole wonderful story of the Passover. When they crossed the Jordan and these memorial stones were put there, the Lord said, you'll put these stones there so that your children in time to come will ask, see these stones here, what were these stones put there for? And you will tell your children the mighty things that the Lord did and how he took you across

the Jordan into the land of promise. All the time the whole thing was geared to the teaching of the children because the Lord has such a place for children in his economy. This is the way it works. And that is one of the wonderful things and that is what we hear about today. It's a wonderful privilege to bring up children in this world. It's an awesome responsibility, an awesome responsibility, but a wonderful privilege.

[25 : 27] It's not the priority, well it is, it is the priority of every home to provide food and clothing and warmth and such like for every child in that home.

But it is also the responsibility and the priority of every home to also provide spiritual nourishment. You know, there are some people have this idea and they say, oh well I don't want to put into people's minds anything just for them to discover themselves as they grow up.

Well, I would say that's an incredibly dangerous thing. We don't do that with a garden. Supposing you planted, whether it's flowers or planted potatoes or carrots or whatever's in that garden.

And then you say to yourself, well I've planted that, but I'm now just going to allow everything and just see how it goes. See how things develop. I'll check it out and see the direction things take.

Well, if you went out to pick up your carrots and you never went near them from the time you planted them, I doubt you could find them. Just there would be this explosion of weeds.

[26 : 43] We need to tend our gardens. We need to take out the weeds. We need to take out the things that are going to spoil what we really are concerned about.

And how true with our children. With our young impressionable minds. We need to feed them and we need to teach them and direct them in the right way to go when they're young.

Children are so impressionable. And even although our memories and we're all complaining about memory loss today, but the amazing thing is that we can go back to our childhood.

And you will often find people in fact whose memories have really gone badly that it's in their childhood that they're living. These powerful impressions that were made when they were young.

May the impression for good be made upon our children. And it's wonderful today to see we're just going to see three little ones come in.

[27 : 53] May we remember them and remember their parents in what is our great responsibility as they were to be brought up within the sphere of the church and to be taught in the way of the Lord.

Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, we ask you to help us and bless us in our worship today. We give thanks for all the good things that we get in life.

We give thanks, oh Lord, for teaching us in the way that we should go. Teach your children well, as it is said, and we pray that we may seek to do that.

O Lord, we pray to open our hearts and minds to the truth. There are so many other voices and powers that are wanting to influence us in other ways.

So many other voices which are powerful and good as well. But everything that directs us in the right way we give thanks for. But may we above all hear the word of truth.

[28 : 52] Bless us and do us good and take away from us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen.