

Jesus Reinstates Peter

Collen finished dressing but sat on the locker room bench, piqued by the conversation of the two men several lockers down.

One was saying he was tired of the “game.” His life had been full of disappointment after disappointment. He was empty, even after trying so many things. The other young man offered an occasional, “I know what you mean.”

Collen felt a slight tug in his heart. But who was he to say something after what he had done? He felt like David in Psalm 32:3-4, when he carried the burden of his unrepentant sin.

Because the weight had been too great for him, he called out to the Lord. At church, Mark had come to the altar twice. Later, he talked to one of the elders at the church.

“Brother, God forgave you the first time you repented,” said Elder Paul. “I don’t want to hear any more of the gory details. We should be grieved by our sins, but condemnation is not from God. It’s from the devil. So, pick yourself up and take your place in Christ. He’s got more things for you to do!”

Collen rehearsed Elder Paul’s words of encouragement and turned off the voice of condemnation in his head.

“Excuse me,” Collen said to the two men. “I’m sorry, but I have overheard much of your conversation.”

Then Collen began to witness the good news of Christ to them.

1. *What are some ways you sometimes feel or respond when you’ve wandered away from Jesus or failed Him in some way?*

2. *How does Jesus respond when this happens?*

3. *What should our response to our knowledge of this be?*

A Checkered Past

John 21:15-16, KJV

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

John 21:15-16, NIV

¹⁵When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

Peter had acknowledged that Jesus was the "Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16) and said if others fell away from Him, he never would (Matt. 26:33). But after Jesus was arrested, he denied three times that he knew Him (Matt. 26:69-75).

Given this context, it should be no surprise that Jesus addressed Peter after eating as "Simon son of John." Although Jesus once said that Simon would eventually be called Cephas, which when translated is Peter or "the rock" (John 1:42; Matt. 16:17-18), Peter had not yet arrived at the point where this was a valid description of him. He was still Simon and not the rock of faith he was destined to be.

Peter may have harbored some of his own doubts if things could be made right between himself and Jesus. The charcoal fire Jesus built on the shore (John 21:9) may have been a reminder of the fire that burned in the courtyard where he denied knowing Him (John 18:18). And, just as Peter denied Jesus three times, now Jesus asked three times if he loved Him. Peter must have wondered as this happened if Jesus would ever take him back and if so, under what conditions. The three questions Jesus asked

could have been a test to determine if Simon was ready to become Peter. And even though the three questions seem similar, there are some subtle differences.

The first time Jesus asked if Peter loved Him, it was probably to help Peter determine the depth of Peter's love for Jesus compared to other things he loved. Could Peter say that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples loved Him or if he loved Jesus more than he loved the other disciples? Considering Peter's rocky history, Jesus wanted Peter to say what or whom Peter loved more. Peter confirmed that he did love Jesus and said that this was something Jesus should already know.

The second time Jesus asked the question, His goal seems to have been to reinforce in Peter's mind how deep Peter's love was for Him. Some English translations precede the word "love" with "truly" (vs. 16). Did Peter truly love Him? Was Peter willing to put his whole heart into what was required to express his love for Him? Or was his love for Jesus superficial or only a fond affection for Him? Was Peter fully committed to love Jesus in mind, body, will, and spirit? Peter confirmed once again that he did love Jesus and said again that Jesus ought to know this.

What Jesus asked Peter to do as evidence of his love was to take care of His sheep. These sheep would be those who were to become followers of Jesus in the months and years ahead as well as those already following Him. Jesus asked Peter to feed His sheep (vs. 15) and to take care of them (vs. 16). What Jesus was asking Peter to do was to provide spiritual nourishment for His sheep as well as to provide for their physical needs. In short, Jesus was asking Peter to pastor His sheep.

4. *How might the circumstances described in today's passage have been a reminder to Peter of his past failures?*

5. *What did Jesus want Peter to confirm?*

6. *What were some differences between the first two questions Jesus asked?*

7. What did Jesus ask Peter to do if he truly loved Him?

A Challenging Future

John 21:17-19, KJV

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

John 21:17-19, NIV

¹⁷The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt 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. ¹⁸Very 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." ¹⁹Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Jesus once again asked Peter if he loved Him. This was the third time Jesus asked the same question, and since Peter had denied three times that he knew Jesus (Matt. 26:69-75), it would now perhaps take three affirmations of his renewed commitment to Jesus to match the sin done earlier.

Peter was hurt that Jesus kept asking the same question. Some of this may have come from remembering how much it must have wounded Jesus when he denied knowing Him. But Peter most likely wanted to get back into a personal and fruitful relationship with Jesus and may

have wondered why Jesus wasn't accepting his answers. Was Jesus unwilling to forgive him? Was Jesus going to continue to hold his past against him?

But Jesus' questions need to be considered in the context of the final verses of today's passage. Jesus said that there was a time in Peter's life that he had control over many things. When he was young, he chose what he wore and could dress himself. As a fisherman, he chose when he went out on the lake and where he looked for fish. But if he truly loved Jesus and was prepared to do whatever came from his commitment to follow Him, he would lose control over many things. Peter would be asked to go to places and people he wanted nothing to do with. And he would end up dying in a horrible fashion, much like Jesus. Was He willing to give up everything to follow Jesus including his own life?

Perhaps that is what Jesus meant when He initially asked Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" (vs. 15). If Peter truly loved Him, he needed to be willing to give up his comfort, his livelihood, and everything he'd devoted his life to; his commitment to Jesus needed to be greater than some others' commitment to Him; and his love for Jesus needed to exceed the love he had for others.

Even though Peter had a history of failure, he was not beyond recovery; he was not beyond God's love. Jesus was ready to reinstate him so that Peter could soon become the rock Jesus said he was destined to be. What this would require from Peter was a commitment to fully and truly love Jesus and to be willing to do whatever Jesus asked, no matter what the cost.

8. *Why may Peter have been hurt by Jesus' repetition of the same question?*

9. *What was going to change if Peter expressed the type of love Jesus demanded?*

10. *What was required so that Peter could be reinstated and become the "rock" Jesus said he was destined to be?*

Jesus Loves You Still

I don't know how many times I've let Jesus down. And every time my faith or character falters, I end up feeling unworthy of the One who saved me. I know that I'm supposed to be salt and light to the world; I know I'm supposed to exhibit what Christ is like. Yet I blunder more often than not in doing this, I'm less like Jesus than I ought to be, and when it comes to sin, no matter how hard I try, I seem to keep on doing many of the things Jesus is urging me not to do.

Sometimes I lay on my bed at night weeping over my inability to live the Christian life in ways that are pleasing in God's eyes. But ironically, sometimes it's in times of grief over my failures that I feel closest to Jesus. It is sometimes in those moments of despair that I end up recognizing that Jesus doesn't hold anything against me and that He's always ready to accept me back into His arms no matter what I've done.

As I think about this and what Jesus did to show He was ready to reinstate Peter, I'm reminded that being restored to a close and fruitful relationship with Jesus can be a one-time event. There can be that dramatic moment when we realize how far we've drifted away from Jesus, understand what is required to be restored to Him, and accept once-and-for-all Jesus' willingness to bring us back into His arms. But it can also be something that happens more often if we've drifted away from Him for a time, experience guilt or shame for doing so, and recognize once again that no matter what we've done that we are never beyond the reach of His love.

11. *Have there been times when you felt worthless in the eyes of Jesus or that what you did was so bad that He would never love or accept you again? Explain your answer.*

12. *How can today's passage be encouraging as you consider times you may have felt this way?*

13. *How does Jesus want you to respond to His promise that you are never beyond the reach of His love?*

You Are Not Beyond His Love

The apostle Paul wrote that “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). These verses as well as what we learned in today’s passage show us we are never beyond God’s love, no matter what we’ve done.

► Write “You are not beyond God’s love” here or on an index card. This week, also write how remembering this sentence helped you recall His love when you wandered away from Jesus or failed Him in some way.

KEY VERSE

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.
—John 21:15, KJV

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”
—John 21:15, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of April 24 through April 30

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20—Go and Make Disciples.
- Tues.** Joel 2:1-15—The Day of the Lord Approaches.
- Wed.** Hebrews 1:1-14—The Son Sits at God’s Right Hand.
- Thurs.** Hebrews 8:1-13—Jesus, Our Great High Priest.
- Fri.** Hebrews 9:8-22—An Eternal Inheritance.
- Sat.** Psalm 24—Lift Up Your Heads, O Gates!
- Sun.** Acts 1:1-11—You Shall Receive Power.