

80. Jesus Asked if Peter Loved Him

In our last topic, we see that Jesus reminded the disciples that He was able to supply their needs in any situation. We also want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example that the Lord does supply our needs as we are obedient to Him. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus restored Peter when Peter felt like he was a failure because he had denied Jesus three times.

We saw in our last topic that the Lord filled the net of the disciples with one hundred fifty-three fish when He called to them after they had gone back to fishing. Once they had finished counting the fish, Jesus invited the disciples to come and eat breakfast. John 21:12-13 says, “Jesus said to them, ‘Come *and* eat breakfast.’ Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, ‘Who are You?’—knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish.” Jesus had the meal prepared for the disciples and just invited them to come and satisfy their hunger.

We read that the disciples did not dare ask who Jesus was because they knew it was the Lord. The word translated “dared” means *to be bold*. Here, we see that none of the disciples had the boldness to ask Jesus if it was really Him. The word translated “knowing” means *to see with the eyes or to know*. The disciples could see that it was Jesus because of the nail prints in His hands. The night Jesus rose from the dead, He had showed them His hands. Luke 24:39-43 says, “‘Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took *it* and ate in their presence.” Here, we see that Jesus showed the disciples in different ways that it was He.

Jesus then brought the bread and the fish to the disciples so that they could eat. Here, we see that Jesus gave the disciples another example of what He had taught them the night before He was crucified. Jesus had said that night in John 13:13-15, “‘You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” Here, we see that Jesus had given them another example of serving one another by His example of preparing and serving them breakfast.

John 21:14-15 goes on to say, “This *is* now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonah, 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.’” The book of John mentioned that Jesus had appeared to the disciples the night of His resurrection. Then, Jesus had appeared to them again eight days later when Thomas was also present. Those appearances had been in Jerusalem. This third appearance was in Galilee. Jesus waited until after they had finished eating and then He asked Peter a question.

Simon (Peter) had denied that he knew Jesus three times the night that Jesus was being tried by the religious leaders. Now, we are going to see that Jesus uses this time to restore Peter. Jesus began that restoration by asking the question, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” Peter had said that he was willing to die before he would deny Jesus. Just a few hours later, Peter had denied Him. As a result, he had returned to the work of fishing which he had done before Jesus called him to become a fisher of men. Suddenly, this question spoke to the heart of Peter when Jesus asked him whether he loved Jesus more than he loved those fish.

Just before Jesus told Peter that he would deny Jesus three times, Jesus had given the new commandment recorded in John 13:34-35. Those verses say, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Peter had answered at that time, “I will lay down my life for Your sake.” It was only a few hours later that Peter denied Jesus three times. Luke 22:60-62 says, “But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are saying!’ Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So Peter went out and wept bitterly.” Peter felt like a complete failure and needed to be restored for ministry.

The word used for “love” (*agapao*) in the new commandment is the word that Jesus used as he asked Peter if Peter loved him more than he loved the fish. This is the word that is used to describe God’s love and the love that Jesus had shown on the cross as He gave His life as the sacrifice for our sins. Peter certainly did not feel that he could use that word for love to describe his love for Jesus after his failure. We see that Peter answered Jesus with a different word when he said, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” The word that Peter used for “love” (*phileo*) is the word that speaks of family love or commitment rather than total sacrifice.

As a result, the answer that Jesus gave to Peter told Peter that if you even love me with a family love you can still, “Feed My lambs.” Jesus let Peter know that a family love was very different than the attitude of the hireling mentioned in John 10:12 where we read, “But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.” A hireling only loves himself and is looking for self-gain. Peter used a word that told Jesus that he had a real commitment to Him even though he had denied Jesus. He had a much greater commitment to Jesus than he had to the fish.

John 21:16-17 goes on to say, “He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonah, 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 all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’” As Jesus and Peter spoke the second time, Jesus and Peter both used the words for love that each had used in the previous verse. This time, Jesus told Peter that if he had the commitment of family love, He (Jesus) still wanted him (Peter) to tend (shepherd) His sheep.

The third time that Jesus asked Peter the question, Jesus used the word for family love instead of the word that spoke of the sacrifice of God's love. Immediately, Peter was filled with great sorrow. He had gone out and wept bitterly when he realized that he had denied Jesus three times. He had great sorrow because of that sin. At the same time, he also understood by the answer that Jesus gave to him the greatness of the love that Jesus had for him. This time, Peter answered, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Here, we see that Peter more fully understood the heart of love that Jesus had for him. Jesus had just told him three times (the same number of times that Peter had denied him) that He still had a ministry for him.

Jesus had told Peter something very important the night before He was crucified. Luke 22:31-32 says, "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.'" When Jesus first met Peter, John 1:42 says, "And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, 'You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas' (which is translated, A Stone)." Peter had been known as "Simon, son of Jonah." Jesus promised him that he would become "Cephas", which means *a Rock*. Jesus had looked at what Simon would become as his life was transformed and he learned to depend on the Holy Spirit instead of his own strength.

This is one of the most important lessons that every Christian needs to learn. This is illustrated so well in Romans chapters 7 and 8. Both chapters talk about Christians. Romans 7:15-25 summarizes what happens when we depend on our own strength. Romans 7:19-20 says, "For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." Even the strongest Christian will fail if that Christian depends on his or her own strength. John 15:5 says, "'I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.'" We will always fail when we depend on our own strength.

In contrast, Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Peter certainly understood in a new way both the love and the ministry that Jesus had for him by the end of John 21:17. The difference between Romans 7 and Romans 8 can be easily summarized by reading the first eight chapters of Romans. In the first seven chapters, the Holy Spirit is only mentioned once. In the eighth chapter of Romans, the Holy Spirit is mentioned nineteen times. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that we will fail when we depend on our own strength. At the same time, we want them to understand the love of Jesus is unchanging. May the Lord richly bless you as you show this love to them by your example.