

FPFWC Christian Development



The Birth of the Church

April 2023

Spring Quarter

April 22, 2023

Lesson #4 – Jesus Reinstates Peter

SCRIPTURE TEXT – John 21:15-25

ICE BREAKERS-

1. What does it mean to love Jesus?
2. How can comparing ourselves with others do us harm?

Key Verse: “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

LESSON BACKGROUND –

This lesson picks up immediately where the previous lesson left off (see commentary on John 21:15a, below). For this reason, the context from lesson 7 is immediately relevant to the events of John 21:15–19. We note that the focus narrows from the disciples in general to Peter specifically. But keep in mind that as Jesus and Simon Peter speak, they are still in the presence of the others, including John (see commentary on 21:2e in lesson 7).

The New Testament testifies in various ways to Peter’s unique and ongoing role in Jesus’ ministry and in the earliest life of the church. Along with Paul, Peter stands out among the apostles in terms of his fame and influence. Peter (also known as “Cephas”; John 1:42) was one of three apostles considered by Paul to be “pillars” of the church (Galatians 2:9). Peter emerged early on as a leader, bold in word and deed (examples: Acts 2:14–41; 3:1–10). He was among the first to recognize that when Jesus told His followers to “go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19), He really did mean to go to Gentiles without requiring them to take up Jewish practices before accepting Him (Acts 10:9–11:18; 15:6–11). Peter’s influence resounded throughout the church. The impact of the events of today’s text are therefore incalculable.

LESSON COMMENTARY

21:15–17. The following threefold exchange between Christ and Peter paralleled the apostle’s threefold denial of Christ (18:17, 25, 27). Twice Christ asked Peter if he loved Him (*agapao*). Twice Peter affirmed his love using another Greek word (*phileo*; see the discussion on the two words at 5:20–21). In the last significant conversation between Peter and Jesus before the crucifixion, Jesus

nuanced *agapao* as “laying down one’s life” (13:15–23). He also called on his followers to love (*agapao*) one another “even as I have loved you” (13:34; cf. 15:13, 12, 17), referring to the love by which He would lay down His life. *Phileo* and *agapao* probably do not differ in meaning in this context (i.e., *phileo* does not refer to some “superficial, inferior love” since the word is used for the Father’s love for the Son in 5:20–21, and *agapao* can be used for frivolously craving the acclaim of people in 12:43). In John’s gospel they both mean “love.” They may, however, have slightly different references, *agapao* referring to an aspect of love that includes sacrifice, an aspect not associated with *phileo* in John’s gospel. In other words, John may have noted Jesus’ use of *agapao* to elicit from Peter a commitment to the kind of self-sacrificing love Jesus modeled and demanded from his disciples as seen in the previous uses of *agapao*.

The question, “**Do you love Me more than these** disciples love Me?” corresponds to Peter’s boastful promise to love Jesus so much he would lay down his life for Him, even if the other disciples do not (13:37; Mk 14:29). Jesus was asking Peter if he would still claim what he did previously—that He would lay down his life for His Lord. Remembering his denials in the courtyard, Peter was hesitant to make that promise again. **Tend My lambs** and **Shepherd My sheep** (v. 16) evoke Jesus’ teaching on laying down His life for the sheep (Jn 10:15, 17) and dovetail with the sacrificial nuance of *agape*. Peter replied in ignorance with *phileo* and not *agapao* because he had still not understood the sacrificial emphasis of *agape* love as Jesus had delineated it in the upper room. For **the third time** (v. 17), Jesus asked, **Do you love Me?** now using Peter’s own word for love (*phileo*) in hopes that Peter would be shaken from his misunderstanding and recall Jesus’ original call to self-sacrificial *agape*. Instead, **Peter was grieved because** Jesus had questioned him three times.

The threefold pattern of questions and answers recalls Peter’s three denials predicted by the Lord in 13:38 and fulfilled in 18:15–27. It is impossible to be certain, but Peter’s distress may have been due to his awareness of the parallel between Jesus’ third question and Peter’s three denials. Jesus’ use of *phileo* in this third question may also include probing Peter for his affection for Jesus when none was evident during his denials. So perhaps *agapao* in the first two questions asked by Jesus is to explore Peter’s willingness to sacrifice himself for Jesus and His people, while the use of *phileo* in His third question was designed to compel Peter to reflect on his lack of affection for Jesus evident during the denials. It was this third interrogation by the Lord that so pained Peter. But it is impossible to be certain of this.

21:18–19. Jesus now predicted that Peter would lay down his life just as Christ did. Peter will **stretch out his hands**, a term that suggests crucifixion. **Signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God** parallels other statements that speak of Christ’s crucifixion (12:33; 18:32). Others would **gird** Peter (NET, HCSB, “tie you up”) for his death. Despite the prospect of suffering, Christ commanded Peter, **Follow Me!** (cf. 1:43; 12:26).

21:20–22. In **turning around** to see **the disciple whom Jesus loved**, Peter physically and spiritually took his eyes off Christ. John, however, was **following** Jesus (**them** is not in the Greek). Would Peter? Peter’s question **Lord, and what**

about this man? revealed Peter's struggle with Christ's will for his life. When other believers appear more prosperous in ministry or life, the Lord's disciple must keep a focus on Christ's command, **Follow Me!**

21:23. A misinterpretation of Jesus' words was spread **among the brethren** that John **would not die** (cf. Mt 28:11–15). By quoting the exact words of Jesus again (cf. v. 22), John stressed the imminence of the Lord's return. While Jesus prophesied His any-moment return in rapture (see comment on 14:3; see also the comments on Mt 24:36–41), this could not take place until after certain prophesied events such as His own death and resurrection, the giving of the Spirit (Ac 2), the first widespread preaching of the gospel (Ac 1:8), and Peter's death in old age (Jn 21:18–19). By the time the Fourth Gospel was written (late AD 60s or 80s; see Introduction: Date), these had been accomplished so that Jesus could come in rapture before or after John died.

C. Final Attestation to Truth (21:24–25)

21:24–25. In his final words, the author maintained that he **wrote these things** as a **testimony that is true**. When John said **we know**, he probably referred to himself (as suggested by **I suppose**). There is no fully exhaustive account of Jesus' life. If such a "Bible" **were written in detail**, then **the world itself could not contain all the books that would be written**—clearly a hyperbole. But in his book the Evangelist set out to prove that Jesus was the Redeemer who would grant forgiveness to those who believed in Him, and he included abundant evidence that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

LESSON NUGGET – By saying, "Follow Me," Jesus reinstated Peter as an apostle. But Peter turned around and took his eyes off the Lord (Matthew 14:30), and Jesus had to rebuke him. The next time you are tempted to meddle in somebody else's ministry, ponder Christ's words: "What is that to you? You follow Me!" (18:22). Peter followed the Lord right into the excitement of the book of Acts!

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word For Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*