

Matt Henry  
John 21:15-19  
05 May 2019

“The Question that Matters Most”

Grace and peace to you on this high and holy Cinco de Mayo...

The classic confirmation question is, “What does this mean?” I have asked the confirmands this and many other questions over the course of this last year. What are the three offices of Christ? What’s a Sacrament? What’s the Third Article about? What are the three uses of the Law? Maybe I should ask some of you those questions. They had their exam a couple weeks ago and as I was grading them, when it comes to head knowledge, it’s clear to me they’ve learned a bunch and there’s stuff they still have to learn. Just as you and I also have things to learn. But Jesus asks a question of Peter in John 21 that pertains not to the head, but to the heart. “Do you love me?” That question wasn’t on the exam, but it is THE question. We take this opportunity to examine our own hearts today. Do we love Jesus when it is convenient, when it is easy, or do we love Him all the time, even when we’re disappointed? Our love for Jesus is always going to be imperfect, but love for Jesus is imperative. This love, as in any healthy relationship, is something that grows and deepens over time.

Church, if you haven’t figured it out by now, is about relationships. We want everyone in a relationship with a focus on actual discipleship. If you look at

what happens in a life group, there's food, there's time together, there's talking about Jesus. That will always be a winning combination. That happens all over the place. We spend time together, we eat, and we talk about life and what Jesus is up to. It happened yesterday at men's breakfast.

Jesus has his own men's breakfast—it's called John 21. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> post-resurrection appearance to the disciples. Peter swam to shore; they are eating some of the 153 fish they had just caught. Not a bad haul. What will Jesus say to Peter? I mean, is He going to mention the whole denial thing? That is in view by the way and John's clue is the fire. Peter was warming himself by the fire in the courtyard as Jesus was on trial. And now, Peter is cooking fish over another fire that Jesus has prepared. Jesus could have asked Peter to resign, but instead, Jesus restores Peter. Jesus asks the same question three times because Peter denied him three times. So this is a means of restoration for Peter and also a commissioning of Peter for sacrificial leadership in the church.

And I appreciate how Jesus is so direct here because a lot of times we think we are kind when we are indirect and circle around a sensitive issue but never really get to the heart of the issue. Jesus gets to the heart—as direct as it gets—because He knows that's the level that needs repair and restoration. He isn't testing Peter for what he knows, or what he has done. He is examining the heart.

What kind of love is in your heart? Is it a love that's on fire? Is it a conditional love, a qualified love, a partial love? Or is it a good kind of love, but repressed? Perhaps the love you have for Jesus is a love that needs more expression? Just as Jesus draws out this expression of love from Peter, I want Him to draw that love out of us. What that looks like will surprise you. For now, note how Jesus asks a question—not of faith or loyalty—but of love! And I wonder if we can look at confirmation as not only about what we believe, but whom our hearts are for.

Simon, son of John...what's the significance of that? Jesus doesn't call him Peter, but Simon, son of John...It goes back to their first conversation. John 1:42. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon son of John? You shall be called Cephas, which means Peter." I think this is Jesus' way of getting to Simon's core identity. Before he was Peter, he was Simon, son of John. Jesus is restoring Peter. John MacArthur rightly observes, "Since [Peter's] denials were public knowledge, he needed to be publicly restored. The other disciples needed to hear Peter's reaffirmation of his love for Christ and Christ's recommissioning of him, so they would be willing to loyally support his leadership."

That's why Jesus asks, "Do you love me more than these?" Meaning, more than the other disciples. Now that may sound boastful, but none of the other

disciples denied Jesus as personally and directly three times like Peter did. They're thinking maybe their fearless leader isn't worth being disciple numero uno. But you can bet they're listening to this conversation closely. And they understand something very important: Peter is ultimately going to be faithful. Instead of Peter being defined by his faithless past, look at the gift of a faithful future Jesus gives him. Verse 18, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." I'm thankful for verse 19 explains further, because otherwise, it sounds like living in a retirement home! Verse 19, "This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God." In that, Peter, like his Lord he loved so much, was crucified. And at his choosing, he was crucified upside down.

As Jesus called the disciples, Jesus had promised that if they followed Him, He would make them fishers of men. But now, Jesus goes second career on Peter. He turns a fishermen into a shepherd with language like this!

"Feed my lambs" (v. 15)

"Tend my sheep" (v. 16)

"Feed my sheep" (v. 17)

Peter got it because he'll write in his own letter, things like this, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you (1 Peter 5:2). "Be examples to the flock and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:3b-4). **The principle is this: Love for Jesus (the Shepherd) is shown by caring for people (the flock).** We are called to shepherding—it's not just a church thing, it's a life thing. A parent who loves Jesus take care of his or her children and tend them, feed them. So a life group leader who loves Jesus is going to care for the people in his or her group. A pastor who loves Jesus, will tend and feed the sheep because they belong to Jesus.

This is all intensely relational. Jesus doesn't say, "If you love me, I need more worship, more devotion, more prayer, more...." He is worthy of our love and all those things. He is a jealous God, but He is not a vain God. He is not insecure! He is not selfish! Instead, He channels all the love for Him into a love for one another—the feeding of lambs, the tending and feeding of sheep.

We need each other in order to be disciples of Jesus.

The Lord knows we love Him. But He wants other people to know we love Him. The way they'll get the memo is by how we serve them as we follow Jesus ourselves. It's discipleship. There are those words, "Follow me" that launch us

back into the lifelong journey—especially when we mess up. He still wants us to follow Him. We're not disqualified because this is a relationship of grace.

Jesus gives us a new question that matters most! It's "Do you love me?" The answer we/confirmants publicly give today is: Yes! But why can we say that? Where does this love come from? This love comes from being overwhelmed just as Peter was as a restored and redeemed person, by Jesus dying on our behalf and rising again, even when we fail and falter and have no merit at all in ourselves. When that kind of love grips you and resides in your heart, then and only then can we love Jesus, treasure Jesus, and be satisfied in Jesus.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Head (what?)**

Why does Jesus ask Peter the same question three times?

How does Peter respond the third time?

In what manner does Peter die?

### **Heart (so what?)**

After times of failure, how does Jesus restore you?

Is your love for Jesus genuine?

Are you growing in love for Jesus?

Has Jesus ever led you to a place that you did not want to be?

### **Hands (now what?)**

How are we to follow someone we cannot see?

How does God desire to use you for the benefit of others?

Is there a person or group that God is calling you to care for?