

## DO YOU LOVE ME?

John 21:1-25

Key verse 21:15

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

Thanks be to God that today we get to study the last lesson of John's Gospel. As with any book, the last chapter is the crowning conclusion. In this lesson, Jesus restored Peter's love relationship with Him. Peter had followed Jesus for a good three years. He thought he loved Jesus; but he denied Him. But Jesus first helped him make up for his defeat in fishing. Then he helped him confess his love for Jesus and healed his broken heart. Finally, he raised him as a shepherd for his sheep.

Our John Bible study began in the spring of 2020. We studied it with a focus on who Jesus is. What word did you take in and write on your hearts through the Gospel of John during this good year? We learned through John 1 that Jesus is Logos, the Almighty Creator God; the Word who became flesh and was full of grace and truth in this world (1:14). John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world (1:29). Jesus revealed his power to change a person by turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana (ch. 2). He met different sinners whom He helped spiritually, such as Nicodemus (ch. 3) and the Samaritan woman (ch. 4). Jesus healed countless people through their faith or the faith of those around them (chs. 4, 5, 6, 9). Jesus forgave sins, promised peace, and promised the Holy Spirit and eternal life (chs. 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19). He even raised the dead to life (chap. 11). Jesus worked with a burning shepherd's heart for the people, which he also taught to his disciples so that they could feed 5000 people. (6:10-14) We also remember the seven great I Am words of Jesus, how he helped his disciples spiritually, instead of being stuck in this world, to be centered on him: I am the bread of life (6:35). I am the light of the world (8:12). I am the door (10:9). I am the good shepherd (10,11). I am the resurrection and the life

(11,25). I am the way and the truth and the life (14,6). I am the true vine (15:1). Jesus accomplished the redemptive work of God through his death on the cross (19:30). And he revealed himself to the disciples as their Lord and God (20:28).

Today's text begins in verse 1 with the word "afterward": "Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way:" "Afterward" means after all the stories just mentioned from John's Gospel. "Afterward" means after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The word "after" also means that the story continues with Jesus after his resurrection. Let us see how the story of Jesus continues by receiving Jesus' absolute unchanging love, and confessing our love for Jesus by feeding His flock.

### 1. Come and have breakfast! (1-14)

Let's look at verse 2: "Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together." When the disciples encountered the risen Jesus, they believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Thomas in particular, who was allowed to place his hands and fingers in the nail marks of Jesus, believed that Jesus was truly alive. But once Jesus was gone and the disciples were alone, they didn't know what to do. They were confronted with the reality of the world and the resurrection faith disappeared from their hearts. When they lived again with their self-confidence, they became afraid and worried about the future. They began to live on their own strength, thinking of their empty stomachs, and so it came to pass that they made a world-centered resolution in verse 3: "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went

out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing."

We do not know exactly why the disciples did not catch anything that night. The disciples were actually professionals at catching fish. What we can conclude from the failed catch is that their hearts were full of feelings of defeat. Perhaps this made them too nervous and they scared away the fish. Or maybe they were paralyzed and thus too slow, so that the fish kept swimming out of their nets before they could pull them in. So, they became the total failures. They had failed in standing on the side of their Master Jesus in His most difficult hour. Now they were failing in their profession as well. They were tired, hungry and really down in the dumps. Perhaps they felt despised by all the fish in the Galilean Sea that morning, "Losers!" We know this situation in our lives. Although we are smart and capable, we can't perform at our best. We are then easily distracted or demotivated. Then at the end of the day or at the end of the learning time, nothing is done.

But how did Jesus respond to the situation of his disciples? Jesus was already there. Let's look at verses 4 through 6: "Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish." Jesus stood on the shore and called them, "Children, have you nothing to eat?" They were told to cast their nets again. There they caught a great quantity of fish. This call and the great catch remind us of the first encounter between Peter and Jesus, which had taken place about three years earlier. Jesus restored the disciples' defeat then, as he does now. Praise Jesus that there is no defeat that He does not restore. If, through the obedience of faith, we once again cast our nets, Jesus will bless us abundantly and give us an exceeding catch of fish. He stands ready to straighten out all our defeat if we trust in Him.

When the disciples remembered the situation three years ago and compared it with the present one, suddenly their eyes were opened. Let's look at verse 7: "Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around

him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water." John knew first that it was Jesus. He told Peter. Peter wanted to be with Jesus first because he really loved his Master. Because Peter had great respect for his Master, he did not want to appear naked before Him. Therefore, he put on his outer garment and jumped into the water and swam to Jesus as fast as he could.

Jesus had already prepared a charcoal fire on the shore. Fish and bread were already roasting on it, as verse 9 says. Let's read verses 10 and 11: "Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn." Some of the remaining fish were also to be put on the charcoal fire. The disciples were so excited about their catch that they even counted the fish. There were 153 of them.

Let's look at verses 12 and 13: "Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish." Jesus called his disciples to eat like a good mother, "Children, have you nothing to eat?" (5) and "Come and have breakfast!" It was a peaceful atmosphere as Jesus sat with his disciples by the fire, the sun slowly rising, and the disciples warmed themselves by Jesus' love and the fire.

The disciples could no longer ask, "Who are you?" They knew it was Jesus who embraced them with his unwavering love. There is a saying that you have to punish a traitor worse than an enemy. In this world, you give absolutely nothing to the losers. But with Jesus it is different. Jesus loves his disciples to the end.

At that moment, when Peter was handed one fish burger after another by Jesus from the coal fire and his stomach became fuller and fuller from them, he knew that Jesus absolutely loved him. Jesus embraced him in this way at the coal fire and forgave him unconditionally for everything he had done. He had so shamefully betrayed Jesus, his best friend and Master. At the very hour when he should have stood by him, he had chickened out and walked away. He had not even been able to testify to Jesus in front of a simple maid. He could never forgive himself for that. He had expected to be rebuked by Jesus, who had risen from the dead, and to be

seriously rebuked and expelled from the fellowship of the disciples. But Jesus forgave him. He gave him his love. Jesus is such that He absolutely loves and forgives us no matter what we have done.

A young man of the next generation acted very shamefully on the work of God by trying to turn the center into a department store and selling parts of his internet flat rates to the other young people. He lived with the spirit of business and exerted bad influence on others. But the servant of God loved him unconditionally, giving him a word from God, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33) It is Jesus' love and forgiveness that restores this man. Now he performs a responsible task in the work of God by leading the worship service.

Another young man led a double life in the church, pretending to be a believer in the church but otherwise devoting himself to gambling and molesting women. But Jesus accepted him unconditionally as well and forgave him. Through Luke 23:34 and Deut. 6:5, he experienced God's love and started a new life by grace. Now he is building his life on God's love and is even used as a leader of the next generation.

I was actually a man who was to live a failed life in disorientation and despair. But I gave little thanks to Jesus for His grace on my life. My testimonies were always full of grumbling and complaining about the difficulties of my life. At the meetings, no one liked to hear my testimony because I was not testifying to God's work but to my grumbling and difficulties. But the servants and maids of God were patient with me and loved me until the word of God came into my testimonies and God's word came out of my mouth. Actually, Jesus should have sent me away from His work, because I was not leading an improved life with Jesus, I was getting farer and farer away from Jesus and attending to worldly things. But Jesus welcomed me back into the fellowship of His own. Jesus also restored my relationship with Him with Genesis 15:1. From then on, I was allowed to grow in grace and live a blessed life. It is Jesus' love alone that I am in the work of God today and God is using my life for the work of God.

Praise Jesus for His absolute and unchanging love for us that completely covers all our failures, defeat, sins and infidelities and invites us

to Himself, "Come and have breakfast!" and restores us in that love.

## 2. Do you love me? (15-25)

What happened when everyone was full? Let's look at verse 15: "When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Jesus now addressed Peter personally. Peter had already been given the fish sandwiches and his livelihood was beginning to change. But Jesus wanted to give him a whole new foundation. Peter had previously believed that he could lay down his life for Jesus. He said, "Lord, why can't I follow you now. I will lay down my life for you." (John 13:37) He had also believed that he would love Jesus the most. That is why he said, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." (Matthew 26:33) But he denied his belonging to Jesus in front of a simple maid three times (John 18:15-27).

Therefore, Jesus came to him by the campfire and said, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" And again, Jesus asked Peter in verses 16 and 17, "Do you truly love me?" "Do you love me?" There is no other place in the Bible where Jesus put such pressure on a person. Jesus touched Peter's sore spot. In the past, he would have immediately said, "Yes sure, I love you!" or "Of course, I love you the most." But now all he could say was, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." The third time Peter became sad and says, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you." Jesus wanted to help him confess his love for Jesus. When Peter confessed his love for Jesus in this way, he was able to build his life on this relationship.

We experience how limited our love is. We think that we would love someone else or we would even love God. But then comes the moment when our own skin is at stake. If we value ourselves or anything else in our lives more than Jesus, we deny Jesus at that crucial moment.

We become disillusioned with ourselves as shepherds. We choose to serve a person with our best that they will be led to Jesus and changed by the Word of God. We also decide to serve 12 sheep. But we experience our limit as soon as we are confronted with their concerns. We get into helplessness or paralysis or even

blame our sheep. I am encouraged by our next generation that they have formed prayer circles in their schools and are interested in sharing the Word of God with their fellow students. The great challenge of a shepherd, however, is to minister to a soul until the end.

I used to serve different people by studying the Bible and sacrificing time and some money for them. But then I noticed that at the slightest distraction they went their own way and outwardly all my Bible study and devotion seemed to be worth nothing. However, I could not overcome this situation. I was deeply despondent and could not pasture new hope. I also could not stretch myself long and love this one sheep who ran away to the end. I was paralyzed. I began to calculate whether being a shepherd would bring me any advantage. Because I didn't want to shepherd new sheep, I preferred to excuse myself with words like, "I don't have time, I'm working full time." or "Later, not now." But Jesus also asked me through this text, "Do you truly love me?" "Do you truly love me more than these?" It is true with Peter, as it is with me, that I love Jesus. By confessing my love for Jesus, I may give thanks for Jesus' great love for me. I may believe in Jesus' love and build on it. Jesus loves me absolutely and even laid down His life for me (John 3:16). Because Jesus loves me, I may be independent of what others give back to me for my effort. I may feed the sheep regardless of their response and go the extra mile for them.

Jesus' love enables me to go out and feed God's flock of sheep, especially those in Koblenz. Since Jesus' love has been the foundation of my life, suddenly many have become interested in studying the Bible and are beginning to grow in the Word of God.

Jesus' love became the foundation of Peter's life. Later he confessed in 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." This word shows that Peter recognized his own sinful nature under the light of Jesus' grace. Apostle John recognized his weak sinful nature and based his life on this forgiving love, as he testified, "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) Paul also based his new life on the absolute initiative love of Jesus, confessing, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) Praise Jesus, who loves us

absolutely and helps us build our lives on rock, namely, on His forgiving, absolute love for us.

We notice now that every time Peter built on Jesus' love for him and confessed his love, Jesus called Peter to "Feed my lambs!", "Feed my sheep!" and "Feed my sheep!" Peter was to feed God's flock of sheep. That was Jesus' command to Peter. It is also Jesus' command to us. However, feeding God's flock of sheep is not a command that we must carry out by hook or by crook with our own strength and then fail miserably on our own. Feeding God's flock is God's grace. We can receive it at the very moment when we have based our lives on Jesus' love. Feeding God's flock of sheep is God's blessing because with Jesus' love, our hearts bubble over with gratitude for God's love. Because of God's grace and His not giving up Spirit, we cannot help but love Jesus' flock and serve them in the various ways.

Peter took Jesus' command and became the arch-shepherd of the first Christians. He shepherded the Christians through the fiery persecutions of the early days of the church. The weak Peter could not do that humanly. The first letter of Peter is legendary, where he did not pity the first Christians for suffering persecution everywhere, but encouraged them with their identity before God as living stones and royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5,9). He had also been very self-centered in the past and not a man of cooperation. But he also cooperated with the co-workers. Because he could not write very well, he activated Mark John, who wrote down the Gospel of Mark when the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' ministry were dwindling because the first generation was going home. He recorded in this Gospel his testimony about Jesus, the servant for us men, who gave his life that we might have eternal life: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Corrie ten Boom was a Christian who saved the lives of many Jews when Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands. This went well for some time. But then she was arrested and taken to a concentration camp. There, she experienced nothing but suffering. But she could share the Bible with her fellow inmates and give them comfort. Through God's gracious guidance, she was finally able to escape from the concentration camp. But she could not forgive her cruel guards. Even when one of them became a

Christian and asked her for forgiveness, she could not until she accepted God's help. We cannot forgive another person by our own strength. That is why many people are very limited and go to their grave full of resentment and anger. But Jesus sets us free. In Jesus we can forgive and we can be shepherds for those who hurt us. It is the great mystery of how we may be shepherds. No one can be a shepherd by himself. To be a shepherd, we need to receive Jesus' forgiving love for us, upon which we build our lives.

Jesus warned Peter that it would not be easy, to follow Jesus as a shepherd for his sheep. In verses 18 and 19 we read, "I tell you the truth, 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." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" Peter would be a shepherd with his whole life. It was not a hobby or a sideline that he pursued. It meant no longer doing his own will, but letting God lead him, no matter the cost. Our life as a shepherd is not a sideline, but our main task, into which we invest our lives. It costs our whole life to witness our love for Jesus in this way. Peter was still not fully ready. Therefore, he asked Jesus what would become of John to distract Jesus. But Peter became the shepherd of the first church. He then decided to follow Jesus no matter what the cost. He loved Jesus to the point of death, giving his whole life. According to Christian tradition, when he was to be crucified, he said that he was not worthy to die in the same way as Christ.

Apostle John wrote down the whole Gospel of John and also this incident at the Sea of Galilee in conclusion. He testifies in verse 24: "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true." There are many other things that Jesus did. But there was no room in this world for the books that would have to be written (25).

Now John's gospel ends. What is your reaction to John's gospel? Let's hear Jesus' question from verse 15: "When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Let us personally accept the absolute and unchanging love and for-

giveness of Jesus and build our lives on it. It is the love of Jesus that encourages us to continually profess our love for Jesus and build our lives on rock. May God fill our hearts and lives with Jesus' love, that we return Jesus' love and dedicate our new lives to wholeheartedly feeding Jesus' flock of sheep to the ends of the earth.