

Feed My Sheep

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.”

We began studying John’s gospel last August and we are going to reach its conclusion today. I thank God for the blessing and privilege he’s given to study his word. And as we wrap up this book, we get to see the author’s point of all he recorded. What we studied in chapters 1 to 20, were things to be believed: Who is Jesus? Where did he come from? How did he live? How did he die? What has he done? But chapter 21 is different. This chapter teaches us how we are to respond to what we have come to believe. Some people think that once you believe in Jesus you’re done. However John tells us that believing in Jesus is really only the beginning because after that we have a lot of work to do.

After we have confessed our belief in Jesus, hopefully most of us will still have many years left on earth, so then what are we to do with all the time that we have left? In chapter 21 John addresses this, as he records Jesus commissioning his people for the purpose of carrying out God’s work. Our belief needs to be converted into action. It needs to move from our head to our hands. To transform from theological into practical because Jesus is more than a concept, he is living and active and present in the daily activities of his people. So that’s where we find ourselves today and it happened this way...

Let’s begin with verses 2-4. “Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.”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. According to Matthew, the Sea of Tiberius was the place that Jesus planned to rendezvous with them after his resurrection. As some of the disciples were waiting for Jesus to meet them, they didn’t know what to do. So Peter decides to go fishing and the others follow him. Peter is a natural born leader. It was his gift, his God given ability. He doesn’t force anyone to go, he doesn’t even ask them, he just does something or goes somewhere and others follow him. However when we look at this small snap shot of their life, we catch a glimpse of what life is like without Christ. That night they caught nothing. Life without Jesus is meaningless and empty. This is not how it is supposed to be. Jesus came to give us life to the full, (Jn 10) not half way or some cheap substitute. He came so that we could have real life, meaningful life, fruitful life. After spending more than 3 years with Jesus the disciples were now experiencing life without Christ and it seems as if they didn’t know what to do anymore. They were wandering and couldn’t succeed at things they used to be good at because they were caught between two worlds, their old life and their life with Christ.

However when Jesus entered their life again things began to change. Take a look at verses 4-6. “Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.”⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered.⁶ 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.” Here’s an example of how Jesus wanted to bless their lives to the full. He gave them an over flowing catch of fish.

The next thing you know, John realizes that it’s Jesus on the shore and then everything turns in to chaos and Peter jumps into the water because he couldn’t get to Jesus fast enough. Verses 9-14. “When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ 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. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.” After a short while all of them end up on the shore and Jesus is there waiting for them with a hot breakfast. It is interesting that ministry in the New Testament begins with a meal. It has it’s seedlings here with the interaction of Jesus and his disciples as he serves them breakfast. Christianity is founded upon hospitality, friendship, and people loving each other in meaningful and practical ways. Why do we go through the effort and expense to have lunch every Sunday? It’s not easy to prepare a meal for 30-40 people. However each week a different family labors, uses their own money, just so that we can eat together after the service. We don’t do this because have to, we do it because we love each other and this is one way in which we can practically show it. I think it’s beautiful and I thank God for everyone who serves because they really are a blessing.

It looks like a wonderful time on the beach. Who wouldn’t like a sun rise breakfast on the shore? After fishing all night they were hungry but now they had a good hot meal in their stomach. It’s time to sit back and relax, however there was still some unfinished work that Jesus had to do with Peter. If you remember, Jesus predicted that Peter would betray him three times. As it turns out, Peter was a coward and indeed he did deny Jesus three times, just as it was promised. He was such a coward that he denied Jesus even to a teenage girl, and now Jesus had to deal with him. Was it time for Jesus to get revenge? How would you react if someone had betrayed you or denied being your friend? I’m sure that you would be upset. Let’s read 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.” No, Jesus doesn’t come to get even, he comes to reinstate Peter and assure him that he’s loved even after his huge mistake. This is good news for each of us, because in various ways, all of us have or will deny Christ. We will sin and fail. Some may walk away or even disbelieve, but thank God for Jesus came to seek the lost. Jesus came looking for Peter not to crush him but to restore him, and I love the fact that he does it in a public way. He does it in front of the other men.

What that does is it validates and reinstates Peter. Because Peter will need authority as he becomes the leader of the disciples and the early church, carrying on the ministry of the Gospel. And so Peter needs to be dealt with publicly, because that’s the way that leaders should be dealt with. When they sin, it is not just a private matter to be dealt with in private, but it is a public matter, and, so, the Lord Jesus deals with his sin in a public way, but he does it not just to crush him. He does it to bring him godly grief and sorrow that leads to repentance that leads to restoration, which will eventually culminate in fruitfulness.

And here where Jesus really begins to press hard on Peter. Take a look at verses 16-17. “Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”¹⁷ The 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.” Just as Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” This is the whole point of the matter, the foundation upon which Peter’s life in ministry would be built upon, does he love Jesus. If you had to narrow Christianity down to one question it would be: do you love Jesus. This is what Peter had to wrestle with. This is the question we have to wrestle with.

Jesus is pushing Peter to recognize the fact that Jesus has deep, deep love for him, and this breaks Peter’s heart because he knows how he failed his Lord. On the night of his betrayal, on the third denial, Jesus and Peter’s eyes met as the rooster crowed and Peter ran outside and wept bitterly. This was a serious matter and dealing with it was not easy at all. Jesus always needs to break his leaders before they are good for anything. Their heart must be broken over their sin and mistakes, over the condition of their heart before their Lord. They have to be truly sorry for their sin otherwise there is no need for salvation. It’s here that Peter is broken, but this breaking will transform his whole life and lead to much fruit. Peter becomes a different man after having to look Jesus straight in the eye, after what he’s done, and answer his question. Imagine if you were in Peter’s shoes. And after God cooks breakfast for you he asks, “Do you really love me?” What could you say after what you’ve done? Peter responds, “Yes, I do,” and Jesus says, “Then love my people. Do something for them.” Because Biblically, love is not just a condition of the heart or a feeling in the pit of our stomach, love is action. God demonstrates his love for us in this. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus is teaching Peter that love must always demonstrate itself. So each time that Peter responds with, “I love you,” Jesus responds by saying, “Then show me.” It’s the same thing for a husband and a wife, or a parent and a child. True love, real love does things for others.

Real love goes beyond our feelings and sometimes even against them. For example when Jesus showed the disciples the full extent of his love by washing their feet even Judas who he knew was going to betray him. What would you do when you got to Judas’ feet? I know what I would do, make sure he wouldn’t be walking anytime soon. Or when Jesus hand fed Judas a piece of bread saying, “what you are about to do, do it quickly,” and right after that Judas leaves to meet the chief priest to sell Jesus out. Or when Jesus hung on the cross and the religious leaders were there mocking him, Jesus said, “Father forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing.” If Jesus followed his feelings, I think the out come would have been quite different. We love stories of justful vengeance. Braveheart, one of my favorite movies, begins with William Wallace getting justful vengeance on the lord who killed his wife and I cheered when he did. However Jesus’ love is different. We have to at times deny our feelings and display mercy and grace. The definition of mercy is withholding the punishment that we deserve. And the definition of grace is giving a blessing when we don’t deserve it. “For God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Mt 5:45)

Through Jesus we come to know what love is because he is love. 1 John 4:8 says, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Jesus, who is God, is the source of love

because he is love. That's how we learn what true love is from Jesus. In fact, "we love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19) The reason that Peter denied Jesus in the first place was because Peter was thinking about himself and not Jesus. Peter wanted to save himself because he knew that if he didn't save himself, that it was going to cost him something. When he was confronted with the question, "Hye aren't you one of Jesus' disciples," Peter thought to himself, "Uh-oh, I might suffer. Uh-oh, I may be inconvenienced. Uh-oh, this might cost me." Jesus said, "If you want to follow me, you must deny yourself." (Mt 16:24) Unless we deny ourselves, our self love, it is difficult, or even impossible to follow Jesus. Real love has a self denial component. That's why I think having children is so good because it is often the first time that people have to do something for another that requires complete self denial because the child is totally dependent upon you and you don't get any thanks for doing it. It's a completely one sided giving. And you can taste a little bit of what it must be like for God who one-sidedly loves us. That's why Jesus is pressing Peter in this passage, "If you really love me, then think of someone else. Care for someone else. Devote yourself to the needs of others." He takes this focus off of himself, and now it is thrust upon others. That is the essence of loving Christ. The essence of loving Christ is not selfish consumption like, "Great, my theology is tight. My sins are forgiven. I read my Bible. I pray. I have Christian friends. My life is in order and I have everything I need." If we think like that, we're missing the point. That's why Jesus is teaching Peter, that shouldn't be our goal. Our goal should be like Abraham who was blessed for the purposes of being a blessing to all nations of the earth.

Jesus tells Peter, "If you love me, feed my sheep," essentially commanding Peter to do the same thing that Jesus has been doing all along. And that is taking care of his people by teaching them God's word, encouraging them, counseling them, comforting them and loving them in whatever way they need. This is the heart of Jesus because he sees people with compassion as sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36) and he hopes that Peter will too.

And then, amazingly Jesus tells Peter what this is going to cost him. Take a look at verses 18-19. Let's read them. "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."¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" Peter was like, "Ok, if I follow you, what is that going to get me? Will I be successful? Rich? Healthy? Happy?" And Jesus responds, "No, you'll be crucified." Peter must have thought, "That doesn't seem like victorious Christian living. That sounds painful." That's why he turned to John and said, "Hey what about him?" Peter was like, "If I have to die, I don't want to die alone. Can he come with me?" But Jesus teaches Peter that God has a different plan for each of us and we have to follow the plan that God has laid out for us.

God created each person and everyone of us are unique. And each one of us have been created for our own purpose. Just as we web designer, creates a web page for a specific purpose, or an architect creates a building for a specific purpose, or an electrical engineer creates a circuit for a specific purpose God has created us for something. This is exciting. This is our life long journey to find out what God has planned for us. In this passage Jesus gives a hint to Peter for his future. God's plan for Peter was to be the foundation of his church. However God's plan for his future meant that he would end up giving his life. It may be that for some of us in this room right here,

that God has called us to give our life for a specific purpose. Could you accept that if it was what God wanted? That's not easy. And that's why Peter kind of complained and brought John into the conversation. But Jesus states clearly, each of us have to do our own part, the part that God created for us. So when we look into God's history, we see that God has called people to do a variety of things. God called Noah to build an ark. God called Abraham to be the father of a nation. Moses to lead his people to the promised land, David to be a shepherd. The list goes on and on. So what is your part in God's plan? Where do you fit in?

Like I said in the beginning, chapter 21 deals with our response to the gospel. What is our response to Jesus who finished everything for our salvation. There is nothing left for us to do, Jesus finished it all, however we **MUST** respond, and how we respond has eternal consequences. What should our response look like. We should be compelled by the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:14) to respond. This is not a task master handing out chores, rather we should have desire to do it. How do you know if you are doing something out of love or out of duty It is very simple. All you have to do is ask yourself one question either while you are going to do something, in the middle of doing it, or after you have completed doing it, ask yourself how do you feel? Are you happy doing it or are you not happy. If you are sincerely happy and you don't have negative feelings in your heart, then you are doing it out of love. But if you have anything in your heart other than happiness, there is a problem and you better stop what you are doing and examine why are you doing it because it is for the wrong reason.

John recorded these events so that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God and have eternal life. However our belief should influence our behavior. There has to be some impact otherwise do we really believe at all? What is the proof? If we believe in Jesus, there should be evidence of that in our life. If we go on living as if we were before Jesus, what is the point of believing in Jesus? Therefore Jesus asks each of us who claim to believe in him, "Do you love me? Then show me, by feeding my sheep."