

# Who do you love?

Luke 22:54-62, John 21:15-19

## Preface

When Jesus spoke to John with letters to each of the seven churches in Revelations, he paid several compliments to the church at Ephesus. He complimented them for their hard work and perseverance. He praised them for their commitment and endurance of hardships in his name.

But Jesus also had some very piercing words to them. *“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.”* Revelation 2:4-5 NIV

I wonder how many of us would receive the same warning from our Lord today. What would Christ say to you if he were writing you a letter of evaluation? Would he say you have lost your first love? Would he implore you to remember the height from which you have fallen?

We are called to love Jesus with all our heart, soul and mind; with all our being. The deepest need we have as Christians is to daily love our Lord. That’s it – period! We have no greater challenge. We have no deeper need. We need to love our Lord.

Today is Palm Sunday, the day we recognize Jesus riding into Jerusalem. But we know how the people turned on our Lord. They went from praises to shouts for his death. Love turned to indifference and eventually to hatred. Proclamation turned to denial in one short week.

## Scripture

<sup>54</sup>Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. <sup>55</sup>But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. <sup>56</sup>A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “This man was with him.”

<sup>57</sup>But he denied it. “Woman, I don’t know him,” he said.

<sup>58</sup>A little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.”

“Man, I am not!” Peter replied.

<sup>59</sup>About an hour later another asserted, “Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.”

<sup>60</sup>Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. <sup>61</sup>The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” <sup>62</sup>And he went outside and wept bitterly. Luke 22:54-62 NIV

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<sup>15</sup>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.”

<sup>16</sup>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.”

<sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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.”

<sup>19</sup>Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” John 21:15-19 NIV

## Introduction

Jesus addressed Peter as Simon son of John, which was the way he was addressed when he first met and called him. Notice there were three denials and the question was repeated three times.

The three responses by Jesus were actually slightly different words meaning tend, herd and lead. God’s grace provides forgiveness but it also includes a call to love our Lord and to follow him.

## 1. Loving Christ means Loyalty to Christ

We see in the latter verses we just read that Jesus asked Peter the question “Do you love me?” In fact he asked the same question three times.

Jesus didn’t need to ask the question for his own benefit for he knew the heart of Peter just as he knows mine and your heart. But Jesus asked the question for Peter’s benefit. It was an important question for Peter to ask himself and answer for himself. For Peter had not been loyal.

Real love is loyal. Real love perseveres and does not give up. Real love remains loyal to the relationship and the commitment. When crunch time came, Peter abandoned and denied his relationship with Christ.

We must ask ourselves today if we are loyal to our Lord. Do you cowl down when others inquire if you are a Christian? Or, do you stand firm to your faith? When at work, the ball field, shopping and other places do you hold to your faith and allow Jesus to be your Lord or do you deny him in words and actions?

Illus: I never go on blogs as I don’t really have time. However, recently I was checking the news at WKRG.com and a link about insurance rates caught my eye. When I went to it some guy had put up a survey for people to complete and he claimed his intent was to fight high homeowner insurance rates on the Eastern Shore. The problem was he presented it in such a way that left you with the impression he was just an insurance agent trying to smoke out prospects. Others had logged in and questioned his motives. This sent TheInsuranceGuy into orbit. He got extremely defensive and began to attack those who questioned him. One guy whose login name was “Ickthus” had not only criticized him but had said some awful things to him including calling him a coward and inviting him to meet and duke it out.

I could not remain silent so I logged in and wrote the following: *“TheInsuranceGuy has been unprofessional and has read false assumptions into people’s responses. I encourage him to change his attitude and manner of communication.*

*However, I have to defend him also. Ickthus is not being constructive with his comments and is doing nothing more than antagonizing an already irritated person. TheInsuranceGuy was right in that the survey is legitimately from the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce. He is also right that the rates are out of*

*control and something needs to be done. He obviously feels very passionate about this and I for one am thankful that someone is leading the charge on this matter. Most of us complain about the rates and we don’t like them but have not gotten bothered enough to spend our time getting involved in fighting them.*

*While I think TheInsuranceGuy has handled the thread poorly, I think Ickthus is being downright ugly and antagonistic. I find myself very uncomfortable in the company of Ickthus.*

*I can’t help but wonder Ickthus, if you are using that login because of your Christian faith. If so, you should rethink your words and manner of handling yourself. Remember who you serve.*

I was letting Ickthus know he was not being Christ-like and he knew it. Immediately the tone of the blog changed. Ickthus became apologetic and polite. TheInsuranceGuy began to explain how it was breaking his heart to see people lose their homes and move away from Baldwin County because of the high cost of insurance. Suddenly there was a Christian tone to the entire blog.

What Ickthus was doing was the same thing that Peter did. He was denying Christ. He was in an environment where his real identity was completely anonymous and he could behave however he wanted. He thought he could curse and be as hateful as he wanted. But his login name gave him away. He was a Christian not being loyal in his love for Christ.

**Christianity is Christ!** We must never lose sight of that. Loving Christ involves complete loyalty to Christ all the time. Are you loyal in your love for Christ?

## 2. Loving Christ means Surrendering to Christ

Notice in Luke 22:62 speaking of Peter it says, *“<sup>62</sup>And he went outside and wept bitterly.”*

Peter must have felt awful about his denial of Christ. The guilt must have eaten at him internally. Peter had been with Jesus for nearly three years. He had seen him perform countless miracles including raising Lazarus from the dead. He had been there to hear the parables, the sermon on the mountain and even the heart-felt prayer of Jesus in the garden.

Peter was the very one who was ready to fight for Jesus when the guards came to take Jesus away. But then when things looked difficult and Peter was scared, he denied even knowing him. Peter must have been deeply disappointed in himself.

When Jesus located Simon Peter following his resurrection, the one question he raised with his defeated disciple was all that really mattered. “Do you love me?” If Peter loved Jesus then all was not over. Our Lord went to the very heart of Peter’s need.

Our love for Christ is the key to our Christian life. It is the measurement of what constitutes an authentic Christian relationship with Christ. Do you love me?

Jesus responds with “*feed my sheep*”. Jesus was speaking of feeding the present and future believers spiritually. Jesus affirmed with Peter that there was great work for him to do if he would just love Jesus enough to surrender to him.

It doesn’t take a special person to love Jesus Christ, just a person willing to surrender to Him. The real measure of victory in Jesus is your willingness to surrender to him.

Illus: Today is Palm Sunday and next Sunday is Easter. But next week will be our real Palm Sunday. Our auditorium will be full of people all dressed up for Easter Sunday church. They will proclaim their love for Christ and then we won’t see many of them for months. Their love will prove to be a fake as they leave to go their way without returning to worship in the coming weeks. **Their love is not loyal and their love does not surrender.**

Today our churches are full of people who claim to be Christians yet they can’t even say his name in public. They can’t speak of our Lord for fear of embarrassing themselves. They are not faithful in worship or in service. Why? Because they have not surrendered in complete love to Christ.

When we surrender to Christ in love the relationship will:

- Solve church and personal tensions
- Settle the sin problem plaguing your life
- Rid our homes of the divorce and heal our marriages
- Bring back modesty in dress and self respect
- Provoke honesty in everything we say and do
- Instill faithfulness to our commitments
- Motivate us to pray fervently
- Inspire us to worship faithfully and give cheerfully
- Restore the joy and peace to our hearts

Too many Christians are still weeping in shame over their denial, yet Jesus calls us to surrender in love to him for he has plans for our life. He wants us to tell our story and feed his sheep spiritually.

## Conclusion

Has your love for Christ grown dim because too many other things—even legitimate things— have pushed Christ to the outer fringes of your life?

Illus: This happened to a young seminary student when he was pursuing a PhD degree at Oxford University. Spending agonizing hours a day, weeks on end, in preparing his doctoral thesis, he became spiritually drained. One day as he was driving along in the English countryside, he felt a dark cloud come over his spirit. He was troubled. It wouldn’t leave. Finally, he pulled off to the side of the road and parked.

There John lifted his heart to the Lord. “Lord Jesus, what is it?” he prayed. And this was the Lord’s convicting reply: “John, you’re running on empty!” John listened and vowed never to let it happen again. There by the roadside he made a covenant with His Lord to spend a certain amount of time each day alone with Christ to insure he stayed close to him.

Are you running on empty today? Have other things pushed the Lord Jesus to the edges of your life?

Jesus asks a very simple but important question; “Do you love me?”