Pastor Michael O'Neill *June 27, 2021*

Questions Jesus Asked, Part Four

John 21:15-19

1. To answer these questions, we need to know the <u>whole</u> story.
- Luke 22:54-62

2. Jesus doesn't want our <u>words</u>.
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West Valley Church
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John 21:15-19 NRSV

These past couple of weeks, Pastor Mike has been preaching on questions Jesus asked. There is a lot of coverage on the questions asked of Jesus, but Jesus had plenty of questions of His own and all of them are important, as they point us to the bigger picture.

We are just getting into it, but have you enjoyed it so far?

Good, well today, we are going to look at John chapter 21, specifically where Jesus asks Peter if he loves him in verses 15-19. Please stand in honor of the reading of God's word:

> **15** When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."
>
> **16** A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."
>
> **17** He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.
>
> **18** Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."
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> **19** (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me." (John 21:15-19)

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you Jesus Christ.

Thank you, you may be seated.

After Jesus is resurrected, He goes and visits His disciples in various places: Some along a road, multiple times in a house -- remember doubting Thomas? -- and some along a lake.

In John chapter 21, Jesus meets with a group of disciples on the shore of a lake, and they have breakfast together.

After they had finished eating Jesus turns to Peter, and Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. Jesus asks Peter this same question three times. Peter grows increasingly hurt with each question and answers, of course I love you Jesus.

And like Pastor Mike has told us, Jesus' questions are important, and if the same question is asked three times, it must be super important.

In this passage, you can see Peter's shock and confusion at such a question. Of course, he loves Jesus, right?

One of the biggest differences between preaching in here and preaching during youth group is how seldom I get interrupted in here. That sounds negative, but the adult leadership team and I are focusing on the positive engagement we are getting during the sermon time. I ask a lot of questions during the sermon, and I get a lot back as well.

I think I've experienced both sides of the conversation we are looking at today. I think I've asked the same question multiple times, fishing for an answer, and I've also been confused on some of the questions I have received from the audience of teens who may be only half paying attention to the topic at hand.

What about you though? Have you experienced that? Either at home or at work, when a question, or series of questions is presented and you have mistakenly taken them at face value, completely missing the point?

I think that is what is happening here. Peter is missing the point of the questions.

Speaking of missing the point, let's make sure we are getting the full picture here, to see what sparked this conversation between Jesus and Peter.

1. To answer these questions, we need to know the <u>whole</u> story.

The answer is in the well-known story of Peter denying Jesus.

This is what Luke's account says in chapter 22 verse 54-62

> *54 Then they seized Jesus and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance.*
>
> *55 And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them.*
>
> *56 Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him."*

57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him."

58 And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not."

59 And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean."

60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."

62 And he went out and wept bitterly. (John 22:54-62)

This is a well-known passage, but it plays right into the one we are focusing on today. Remember, the Bible is connected, it is important to understand it as a story, not just stand-alone sections.

Ok, in this passage, Jesus is being taken away and Peter appears to try to blend in with the local crowd.

Peter denies being associated with Jesus three times, just as Jesus said Peter would in verses 33-34…

> 33 Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."
> 34 Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me."

Peter told Jesus that he would go to prison with Jesus, even die with Jesus, that sounds serious, that sounds like dedication. And what's Jesus' response? Peter, you won't do that, you will deny me three times just minutes from now.

Peter **tells** Jesus that he would go to jail with him, that he would even die with him, but then goes on to deny Jesus three times.

Which leads us to Jesus' three questions in John 21:15-19

> Peter, do you love me more than these?
> "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."
> Feed my lambs
>
> Peter, do you love me?

> "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."
> Tend my sheep
>
> Peter, do you love me?
> "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."
> Feed my sheep
>
> After this Jesus said to him, "Follow me."

Jesus' first question is pointed at Peter's current situation and environment.
Peter, do you love me more than your old life as a fisherman? Remember, they were fishing before having breakfast with Jesus. Do you love me more than these disciples you are with? Do you love me more than the other disciples love me?

Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.

Feed my lambs, Jesus says.

Remember, Jesus calls himself the good shepherd, His sheep know his voice. Jesus is reminding Peter of that, and again inviting him into the work that Jesus started, caring for and pointing people to God. Feed them with not only physical food, but with the Gospel as well.

Peter, do you love me?

Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.

Tend my sheep. Take care of my people, look after my people, continue the work that I started.

Peter, do you love me?

"Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

Feed my sheep.

This time around, Peter offers no assurances, no metaphors, no empty promises of going to prison or death. Peter surrenders this time and acknowledges Jesus' wisdom and grace; the wisdom of who Peter is and the grace of accepting him back as a disciple, as someone who will continue Jesus' work on earth.

Jesus' response to Peter's response? Feed my sheep. Not with words alone, but with physical acts of service.

Peter if you love me, serve my people, feed, care for, and guide my people. Don't make empty promises, go and do it.

In their commentary, Scott Daniels and George Lyons propose that Jesus brought Peter to the fire and asked him three questions, as a reminder of the night he betrayed him. Remember, Peter went to the fire with the locals to warm himself, where he was asked three questions.

Daniels and Lyons also state that Jesus set up the same scenario, not as a way to embarrass Peter, but to redeem him, to assure Peter that he still had big plans for him. Jesus was cementing Peter's future in ministry, not dragging him through his past.

Jesus wants Peter's actions, not just his words. Jesus wants Peter to continue the work, to continue to care for God's people.

2. And it's the same for us, Jesus doesn't want our <u>words</u>.

Jesus asks us the same questions and we respond similarly:

Do you love me?
Yes, Lord, I go to church.
Feed my lambs

Do you love me?
Yes, Lord, I read my Bible.
Tend my sheep

Church, do you love me?
Yes, Lord, I even tithe.
Feed my sheep

All three of those are good responses. There is nothing wrong with going to church, reading your Bible, or even tithing, these are all good and necessary things, but sometimes we use them as a substitute for going out and serving Jesus.

Being a child of God isn't just about the words you say but also about the way you love God, the way you take care of others, and the way you lay down your own life for others and for Jesus.

Jesus makes this clear in response to a question about the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:37-40…

> **37** Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'
> **38** This is the first and greatest commandment.
> **39** And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

> **40** All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Jesus continues with these instructions recorded in John 15:12-15…

> **12** "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
> **13** No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.
> **14** You are my friends if you do what I command you.
> **15** I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

We are to love God and neighbor, don't just tell God and neighbor you love them, I mean that's good too, but Jesus' instructions, Jesus Commandment, is to *love* God and neighbor.

Sometimes, we get in the way of that; we try to define loving God and neighbor on our own terms, like Peter did when he told Jesus he would go to prison and die with him. Peter was trying to make a grand gesture.

Sometimes, we stand in the way of loving Jesus or loving like Jesus.

That's a problem, and Jesus makes it clear that you are to…

3. Lay down your life and <u>live</u> for Jesus.

Jesus doesn't want our words, our promises, our goal. He wants our very lives. Jesus wants us to live the way He did.

But we have to first get out of the way. We have to first die to ourselves. To live like Christ, we must ask for forgiveness of our sins and leave that life behind. We must repent.

I think Peter demonstrates that leaving yourself behind, your own opinions and desires, is difficult, painful at times.

I'm reminded of a story of a pastor friend I met in Scotland, Rev. Ruth Turner. Pastor Ruth continues to minister in Northern Ireland and was recently elected as District Superintendent of the British Isles North district. Ruth has also worked in the medical field, specifically in Cardiology.

I met Ruth on my very first day in Scotland. I was picked up at the airport and whisked away to a 2-day prayer conference. Extended periods of time with my eyes closed in a conference was not what I thought I would first do when finishing an extremely long day of traveling, but it was what I was there to do.

Pastors from around the district would share prayer and encouragement, and I remember Ruth sharing this story:

Ruth was working a shift in the Cardiology department, seated in front of a big display of monitors, each one displaying a different patient's heartbeat. Everything was going well, until Ruth looked up to a heart rhythm, she was very familiar with, and she knew it was not good.

She said that she got up and raced to the patient's room, and when she entered, he was sitting at the edge of his bed, talking on his cellphone. He saw the concerned look on her face and said "what". Before she could answer, he was thrown back in bed with a massive heart attack.

In comes Ruth, in comes the rest of the team, there is honestly no better place to have a heart attack than in front of this team.

Everyone was well equipped; they each had their own role and were more than capable of executing their role.

Ruth was there, standing over the man, ready with the defibrillator, the whole team was there, ready with their expertise.

There was just one problem though.

Ruth told us that you don't really want to be conscious when being defibrillated, in fact, you really don't even want to be alive, it is an incredibly painful experience.

So, teams all there, Ruth is ready, the machine is ready. The man is not.

He's lying there, writhing in pain, grasping his chest clawing at his shirt in pain, hurt, in need of help, in need of healing.

Ruth allows this for only a couple seconds before leaning over and yelling, "If you would only die, I could save your life"

He wouldn't let go, so she hit him anyway, saving his life, but in not a fun way, if there was a fun way to save a life.

Everyone was ready to go, ready to receive and heal this man, but he got in the way, he got in the way of being healed, being redeemed.

And I know for a fact that we are still doing that today, that we are still living our lives writhing in pain, pulling at our chest, and Jesus is there, holding out his hand saying, if you would only die to yourself, I could save your life, I already have saved your life, say goodbye to your old self and follow me.

That is exactly what Jesus says to Peter at the end of our passage today.

> **18** Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt
> and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your
> hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do
> not wish to go."
> **19** (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After
> this he said to him, "Follow me." (John 21:18-19)

(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Peter, die to yourself and follow me. Church, die to yourself and follow Jesus.

And don't continue the journey on your own, that is what we are for.

This building, all the events and activities, small groups, classes, it is all for the journey of living for Christ, growing closer to Christ, together.

So, don't get in your own way, don't define what love is on your own terms, surrender to Christ and love like He does.

Pray

Benediction

Philippians 4:7

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed we were called in one body. Amen.