

The Believer's Call to Service

John 21:15-25

Introduction: Peter is the natural leader of the disciples. Every group has one. He is confident and bold and men follow such a man. He was the default spokesman for the group....unafraid to say what was on his mind.....It was often very good too.

John 6:67-69 ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

Matthew 16:15-16 ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Sometimes it was stupid and ill advised, but he was never silent like the rest of the men.

John 13:8-9 ⁸ Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."

Sometimes it was fearless and foolish:

Matthew 26:31-33 ³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.' ³² "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." ³³ But Peter said to Him, "*Even* though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."

Do you believe that Jesus has the words of Eternal life? Then you are like Peter! Do you believe that Jesus is the ChristThe Son of the Living God? They you are like Peter! Do you find it hard to believe that the Creator of the universe and your personal life giver would serve you like a slave and take abuse and shame on your behalf? Then you are like Peter! Have you made commitments to love Christ that you have not kept? Men... have you failed to love you wife sacrificially especially when she is being difficult and unloving to you? Have you told Christ you would do something and then didn't do it? Have you ever purposed to be part of a local church because you know God commands it, but then you didn't do it? Have you ever decided to give a regular offering, but then didn't do it? Ladies, have you ever disrespected your husband because he was weak and unloving even though you knew Christ wanted you to honor him? Children, have you ever lied to your parents or resented them for telling you what to do even though you know God does not want you to do that? THEN WE ARE ALL LIKE PETER!

How does Christ feels about your weakness, indecision, and sin. Peter is the poster child for what ails you and me this morning and Jesus is still the solution.

John 21:15-25 ¹⁵ So 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." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." ¹⁸ "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹ Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" ²⁰ Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following *them*; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" ²¹ So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" ²² Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me!" ²³ Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but *only*, "If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you?" ²⁴ This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. ²⁵ And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

So when they had finished breakfast [15a]: Breakfast was tense. The Disciples were well aware of their recent failures and they were feeling cowardly. Jesus actually wanted them to escape arrest that night. If they had all been killed we would not have a church today. AND...failure is part of discipleship. It teaches us that we are dependent on Jesus. Nevertheless, they had abandoned Jesus at the hour of his greatest need. Peter had actually tried to keep his bold promise never to fall away...but we all know the outcome of that. But know this about Peter...He loved Jesus. So many Christians just fall off the radar because of weakness and failure. They believe Satan's lie and their inner voice that says they are no longer loved or welcomed by Christ because they have failed so many times to keep their commitment or word. They have sinned after having promised that they would not. We need to see how Christ feels about your weakness and sin.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?" [15b]: More than these what? The Greek does not help us here because the neuter ending and the masculine ending on "these" is the same in Greek. So Jesus is asking Peter..."do you love me more than these boats and nets [neuter] or do you love me more than these men love me." [masculine]

Just a few days before Peter had said..."***Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.***" Now he is again in the company of those same men and Jesus is asking..."In light of everything that has happened do you still maintain that you love me more than these other men love me?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." [15c]: It is telling that Peter does not really answer the question "as asked." He drops the comparison that Jesus had made between Peter's love for "these" and his love for Jesus and just says without equivocation....YES, LORD; You know that I love You!" Peter has certainly not acted like he loved the Lord this past week, so he is not foolish enough to appeal to that. He appeals instead to the omniscience of Jesus. You know that I love you.

There is another issue that you might have heard mentioned. Jesus uses the word "agape" when He asked Peter 'do you love me.' Peter responds with "phileo" when he affirms his love for Jesus. There are several ways to look at this. Here are some facts however that we should consider. Phileo and agape are not very different in Greek even though you might have heard that they are. If anything, Phileo is the warmer of the two words. Jesus has asked..."do you have a settled, devoted and sacrificial love for me and Peter responds with "Yes Lord," I adore you deeply.

Some think Peter was saying...no I do not love you, but I like you. But, Peter accepts Jesus' "agape" with a resounding yes Lord! And an affirmation that Jesus knows his heart on the matter.

He said to him, "Tend My lambs." [15d]: Tend is the word for feed. So tending the sheep in this case means feeding them. Is it important what your animals eat and drink? Of course. "See to it that the lambs that belong to me are fed properly." The word lamb is often used to describe sheep. I still call my adult children..."my kids." There is no hidden meaning here just as there is no significance to the two different words for love. We do not want to miss the point of this encounter by being overly concerned about certain details.

He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." [16]: Jesus asks the same question, but without the comparison to "these." Peter did not want to say "no" to Jesus' first question and he did not want to say that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples loved Him. Jesus proves that He does indeed know Peter's heart and does not press the first question. He does know the answer.

He also does not question Peter's response either time. He accepts the answer and gives an instruction. This time it is "shepherd My sheep!" Shepherd means to do what shepherds do. Shepherds tended the flock. They fed them, watered them and protected them. Both times Jesus has said the same thing in different words. "If you love me then care for my sheep diligently."

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep. [17]: Peter again appeals to what Jesus already knows, but is not understanding the most significant aspect of this. Peter had denied Jesus three times and Jesus was giving him three opportunities to embrace Him and express his love for Him. This time Jesus says "tend [feed] **my** sheep." The sheep are always Christ's. They never belong to the church, the pastor or leaders. Shepherds are taking care of and feeding the

sheep that belong personally to Jesus. We should never give a word of teaching, counsel or rebuke that is not soaked in prayerful recognition that we are dealing with someone else's children and that person is our Lord and Master and Savior. Jesus is Lord of our church!

Colossians 1:15-18 ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Peter is restored and commissioned by Jesus who had predicted Peter's ministry when He said...

Luke 22:31-32 ³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; ³² but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Two things are vitally important here and they apply to us and not just to Peter:

LOVE FOR CHRIST: All true service is based on and driven by LOVE FOR CHRIST! Morris says...

"It is worth noting that the one thing about which Jesus questions Peter prior to commissioning him to tend the flock is love. This is the basic qualification for Christian service. Other qualities may be desirable, but love is completely indispensable."

1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

LOVE FOR OTHERS: Service for Christ is exclusively service for others. This is because there is nothing that God needs from us. He doesn't need any money or food. He owns everything. He is....

Acts 17:24-25 ²⁴ "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things;

Service for God thrives in the family of God, the church, but is not limited to that. Jesus made it clear that **Love Driven Service** to others is service to Him.

Matthew 25:34-40 ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶ naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? ³⁸ 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹ 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.'

NOW....Did you know that God has prepared works of service for you to do.

Ephesians 2:10 ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Those opportunities surround you starting in your family with your spouse and children. Men you are serving Christ when out of love for Him you love your wife and children and work hard all day to provide for them. You are feeding and shepherding them....just like Jesus told Peter to do. Faithful husbands and fathers are full time servants of Christ....every single day. Work hard...it for your Savior who gave everything to you.

Women...when you clean and cook and wash and then still need to be a loving mother and wife...you are serving Christ. Do you think your own kids are not included in your service? Jesus only talks about strangers because that stretches us in order to do it. But the point is that when you grudgingly go through your day you are missing the joy of service for Christ. You are a full time servant of Christ and you didn't even experience the joy of knowing it. The works you are doing are the ones prepared for you to do.

Can we do more....often. Service for Christ extends to your church family. Bringing food, helping those in need, giving love and affection to the lonely and hurting. Giving money, gas or time to a missionary. Do you know that most missionaries are discouraged? They just want to go plant a church or help make disciples, but there is often no money forthcoming for that. As you serve others out of love and devotion to Jesus you are serving Him.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." [18]: Jesus tells Peter that he is going to get old and not be the powerhouse leader that he is today. He would be dressed and lead around by others.

Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!" [19]: Peter did grow old, but died a martyr. Some think that the "stretching out of hands" was the way of referring to crucifixion in Christ's day. If so then we have a prophecy of the way Peter would die. At the very least Jesus is predicting that Peter will die a martyr's death rather than of old

age. Christ did not promise Peter “his best life now” or “health and wealth.” He promised him difficulty and called him to follow and Peter willingly did!

Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following *them*; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" ²² **Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me!"** [20-22]: We all worry too much about the other guy. Everyone wonders why they have hardships or difficulties and another brother or sister does not. Others have the higher paying jobs or the nicer cars. I have a friend who never has to fix a thing in his house or on his new car. When he isn't working he is relaxing or going on vacation. Everything else is always taken care of. Your life is probably different!

Peter wants to know....if he is going to eventually die as a martyr then what is going to happen to John. Jesus essentially says....with a little bit of sarcasm thrown in....that is really no concern of yours. We could all learn a lot from this. We are following Christ in service in our daily lives. Our lives are directed by Christ for His glory. If our brother or sister is doing well we should rejoice in that because they may need our loving sympathy in the future. We simply do not know what works Christ has prepared for them and should not be thinking about it.

Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but *only*, "If I want him to remain until I come, what *is that* to you?" [23]: John debunks this rumor so that when he died people would not think that Jesus had given a false prophecy. Jesus was using some hyperbole to make His point to Peter...which was....”don't worry about John and how his life goes....come and follow me!

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. [24]: John is adding a kind of affidavit to his gospel. He is identifying himself one last time as the writer and affirming that everything he has written is true.

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written. [25]: The Bible is breathed out by God according to Paul

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

God causes Peter to write us this explanation.

2 Peter 1:20-21 ²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

What Scripture is saying is this: God is not telling you everything that happened, but everything he is telling you actually happened. The Holy Spirit combines the thoughts of God with the Words of God to produce the Scripture. There is no reason to believe that anything is lost unless you are prepared to believe that God was unable to get what He wanted in the Bible.

Jesus taught and revealed Himself and the Father to God continuously for three and one half years. He lived and moved among the people 24 / 7 with only a few recorded rest periods and those were usually only at night. If you wrote down just those three years in detail it would be beyond huge. If you wrote down his entire life it would be colossal.

CONCLUSION: So what is the conclusion of this final event in John's account of the life of Jesus? Let's try to boil it down.

When Christ is loved He is willingly served. Love for Christ is the only basis for Service. You serve Him by loving and serving others in a widening circle. This is true because God needs absolutely nothing you possess. **ALL SERVICE MUST BE FOR LOVE OF HIM.** If you stop doing it because the person or people you serve are not worthy or appreciative then it is probably **NOT** done for the love of Christ.

Resist letting what others do or do not do alter your love for Christ. If every believer embraced this principle it would change families, marriages, churches. Do not adjust your service for Christ because of what others are or are not doing. Jesus wants you to fix your eyes on Him to the exclusion of others.

You know very little about Christ and God, because God has not told you that much. He has told you enough for this life, but you will have an eternity to get to know God properly. You are not going to know the mysteries of the universe and God when you get to heaven. This idea is why so many believers imagine heaven as incredibly boring. Eternity sitting around with nothing to do or learn....The thought of it is appalling to me!

Can you remember a time when you learned some life changing principle or fact. It was a joyful thrill that sparked your desire to know more and more. We do not become God when we get to heaven! **AND...**only God is omniscient. God alone knows all things. We will get to discover them for eternity. You will absolutely **not be bored** with Christ, with worship, with love for one another or with the eternal creation that God will make for you. It will be a joyful and exhilarating eternity.

John's Gospel has uniquely revealed the nature and person of Christ. The Eternally existing Son spoke creation into existence... created Satan and the angels and then stooped to breath His own breath of life into one creature only. Mankind! He placed His image on one creature only...Mankind! He gave the rule of His creation to one creature only...Mankind!

Satan became so jealous and prideful that even being in the very presence of God as the highest angel was not enough. He wanted the earth and he wanted to deface God's image in man....and he succeeded in doing both in Eden.

John has told us how this same Son who created man became one of His own creatures. Fully, entirely human. He did not appear to be human. He was and is human. He bore the image of God fully and without sin for all creation to behold. John lets us see Him in His glory again and again. And then, HE does the unimaginable. He gives His righteousness to God on our behalf and assumes our filth and sin at the cross. He takes sin that is not His and gives us righteousness that is not ours.

Peter is every Christian in this passage. He knows Christ and loves Him and yet...he is unworthy, inept, ignorant, weak and unable to keep his commitments to Jesus or even meet his own expectations of himself. Jesus let Peter and us fail again and again to show him that our strength comes from the Lord and not ourselves.

The knowledge of your weakness is intended to renew your confidence in Jesus to care for your life's needs. John tells us that is why he wrote...

John 20:31 ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

“Believe” here is a settled confidence that Jesus is God the Son who created the world and all things in it and then left that exalted place to die like a criminal for your sin. If that is not what you believe then you do NOT believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It has to be the True Jesus of the Bible. Do not be deceived by those coming to your door saying they believe that Jesus is the Christ. THEY DO NOT!

“Believing...you may have life in His name,” means trust ONLY this Jesus of the Bible. Not your works of righteousness or even your favorable comparison with other sinners. There is always someone worse...that is not the point. There are none who are good, but Jesus. Eternal life is Christ's gift to you entirely without your input. He calls you to trust Him enough to allow Him to order your circumstances and their outcome. He has prepared this life for you to live at the time before creation when He purposed to make you His child. Saving faith is this kind of daily trust in Jesus who said....

John 10:27-30 ²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ "I and the Father are one."