

## Sermon – 13/05/2007 am

### A New Start

Study Text: John 21:15-17

A week after his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples a second time. Why a second time? Because Thomas was absent the first time and he was refusing to believe. Jesus appeared to his disciples yet another time. This time it was in Galilee and only seven were present. But why did he appear this time?

Jesus met them by the lake, after they had spent a fruitless night fishing. Just like the old days, he told them to let down their nets and they came up with a great catch. This was a sign that they would be fishers of men as he told them before. But Jesus had another task to perform at this appearance. He came to restore Peter. In his grace Jesus would give Peter the opportunity to make a new start.

### Confrontation

When they had eaten breakfast Jesus spoke to Simon Peter. Why to Peter? What did Jesus want to speak to Peter about? It seems they went off along the beach together although John was not far away (21:20). Jesus addressed Peter him as *Simon son of Jonah*. He did not use the name Peter, meaning 'rock', that he had previously given him.

Peter became the leader of the band of disciples. He was very outspoken and boldly declared his love for Jesus. When Jesus said 'all of you will be made to stumble because of me this night', Peter replied 'even if all are made to stumble because of you I will never be made to stumble'(M atthew 26:33). A short while later Peter rushed to defend Jesus with his sword.

But what happened after Jesus was arrested? Sitting by a warm fire, Peter denied Jesus three times. He went out and wept bitterly. When the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples he said *Peace to you*. He did not reprimand Peter for his denial. But now he makes Peter confront his past, before he again calls him to 'follow me'.

*Simon, do you love me more than these?* Who or what was Jesus referring to by the word 'these'. Clearly he was pointing to something around about. Was it the boats and the nets? It is more likely he was referring to the other disciples. That being so, what did he mean by saying 'do you love me more than these'. Based on what Peter had earlier so boldly claimed for himself, it is most likely that Jesus meant 'do you really love me more that they do, as you said? After all, look at how you denied me'. This self-confidence must be confronted.

Peter may have been the first to fall away so terribly, but he was not the last. Too often we see those who make great boasts of their faith, and their faultless life, fall away. There are those who boast of their upbringing in a fine Christian home, those who boast that they have never missed a Sunday at church, those who boast that they are one of the elect. 'I will never fall' away they say. Peter stands as an eternal testimony to the danger of such self confidence and presumption.

## Clarification

*Do you love me* was the simple question Jesus asked Peter. He asked him three times. *Simon son of Jonah do you love me?* Peter was grieved when Jesus asked him the third time. Did Jesus not believe him? So he said *Lord you know all things* or 'Lord you know my heart'. The Lord did indeed know his heart, but this was the heart that had recently denied even knowing Jesus three times. Now he was saying 'I love you Lord'. There was a lot of restoration to be done in Peter's heart.

What about your heart? Is any restoration needed? Any relationships in need of restoration? We find broken relationships at almost every turn in our lives. Some seem to be beyond restoration. But what about this relationship between Peter and Jesus? Cursing and swearing Peter said 'I do not know the man!' Jesus must have been bitterly disappointed. Yet he came to Peter to restore this very relationship. Surely Jesus has the power to restore your broken relationships.

'Simon do you love me'. 'Yes Lord you know that I love you'. Now In Greek there are four words for love. Jesus used one (*agape*) and Peter another (*phileo*). Some hold that *agape* is a higher form of love. Yet when we come to the third questioning Jesus dropped this word and used *phileo*. Was he lowering his standards for Peter?

On the other hand there are those who say that Peter was actually expressing a higher form of love, at least in his mind. Are we really meant to see clear differences in meaning here, or this just another case of simple synonyms? In this very passage we 'lambs' change to 'sheep' which is another case of synonyms, though some try to make something out of this also.

'Do you love me' was the question Jesus put to Peter. It is a simple yet profound question. Peter had jumped out of the boat, rushed through the water, and run up the beach to greet Jesus. Jesus said 'bring some fish' and Peter rushed off to drag the nets in and get some fish. Could Jesus not see that he loved him?

Ryle writes 'we may know much and do much, and profess much and talk much, and work much and give much, and go though much and make a show of our religion, and yet be dead before God for want of love and at last go down to the pit. Do we love Christ? That is the great question. Without this there is no vitality about our Christianity. We are no better than a painted wax figure, lifeless stuffed beasts in a museum, sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. There is no life where there is no love'.

Ryle can be rather blunt but what he writes is true. Are we more concerned about decorum and traditions than about loving those whom the Lord brings to us, people exhausted from abuse and the depravity of this world? When he was still a long way off the father saw him and had compassion on him – so we read in the parable of the prodigal son. Do you know such love? Do you show such love? 'Do you love me' was the simple question Jesus asked Peter by way of restoring their relationship.

## Commission

As Jesus questioned Peter three times, *do you love me*, so he commanded him three times *feed my sheep*. Jesus was not only confronting Peter with his past, and clarifying his relationship to Jesus, but was at the same time commanding Peter to enter into a great ministry.

Jesus' questions were searching, and Peter was grieved after being asked the third time. This was a humbling experience. But through this humbling he was exalted by Jesus. *Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time.* Peter would later write such words (I Peter 5:6). Jesus knew all along what he would have Peter to do, but he must firstly have Peter humble himself before the Lord.

Peter was not exalted to above his brethren in the way that the RC church claims. They make great claims from this passage but without any basis. The claims they make concerning the pre-eminence of Peter, and apostolic succession, cannot be supported from this passage, or any other passage in the Bible. Peter was called to feed 'My sheep', that is the sheep of Christ. He was commanded to be an 'under-shepherd' just like the other disciples. Peter himself later wrote as a 'fellow elder' in the church to other elders, telling them shepherd the flock of God (I Peter 5:2).

Jesus said to his disciples *I am the good shepherd* (10:11). The good shepherd feeds and protects his flock – he even gives his life for the sheep. As spoke to Peter on the beach he was actually returning to his Father in heaven. Jesus would still be the chief shepherd. He was commissioning Peter to be an under-shepherd in the church. He was to feed 'my sheep' and take care of them. He was to lead them gently, just as Jesus was doing to him at this very moment. Peter would later instruct other shepherds in the church to be gentle and lead by example (I Peter 5).

How grateful Peter must have been to have been given this opportunity to make a new start. Only Jesus could give him such an opportunity. The grace of Jesus abounded towards his servant Peter – just as it had abounded towards Thomas in his previous appearance. Jesus allowed Peter to put his past behind him – not forgetting his sin but knowing that Jesus forgave him and accepted him as one who loved Jesus and worshipped him as Lord.

Do you want to make a new start? No one else in this world will enable you to do so like Jesus. Men take pleasure in remembering your sins, but Jesus takes pleasure in forgiving them. Sure, Jesus will confront you with your sin but see how graciously he will deal with you as a sinner and restore you unto himself. Do you love me? That is his question to you today.

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