

## **DO YOU LOVE ME? - Sunday April 29<sup>th</sup> 2012**

***<sup>15</sup> 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."<sup>16</sup> 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."<sup>17</sup> 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. John 21:15-17***

Beloved in the Lord,

If Jesus were to stand before you this morning, look you in the eye and ask: "Do you love Me?" – how would you respond? "Lord, You know that I love You! I love Your Church! You know how much I do....."

Jesus asks again – "Do you love Me?"

I saw a poster once that said: "If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" That makes us stop and think. In response to the question posed by Jesus: "Do you love Me?" would there be enough evidence to prove a positive response from us. You see to say I love you, and to actually prove it in life are two very different things.

In our text today, Jesus has taken Peter aside and three times asked him: "Peter – do you love Me?" No once, not twice, but three times. Why? I think that there maybe two reasons: Firstly, the Bible tells us that every matter is established on the testimony of two or three witnesses and secondly, Peter had denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

Jesus has demonstrated His love for Peter. He died on the cross bearing not only Peter's sin, but the sin of all humankind. Jesus shed His blood for us. It was our sin, our cross that He bore upon His sinless and guiltless shoulders.

***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:16***

You see Jesus love was not just merely words, but He demonstrated His love in the greatest sacrifice of all time. He took our punishment and died in our place, shedding His blood for our sin.

Having done this, He turns to Peter and says: "Do you love me?" Each time Peter answers "Lord, you know that I love You." Jesus says to him: "Feed my sheep." In other words, Jesus is saying – if you love Me, then demonstrate it by keeping my commandment and by serving Me. You see our love has to be demonstrated in our unselfish service to Him.

In essence Jesus is saying that if you love Me, then may the outworking of this love be in your life, in word and deed, in faithful and loyal service.

This outworking was certainly clear in Peter's life after Pentecost. Peter went about with great faith and love and power, and he served the Lord with all his heart, and died a martyr for Jesus.

Today, I would like to go a little deeper into Jesus question to Peter, and to make it personal. Let us delve a little into our own hearts and examine how our love really measures up.

The greatest commandment of our faith is found in Matthew 22:37-39:

***“And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’<sup>38</sup> This is the great and foremost commandment.<sup>39</sup> The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’”***

The words that we need to emphasise are with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. All means all. We do not have here some tepid, lukewarm, half-hearted love. Jesus is not talking about a half-baked faith. Jesus does not want a half-hearted confession of allegiance that has no firm foundation. With all your heart, soul and mind. This means that absolutely nothing or nobody can be more important to you than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He has to be in first place in your life. Jesus said it in words that many misunderstand and misinterpret:

***“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.”***

Jesus is not in any way inciting hatred, in fact He taught and lived the opposite. In His time, this way of expressing things was clear. A powerful negative was used to enforce the positive. What Jesus is saying is that absolutely no other relationship can be more important to us, take priority over our relationship with Him. That is because the reality, the truth is that unless we put Jesus first, unless we crown Him King of Kings and Lord of Lord's in our lives, we cannot truly love wife or husband, son or daughter, father or mother, brother or sister, neighbour. It is only when our relationship with God is right, can our relationships with one another be what they ought to be. We are talking about Agape love. God's love. The highest and purest form of love.

If our relationship with God is not right, then our relationships with one another will not be right. The key to successful and loving relationships is to love God above all else.

Last week we considered the narrow gate and saw that the way to God is as narrow as the cross.

In as much as our earthly relationships are of vital importance, our relationship with Jesus even more so. When our time comes to die, to leave this mortal body, then the only relationship that will really matter at that time will be our relationship with Jesus. As we cross the sea of death, the world will no longer help us. Our beloved, our dearest and nearest will stay behind and will not be able to help us once we slip out of this realm. They and all our earthly possessions will remain here, and we will go without them either to meet Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, or as our judge. If you have accepted His love, and if you have loved Him, He will be waiting with open arms to receive you into His presence. If you have rejected His love, rejected Him, haven't believed on Him, then He will be your judge to condemnation. More about that another time.

We return to Jesus question: "Do you love Me?"

We have considered that God's Word teaches us to love Him above all others.

We are also to love Him above all else in this world.. This is spelled out for us in 1 John 2: 15ff:

***"<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. "***

These words should be read in conjunction with Jesus teaching in the sermon on the mount:

***"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Matthew 6:24***

This is a very clear teaching. So many lose everything, because they pursue wealth and happiness apart from God, and end up losing their soul. What they do not understand is that if you love god, if you put His Kingdom first, then everything else is added unto you.

Jesus promised it: ***"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Matthew 6:33***

The principle is clear: If we love God with all our heart, if we place Him and His Kingdom first in our lives, then out of His great love for us He adds to us not only what we need, but so much more. He is a Father who loves to give and to bless. This is spelt out in Psalm 23 with which we close today:

<sup>1</sup> *The LORD is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.*

<sup>2</sup> *He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside quiet waters.*

<sup>3</sup> *He restores my soul;  
He guides me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name's sake.*

<sup>4</sup> *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil, for You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

<sup>5</sup> *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You have anointed my head with oil;  
My cup overflows.*

<sup>6</sup> *Surely goodness and loving-kindness will follow me all the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

**Amen.**

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.