

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

Burning Question #47

Who Is My Neighbor?

Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-37

April 15, 2018

Communion: Latonya Evans

Care Calling: Thornton-White

Host: POTLUCK

Saturday 4/14 Clean Up: Mike Rylant

- 1 🎵 **How Majestic Is Your Name** 121
- 2 🎵 Rise up O church of God [ALL] 433
- 3 🎵 The servant song [v. 1, 2, 5, 6] 424
- 4 🎵 **Doxology**
- 5 🎵 Bind us together 425
- 6 🎵 I want to be like Jesus [ALL] 550
- 7 🎵 456 - Find Us Faithful [Once] 456

Mark 12:28-34 (GW)

28 One of the scribes went to Jesus during the argument with the Sadducees. He saw how well Jesus answered them, so he asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of

them all?” **29** Jesus answered, “The most important is,

‘Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. **30** So love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ **31** The second most

important commandment is this: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

32 The scribe said to Jesus, “Teacher, that was well said!

You've told the truth that there is only one God and no other

besides him! ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as you love yourself is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ When Jesus heard how wisely the man answered, he told the man, “You're not too far from the kingdom of God.” After that, no one dared to ask him another question.

Luke 10:25-37 (GW)

²⁵ Then an expert in Moses' Teachings stood up to test Jesus. He asked, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ Jesus answered him, “What is written in Moses' Teachings? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.’ And ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’” ²⁸ Jesus told him, “You're right! Do this, and life will be yours.” ²⁹ But the man wanted to justify his question. So he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man went from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way robbers stripped him, beat him, and left him for dead. ³¹ “By chance, a priest was traveling along that road. When he saw the man, he went around him and continued on his way. ³² Then a Levite came to that place. When he saw the man, he, too, went around him and continued on his way. ³³ “But a Samaritan, as he was traveling along, came across the man. When the Samaritan saw him, he felt sorry for the man, ³⁴ went to him, and cleaned and bandaged his wounds. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day the Samaritan took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. He told the innkeeper, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than that, I'll pay you on my return trip.’ ³⁶ “Of these three men, who do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by

robbers?” ³⁷ The expert said, “The one who was kind enough to help him.” Jesus told him, “Go and imitate his example!”

I don't know who in the congregation asked this question, but it shows a sophisticated sense of current events with all the shootings going on around our country, and the tension incurred. And it is a question that was even posed to Jesus Himself. It's a question that we need to rethink on occasionally. So, I thank whomever raised the question.

Cab drivers in New York City used to take a 80-question test before getting their taxi licenses.

Now, however, the exam has been reduced to 10 questions.

What changed?

Well, they were required to answer questions on the geography of New York City, but now that information is less needed because of *Global Positioning Systems* (GPS) installed in the cabs

Jesus did something similar when He reduced the 613 commandments of the law of Moses to just two!

And, a story that is told among our **Hasidic** Jewish friends highlights this for us:

Late one evening, a rabbi is sitting out with his students, watching the stars appear in the heavens one by one.

"Tell me this," asks the teacher: "how can we know when the night is ended and the day has begun?"

One eager young man jumps right in.

"You know the night is over and the day has begun when you look off across the pasture and can tell which animal is a dog and which is a sheep."

The rabbi says nothing, gazing off into the distance.

"Is this the right answer?" the young man asks, after a time.

"It is a good answer, but not the answer I am looking for," replies the rabbi.

"Let me try," says another student.

"You know the night is over and the day has begun when the light falls on the leaves, and you can tell if it is a palm tree or a fig tree you're looking at."

"That too is a fine answer, but not the one I am looking for."

"Then, what is the right answer?" demand the students. "Rebbe, answer your own question!"

The rabbi looks out over the eager young crowd of disciples and replies, "When you look into the eyes of a human being and see a brother or sister, you know that it is morning. If you cannot see a sister or brother, you know that it will always be night."

This is the 55th anniversary month of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., an American Baptist minister and civil rights leader.

He was shot in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968, and was pronounced dead at 7:05 p.m. CST.

Today I want to focus broader than race relations, and racism. I hope to bring an answer to the question of the expert in Moses' law that is in the spirit of Jesus' answer to the question "Who Is My Neighbor?"

Several years ago, I was showing a house up in the North West area of Santa Maria.

The owner had spent over \$80,000 renovating it, and it was a show piece.

I had to show houses after I finished leading worship services here at OCC, so the Open Houses were advertised to begin at 2 PM.

Several families were inside wandering around looking, and I was outside greeting people as they arrived.

A Jaguar pulled up and a young Hispanic couple emerged that could have passed as models, with their fine appearance and their expensive clothes.

Just as they started for the front door, a Oaxacan family came out. The very flashy dressed young Hispanic from the Jaguar threw up her arms and loudly said, "That does it! I'm outa here. I'll not walk in where the little people have been."

"Little people!"

That was my first realization that there was stratification among the Mexicans.

And stratification is an ancient spiritual problem which Jesus is asking us to reconsider.

The spiritual problem is ...

I. The Sin of Partiality

James 2:1-10 (NASB)

¹ My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. ² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? ⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are

committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors.

10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

It's not black vrs. white.

It's not yellow vrs. red.

It's people created in the image of God vrs. people created in the image of God.

Racism is alive and well in our world.

Any historian can tell you that it has always been that way.

Just think about the internment of Japanese American's during WWII.

What is even sadder is that this bigotry is also alive and well in the church.

And this should not be!

Of all the places that racism should never raise it's ugly head is in the church!

II. The Pattern of The First Church

Our Lord said:

Matthew 28:19 (NASB)

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Many people have a mental image of Jesus drawn from artistic depictions.

A wide range of depictions have appeared over the two millennia since Jesus's death, often influenced by cultural settings, political circumstances and theological contexts.

Artists in the Middle ages tended to paint Him as if He were Italian

Was Jesus a Nazi?

During the Third Reich, German Protestant theologians, motivated by racism and tapping into traditional anti-Semitism, redefined Jesus as an Aryan and Christianity as a religion at war with

Judaism.

Contrary to the Nazi propaganda of the 1930's-40's, Jesus wasn't blue-eyed, blond, and white.

Jesus was a Jew.

When Paul was in Athens speaking to the wise Philosophers who loved to debate, he said God:

Acts 17:26 (NASB)

26 He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

J.W. McGarvey says of this verse that it:

"is an inspired assertion of the unity of the race, and accords with the Mosaic history. To deny it because we find some difficulty in reconciling it with the present diversity in the types of men, is ... to deny an assertion of the Scriptures, not because of something we know, but of something we do not know. We do not know, with certainty, what caused so great diversity among the races of men, and, because of this ignorance, we deny their common paternity. Such a denial could not be justified, unless we knew all the facts which have transpired in human history. But much the larger portion of human history is unwritten and unknown; and, at the same time, we are dependent, for all we do know of the first half of it, upon the word of God. The only rational course, therefore, which is left to us, is to receive its statements in their obvious import as the truth of history."

And, for whom did The Messiah die?

He died for all man-kind, all humanity, for all who have sinned and fallen short of God's loving will.

And, as Jesus is stumbling on His way be lynched by the mob,

Mark says

Mark 15:21 (NASB)

21 They *pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.

From at least the time of Queen Sheba, there were thousands of Africans who converted to Judaism.

There is little doubt that she was black.

In the Cathedral of Cologne, there is a stained glass window that dates back to around 1280 AD that shows her being black.

Judaism spread across the north of Africa, and this included Cyrene and Ethiopia.

Luke tells us of the

Acts 8:27 (NASB)

27 Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians,

There is little doubt that the eunuch was black.

You see, when Jesus said He would establish His Church, it was a church for humanity.

And, Luke gives just a thumbnail sketch of the day the Church was established, and says those present were:

Acts 2:9-11 (NASB)

9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs

The church we pattern ourselves on was multicultural, multigenerational, and of both sexes.

You don't realize how you have carried out this injunction to Love Your Neighbor.

We have had the opportunity to share in the Good News with many nationalities

We had the Chinese gentleman who attended here, and he wanted to learn how to minister to the Chinese on the Central Coast. He worshiped here; I gave him material to study; we sat and talked.

Then, when he felt he was ready, he started a congregation in Arroyo Grande to reach out exclusively to the Chinese.

I commend him for that, but I don't think that is what Jesus had in mind.

I don't think that is the congregation of which James is speaking.

Kids understand it.

A first grader went on her first day to a newly integrated school at the height of the segregation storm.

An anxious mother met her at the bus and asked, "How did everything go, honey?"

"Oh, Mother! You know what? A little black girl sat next to me!"

"And what happened?"

"We were both so scared that we held hands all day."

III. We Must Bring Our Relationships Under the Lordship of Christ.

James 2:8 (NASB)

⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

The Bible says

Genesis 1:27 (GW)

²⁷ So God created humans in his image. In the image of God he created them. He created them male and female.

Each and everyone of us is made in the image of God.

We were created to love not to hate.

We were created to show compassion.

We were created to show mercy.
We were created to forgive.

In 1982, when he was vice-president, George Bush represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow, Viktoria.

She had been married to him for 55 years.

She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed.

Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as a profound act of civil disobedience.

She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.

There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.

When Leonid could no longer criticize her faith, she exercised her belief.

Just as atheism is a spiritual disease, so is ethnic prejudice.

Ethnic prejudice is a spiritual disease that can only be cured by a right relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible is the inspired Word of our Lord, and He makes it very clear that we are **to love your neighbor as you love yourself is more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.**

The idea that one nation or race is superior to another does not come from the Bible.

Ethnic prejudice like that displayed by many during the slavery years of the United States has always been a sin.

Acts 17:26 (NASB)

26 and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live

on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,

Paul underscores the idea of our human equality when he said:
Galatians 3:26-28 (NASB)

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

One in Christ.

When we committed our life to Christ, and were immersed into His Body, we became brothers and sisters to each other.

With the spread of Christianity and with increasing numbers of slave masters becoming Christians, the physical lives of slaves improved dramatically.

That is so is seen in Paul's letter to the slave owner Philemon.
Philemon 1:10-16 (NASB)

10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; 4 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. 15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever, 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

As slave owners submitted to Christ, they would be transformed by the Gospel.

Romans 12:10-13 (NASB)

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

When we truly bring our relationship to Jesus Christ, and submit to His Lordship, we will stamp out the spiritual disease of ethnic prejudice.

We long for a world driven by love and not by lust.

We long for a world driven by the correct answers to two profound, earth shattering, life transforming questions:

Do you Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind?

And do you Love your neighbor as you love yourself?

In his "I have a Dream" speech, Dr. King said:

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

We long for a world transformed into the image of Christ, and as that comes true, we will discover that my friend Wiggins Lambert is right.

Wiggins says we are all people of color.

No longer will Oaxacan's be looked down on.

No longer will people be locked up simply because they are of a different ethnic group.

No longer will hatred rule the world.

Because Dr. Martin Luther King is right.

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.

Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Prayer and Invitation

April 15 Lesson 7 (NIV) **Follow Me**

Devotional Reading: [Matthew 10:5-15](#)

Background Scripture: [John 21:15-25](#)

JOHN 21:15-25

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” **16** Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” **17** 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. **18** Very truly I tell you, 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.” **19** Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” **20** Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) **21** When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?” **22** Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” **23** Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” **24** This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. **25** Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

KEY VERSE

“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed

*my lambs.”—**John 21:15***

Introduction

A. The Comeback Kid

Most football fans will recognize the name Joe Montana. Montana was a star quarterback for the University of Notre Dame during the late 1970s. He then played professional football, spending most of his career with the San Francisco 49ers. He won four Super Bowls with the 49ers and was named Most Valuable Player in three of those games. He became known as the Comeback Kid because of his reputation for leading his team from behind to some dramatic victories. He guided his teams to 31 come-from-behind triumphs during his professional career.

Simon Peter was a broken man following his denial of Jesus; he “wept bitterly” at having done so ([Matthew 26:75](#)). We can only imagine how often his thoughts tormented him in the aftermath of Jesus’ crucifixion. But the resurrected Jesus offered Peter the opportunity to make a “comeback.” Accepting that opportunity meant leaving remorse and shame behind as he entered a place of renewed service to the Master. Jesus’ words of restoration and his challenge of service to Peter have something to teach us yet today.

B. Lesson Background: Synonyms

Today’s lesson considers the final 11 verses of John’s Gospel. The immediate background is the 14 verses of [John 21:1-14](#), which was last week’s lesson. A further item of background to consider in relation to this week’s text specifically is a caution in how we interpret the Gospel writer’s use of synonyms and near synonyms.

Noticing that the writer used two Greek words that are translated “love,” two translated “sheep,” two for the care given to sheep, and two for “know,” readers over the years have tried to determine what point John was making by using different words. But there is scant evidence that John intended anything significant by this variety.

For example, when considering the Gospel of John as a whole, we see the different Greek verbs translated “love” used interchangeably in [John 3:35](#); [5:20](#); [11:5](#), [36](#). It is therefore more

likely that John used different words stylistically, perhaps to avoid monotonous repetition. We do the same thing by using words like *cat* and *feline* interchangeably. We may also think of *welcoming* and *hospitable*; *automobile* and *car*; *desire* and *want*; etc.

C. Lesson Background: Shepherds

The image of a shepherd caring for sheep is central to our text. This was an image very close to the experience of biblical people, drawing as it does on a common occupation. The Old Testament uses sheep and shepherd to picture the relationship between God and his people, most notably in [Psalm 23](#). The relationship between God's people and their leaders, especially the king, was portrayed in similar terms. Israel could be described as sheep with no shepherd ([Numbers 27:15-17](#); [1 Kings 22:17](#)), and wicked leaders of the people were characterized as bad shepherds ([Jeremiah 23:1-4](#); [50:6](#); [Ezekiel 34:1-10](#)).

The picture of sheep without a shepherd is also used of people in Jesus' day ([Matthew 9:36](#)). Jesus described himself as "the good shepherd" ([John 10:11](#)), in contrast to those "thieves and robbers" who had no concern for the welfare of the sheep ([10:8-10](#)). Jesus went beyond what an ordinary shepherd would do, even giving his own life for the sake of his sheep ([10:11](#), [17](#), [18](#)). His exchange with Peter should be understood against this backdrop.

I. Repeated Exchange

([John 21:15-17](#))

A. First ([v. 15](#))

15a. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

The *they* are the seven of [John 21:2](#) plus Jesus (see last week's lesson). The shared meal eventually gives way to a one-on-one conversation between Jesus and Peter. Jesus addresses Peter formally, using his given name *Simon* and the name of his father, which functions like a surname does today.

Jesus' question creates its own question for the reader: What does

the word *these* refer to? Does *more than these* mean, “Do you love me more than these nets and boats, than your old life of fishing?” Does it mean, “Do you love me more than you love these other people?” Or does it mean, “Do you love me more than these other people love me?” An answer is impossible to gain from what the text says. We may conclude that Jesus means *these* as a general point of reference: “Do you love me supremely, most of all?”

15b. “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Peter’s answer is strongly affirmative, but worded in an interesting way. Before Jesus’ death, Peter expressed bold confidence that he was willing to give his own life for Jesus’ sake. But Jesus countered that Peter would in fact deny him three times before the rooster crowed ([John 13:37, 38](#)). Jesus knew better than Peter what was in Peter’s heart. Now Peter acknowledges Jesus’ awareness of his inner life. Peter’s statement of love for Jesus is also a confession that he no longer has anything to hide from his Lord.

15c. Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Jesus then challenges Peter to act on the love that he proclaims. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus has laid down his life for the sheep ([John 10:15](#)). If Peter loves Jesus, he will live in the same way, protecting and providing for God’s people as Jesus’ under-shepherd. It is most interesting that in Peter’s first epistle, he charges elders to serve as nurturing, protecting shepherds under the supreme shepherd, Jesus ([1 Peter 5:1-4](#)).

What Do You Think?

What diagnostic questions can we ask to ensure lesser loves do not displace love for Jesus?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding finances and possessions

Regarding time and leisure

Regarding passions and priorities

Other

B. Second ([v. 16](#))

16. Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

With only slight variation, the exchange is repeated: question, answer, challenge. We imagine that Peter is puzzled to be asked a question he has already answered! Once more, however, he expresses his *love* for Jesus; and Jesus responds with a challenge similar to the first: *Take care of my sheep*.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you personally accept the challenge to feed Jesus' sheep?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Identifying aspects of the challenge that applied only to the apostles, if any

Concerning aspects of the challenge that apply only to church leaders, if any

Concerning aspects of the challenge that apply to all Christians

CALLED TO SACRIFICE

Ann and her family moved to a developing country to live for nine months. While ministering there, they experienced the economic devastation of the culture. Basic necessities were in short supply. She washed clothes by hand, cooked meals without proper ingredients, and endured frequent power outages. When the time to leave came, Ann left happily, ready to be back in her own home.

After their return, however, Ann noticed that part of her husband's heart remained back in their host country. He sensed that God was opening the door for them to return, calling them back to feed God's sheep there. Ann, however, did not want to return to a place of such hardship. Yet her husband's sense of God's calling only grew. Finally, she agreed, and they moved back, remaining for several years.

The apostle Peter was married ([Matthew 8:14](#)). His wife's reaction to his calling to feed God's sheep is not recorded in Scripture. Perhaps her decision was a bit like Ann's. “I realized that I could insist on my way, and my husband would relent,” Ann said. “But

I'd live knowing that I had kept him from doing what God wanted him to do. Now I'm glad I didn't." Everyone has a sacrifice to make, and each person's sacrifice is different. What's yours?

—L. M. W.

C. Third ([v. 17](#))

17a. 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?”

If this were a court of law, Peter's defense attorney might object “Asked and answered! Move on!” For Peter to be *hurt* by this repetition is understandable. Does Jesus doubt his answer? Is Jesus questioning his loyalty? Or is Peter's distress the result of seeing a connection between these three exchanges and his three denials of Jesus ([John 18:15-18, 25-27](#))?

17b. He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Peter expands on his previous responses by confessing not just that Jesus knows his inner thoughts but that he knows *all things*. Jesus' knowledge is not just exceptional. It is the kind of knowledge that God alone has. John has previously stated that Jesus knew what was inside a person ([John 2:25](#)).

17c. Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.

For a third time Jesus repeats the command that flows out of Peter's confession of supreme love. The challenge is unchanged: Peter is to put his love into action as he leads God's people, with Jesus as his example of the good shepherd.

The scope of Jesus' grace is demonstrated by this repeated exchange. Without prior warning or explanation, Jesus has given Peter the opportunity to declare openly three times what he had denied three times during Jesus' trials. But Jesus is not finished with Peter.

What Do You Think?

How has an experience of a “second chance” from God shaped you? How should it?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding attitude changes

Regarding priority adjustments

Regarding relationships

Other

II. Solemn Prophecy

([John 21:18, 19](#))

A. Unwelcome News ([v. 18](#))

18a. “Very truly I tell you,

The expression *very truly* is a favorite of John’s, occurring 26 times in his Gospel but never in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It emphasizes the absolute certainty of what follows.

Jesus used the same expression when he warned Peter of his coming denial ([John 13:38](#)). Now Jesus uses it to preface a different kind of warning.

18b. “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.”

Grown, able-bodied people, especially the young, tend to be independent—they usually are willing and able to do things for themselves, things such as dressing themselves. This has characterized Peter’s life to this point.

But in the future, Jesus declares, when Peter is *old*, he will not tie his own garment but will instead be tied up and led against his will. This is an unmistakable prophetic warning that Peter will be arrested and bound, his hands stretched out as a prisoner who will be taken to wherever his captors desire, as Jesus was ([John 18:12, 13](#)).

Jesus has told his followers that if the world has hated him, the world will also hate them ([John 15:18-21](#); [16:1-4](#)). That warning is

now personalized to Peter. Peter's life will reflect his Lord's. But though Jesus' words are solemn, they are not hopeless.

B. Warm Invitation ([v. 19](#))

19a. Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

John removes any doubt about the meaning of Jesus' words: they predict Peter's arrest and execution. But this is no mere tragedy. Peter's *death* will *glorify God*. Jesus has previously spoken of his own death in just this way ([John 12:23-28](#)). This means that those who follow him must be prepared to do so at the cost of their lives. It is in giving one's life that one truly receives life from God ([12:25, 26](#)). Peter's looming imprisonment and death are not a sentence of doom but a call to embrace the greatest purpose for which one can live life: to glorify God.

19b. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

As John's explanation ends, Jesus' words resume. He ends the prophetic warning with the command *follow me*. Peter was among the first to follow Jesus because of the testimony of John the Baptist and Peter's brother, Andrew ([John 1:35-42](#)). Now Jesus calls him to follow with a new perspective, understanding all the implications.

A very ancient tradition tells us that Peter indeed goes on to die a martyr's death as a prisoner in Rome. Some expressions of that tradition say that he was crucified, but by Peter's request he was crucified upside down so that his death would not too closely resemble the Lord's. It is clear that Peter will indeed do what he had earlier claimed: "I will lay down my life for you" ([John 13:37](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways does Peter's reinstatement serve and not serve as a model for reinstatements to Christian service today?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering how forgiveness and consequences do and do

not interrelate

Considering uniqueness of the apostles' roles

Considering the nature of the offense

Other

III. Refocused Challenge

([John 21:20-22](#))

A. Wrong Focus ([vv. 20, 21](#))

20. Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”)

Perhaps overwhelmed with the hard words that Jesus has just shared with him, Peter attempts to change the subject. Following behind Peter and Jesus at this moment is *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, traditionally understood as John, the author of this Gospel. The verse further makes reference to the fact that when the disciples were gathered in the upper room before Jesus' death, Peter had asked John to find out from Jesus the identity of Jesus' betrayer ([John 13:23-26](#)).

21. When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

Having earlier asked John to pose a question to Jesus about another disciple, Peter now asks Jesus directly about John. If Peter will be arrested and killed, will his friend John as well? If both are followers of Jesus, hated by the world that hated him, will they both suffer the same fate?

Peter's question may be motivated by fear, jealousy, uncertainty, or curiosity. The text does not reveal his state of mind. But it surely expresses faith in Jesus as the one who can supply the answer.

B. Right Focus ([v. 22](#))

22. Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.”

Jesus' reply refocuses Peter's thoughts on what Jesus has just

charged him to do. What might happen in the future to others is not Peter's concern. It will not change Peter's situation, and it will in no way change the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to abide with his followers through the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit ([John 16:33](#)).

Jesus has already spoken to his disciples about departing from the earth and returning someday ([John 14:1-3](#)). The furthest point to which a person's death might be delayed is Jesus' return. That time is unknown to any but God the Father ([Matthew 24:36](#)). So to put the other disciple's future out of Peter's reach, Jesus' rhetorical question has the effect of declaring that even if that disciple lives until Jesus comes, it is not Peter's concern. A Christian's focus is not to be on the future of fellow believers, but their own faithfulness.

Thus Jesus tells Peter a second time to *follow me*. Peter's primary focus is to be on his response to the Lord's leading. To follow Jesus means not pursuing irrelevant matters (compare [1 Timothy 4:7](#); [Titus 3:9](#)) but rather serving as a shepherd cares for his sheep.

What Do You Think?

How do we walk the line between meeting the needs of others (feeding sheep) while not allowing their callings to distract us from ours?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When the feeding involves physical concerns

When the feeding involves spiritual concerns

THE ENGLISH CHINESE MAN

In 1853, at the age of 21, Hudson Taylor became a missionary to China. Believing that the other missionaries spent too much time with Europeans and did not relate well with the Chinese people, Taylor began to dress in Chinese clothes and grew a long ponytail in imitation of Chinese men. His fellow missionaries disdained his attempts, but he maintained a good rapport with the Chinese people he loved so much.

At that time, foreigners were permitted to live only in coastal cities. But Taylor believed that all the Chinese needed to know

about Jesus, so he began a movement to send missionaries inland, to more remote and dangerous regions. Despite criticism, he continued to recruit people for the work of his mission organization, China Inland Mission (now known as Overseas Missionary Fellowship).

Taylor struggled with depression in feeling the crushing need for missionaries, eventually suffering a physical and mental breakdown. But by then he had recruited hundreds of missionaries. His influence continues, as many believers study his life and become missionaries as well. Does that mean you should too? Not necessarily. The fact that Jesus had different plans for Peter and John is worth noting.

—*L. M. W.*

IV. Witness's Declaration

([John 21:23-25](#))

A. False Rumor ([v. 23](#))

23. Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

Here the direct narration of the story ends, and reflection from John the author begins. There's an old saying among preachers that “anything you say that *can* be misunderstood, *will* be misunderstood.” That seems to be the case here. Jesus' words to Peter are remembered and passed along. But somewhere along the line, an interpretation develops that Jesus promised *that this disciple* (John) would remain alive until Jesus returned. John points out that this is a false inference.

How interesting that the rumor that spreads from Jesus' declaration is much like Peter's own question: it reflects a concern to know about another person's future. By reminding readers of Jesus' true intent, John also reminds us of that to which all disciples of Jesus must give full attention: we are to focus on him and his task for us.

B. True Testimony ([vv. 24, 25](#))

24. This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

Now the reflection widens in scope. The *disciple* of whom Peter inquired is the one who tells the story we have just read. Indeed, he is the source of the entire record in this Gospel. It is *his testimony* of what he has witnessed, in both signs and sayings. The testimony includes many things, including the vital fact that Jesus is the Word become flesh ([John 1:14](#)). Amazing as this is, the *testimony* about it *is true*. John interrupted the narrative once before to make a statement of truthfulness ([19:35](#)). Now he does so again.

25. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

After Thomas's confession of Jesus, John reminds the reader that Jesus performed "many other signs" not recorded in his Gospel ([John 20:30](#)). Now he makes a similar statement, emphasizing the magnitude of what Jesus did. As an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, John realizes that he must be selective in his material; he can't record everything. But what John does provide in his record is sufficient to bring any reader to faith in Jesus. Indeed, that is the stated purpose of this Gospel ([20:31](#)).

Conclusion

A. Rising to the Challenge

Jesus' words to Peter are both reassuring and unsettling. They reassure us that anyone, even one who denies knowing Jesus, can be restored to fellowship with the Lord by his gracious forgiveness. But they are unsettling because they remind us of the opposition to the gospel. John experienced that opposition personally through his exile on the island of Patmos. There he wrote the book of Revelation, describing himself as "your brother and companion in the suffering" ([Revelation 1:9](#)).

Our response to Jesus' words to Peter needs to be what Peter's was: to rise to the challenge to follow Jesus and feed his sheep.

Martyrdom may not be in our future. But giving our lives sacrificially in service to Jesus must still be the theme of our lives.

B. Prayer

Father, we belong to you only by your grace, granted to us by your Son's willing death on our behalf. Empower us, Lord, to follow him and to feed his flock. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Feed the flock while following the shepherd.

Standard Lesson Commentary NIV (2017-2018).