Do You Love Me?

Text: John 21:15-25 -- 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." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 He said to him 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, "Tend 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 everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me." 20 Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" 21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" 23 So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" 24 This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. 25 Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Introduction: A college football coach was faced with the possibility that his star player might be declared ineligible for academic reasons. So, he pleaded with the chemistry professor not to flunk the athlete. "**Tell you what, coach**," said the professor. "**I'll ask him a question in your presence. If he gets it right, I'll pass him**." The athlete was called in and the professor queried, "**What's H2O?**" "**Water**," replied the player. Before the professor could respond, the frantic coach cried out: "**Give him another chance! Please give him another chance!**" Well, I'm sure we can all think of times when we needed a second chance. And when it came, we were probably very grateful to receive it. Our passage for this morning tells the story of Peter's second chance, given to him by Christ after having failed

so badly the first time around (**See John 18:15-27**). It's fascinating that all four Gospels record Peter's failure, but only John writes about his reinstatement to ministry. In this text, we know that Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Christ did so, not because He disputed Peter's love, but because He wanted His disciple to understand what it meant to love Jesus....to utterly and completely surrender to His will! ***TO LOVE CHRIST SUPREMELY IS TO SURRENDER TO CHRIST COMPLETELY***.

Background: At the end of chapter twenty, John the Apostle writes these words, "**Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name** (**John 20:30-31**)." The purpose of all the signs that Jesus presented was to provide evidence that He is the Messiah (Deliverer) of God, starting with his first miracle, turning water to wine, and concluding with the last and greatest sign…the resurrection (**See John 2:9; John 19 & 20**). ***His disciples were there for both***. Yet after Jesus appeared to them, these men did not take the Gospel confidently and boldly to the world, but went back to that which was familiar to them…fishing. Later Jesus appeared to several and performed yet another miracle not unlike an earlier one recorded in **Luke 5:4-8**. It must have struck a similar chord in Peter because it had the same result. HE RECOGNIZED JESUS. John then records that they shared a meal together. After they had eaten, our Lord asked Peter to declare his allegiance. Then He followed with some instruction about what it meant to ***fully surrender his life*** to the One who conquered death and sin through the triumph of the cross. Let's consider what Jesus said.

CHRIST CALLS US TO SURRENDER OUR FORMER AMBITIONS TO HIM (**John 21:15-17 -- 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, "Feed my lambs." 16 He said to him 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, "Tend 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 everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep"**). Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" To

understand WHY our Lord asked the question three times we need to first figure out WHAT He was asking in the first place.

A. **Was Jesus asking**, "*Do you love me more than you love the other disciples*?" I don't think so. It seems to me that this was never Peter's problem. He was always very willing to display his devotion to Christ, first and foremost (**See Matthew 26:33-35; 14:27-30; 16:21-22**).
B. **Was Jesus asking**, "*Do you love me more than the other disciples love me*?" I don't believe this is it either. Jesus never asks us to love Him more than others love Him. He asks us to love Him with all of our being (**See Matthew 22:37**).
C. **Was Jesus asking**, "*Do you love me more than you love these things*?" This makes the most sense given the context. Even after Jesus appeared to Peter in His glorified body, Peter still didn't know what to make of it all. So, he returned to what was familiar to him --fishing. YET PETER WAS NOT MEANT TO SERVE THE LORD BY FISHING FOR COD (though some may be), BUT MEN. Jesus asked His most brash disciple if he had come to the point where ***he was willing to let go of all those things from his past that were previously so important and begin to live out his purpose as Christ had determined it.*** Peter answered affirmatively and Jesus restored him to his calling. It's interesting to note that just as Peter denied Christ three times, so ***Jesus gave him the opportunity to affirm his love three times and to receive his commission (feed my sheep) three times***.

I wonder how many of us have a hard time letting go of our former ambitions in order to follow Christ today. In **Luke 9:62** Jesus says, **"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God**." If a man looked back while plowing a furrow, he would inevitably begin to move off line. The only way to plow a straight row is to focus on what's in front of you. Jesus calls us to surrender to Christ. This means that we abandon the things that once preoccupied us and choose to live in light of God's plan for our lives. **Christine Northrup** says, "***In order to take a new path, you must leave the old path behind. This is one of the most terrifying aspects of life transformation--leaving behind what is familiar and embracing what is unknown.***" (Review: Surrender our former ambitions)

CHRIST CALLS US TO SURRENDER OUR FUTURE COMFORTS TO HIM (**John 21:18-19 -- 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch**

out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me"). Once Jesus reinstated Peter to his work as an apostle, He made it clear that his future would not be without difficulty. As a young man, Peter enjoyed great freedom. He determined what he would wear, and where he would go. In the future, however, he would not be able to exercise the same kind of control. Peter would die a death that he would not choose for himself--crucifixion. Just as Jesus had His arms tied to the crossbeam and was forced to carry His cross to Golgotha, so Peter would do the same. ***Not only would Peter imitate Jesus in the kind of death he suffered, but also in the glory he would bring to God*** (**John 12:27-28 -- "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose, I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again"**). It was probably with this thought in mind that Peter would remind others that suffering in the cause of Christ results in His glory (**1 Peter 4:12-13 -- Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed).** In light of this prophesy, Jesus exhorted Peter ***to "(keep) following me***!" (By the time the Gospel of John was written, Peter had already been crucified, probably by Nero in Rome.)

None of us has any idea what the future holds. Nor do I think we would want to if Jesus gave us the opportunity. If somehow we could know, we would most likely live in dread of the painful challenges that we all ultimately face. What is most remarkable about this story is that Peter lived and ministered for three more decades with this prediction hanging over him. May I remind you today that it is enough for us to know that our futures are in the hands of God? (Review: Surrender our former ambitions; Surrender our future comforts)

CHRIST CALLS US TO SURRENDER OUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES TO HIM (**John 21:20-23 -- When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" 23 So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"**). For Peter,

the cost of discipleship would be high. But what about John, the disciple whom Jesus loved? It is likely that Peter, as a somewhat impulsive and boastful leader of the disciples, was insecure enough to compare himself to John, who shared a very close relationship with Christ (**John 13:23 -- One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table close to Jesus**). Remember that it was John who outran Peter to the tomb when they had received word from Mary that it was empty. It was Peter, however, who entered first. Now Peter turns to John and asks, "WHAT ABOUT HIM?" ***The thought is: If I'm going to die in my service for you, what is going to happen to John***? Jesus responded by telling Peter it was none of his business. He was expected to obey regardless of Christ's plan for the other disciple. ***Peter was called to a pastoral ministry and a martyr's crown. John to a long life and a strategic witness***!

One of the great stumbling blocks that we all face in our service to the Lord is the tendency we all have to compare ourselves to each other and even compete with one another. I know I struggle with this. When I listen to Dr. Sweeting with his impeccable radio voice or James McDonald with his in-your-face preaching style, I often feel less than adequate in my role as a teacher and preacher of the Word. When I visit with my other senior pastor friends, and learn that they saw great things happen in some ministry event, I find myself battling the secret hope that it all fall apart. COMPARISON LEADS TO COMPETITION! Yet God did not call me to compete with others in the body, but to cooperate with them for the same outcome. And so, I heed the words of Christ to Peter when he began to compare himself with John, "***follow me***!" Just be faithful to what God has called us to do.

We are called today to surrender our lives to Christ as evidence of our LOVE FOR HIM. ***This means surrendering our former ambitions, our future comforts and our current circumstances***.

- **Will you surrender your FORMER AMBITIONS** that constantly tug at your sleeve and beg to once again be a significant part of your life?
- **Will you surrender your FUTURE COMFORTS** not knowing what will happen, but knowing the One who holds the future in His hands?
- **And will you surrender your PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES** and be content with God's plan for your life. Will you be faithful to honor and glorify Him in whatever circumstances He has ordained for you, no matter how humble?

Conclusion: To love Christ is to surrender to His will for us so that we are completely His. The story is told of the deep love and devotion French soldiers had for their leader, Napoleon. He noted that it was not at all unusual for a mortally wounded soldier to raise himself on one elbow and give a final cheer to his reverend General. And if by chance the dying man saw Napoleon nearby, he would, with his final breath shout, "***Vive Empereu!***" Perhaps one of the most eloquent expressions of all, however, came from the lips of a soldier who had been shot in the chest. As the surgeon was attempting to remove the bullet, the suffering man was heard to whisper, "***If you go much deeper, Doctor, you'll come to the Emperor***." He had him on his heart. May Christ capture our hearts so that we can say the same thing of Him.