

# **“Peter, Do You Really Love Me?”**

## **John 21:1-17**

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**Teaching Aim:** To recognize the tenderness and care the resurrected Lord had for His troubled disciples as He ministered to them. To realize these are the same disciples who had turned their backs on Jesus and deserted Him during His time of greatest need. To observe how tenderly Jesus restored Peter into ministry. To examine our own spiritual walk to see where we have let Jesus down and to repent of that sin and get right with Him.

### **DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (*BIBLE STUDY*)**

#### **Part I: Simon Peter and six other disciples return to fishing (John 21:1-3)**

1. Where did the events of **John 21** take place (**vs. 1**)? This body of water has four names in the Bible; what are they? (See Bible Dictionary) What are some factors that make this particular lake so famous?
2. What seven disciples were gathered together at the lake (**vs. 2**)? What were the names of the two sons of Zebedee? (See **Matt. 10:2-4**) Why do you think the disciples were waiting for Jesus in Galilee? (See **Matt. 28:5-7**)
3. What did Simon Peter decide to do in **verse 3**? What had Jesus previously commanded him to do? (See **Matt. 4:18-19**) Is it possible Peter gave up on ministry and decided to go back to fishing as a profession in order to provide for his family? Have you ever become discouraged and felt like giving up your ministry? What do you think Satan would have you do? How about Jesus?
4. Was it unusual for fishermen to fish all night in those days or was this a normal practice (**vs. 3**)? (See **Luke 5:4-6**) If Peter and the disciples did decide to return to their former career of fishing, is it possible the darkness of night and the empty nets were symbolic of life apart from Christ. What was your lifestyle like before coming to faith in Christ? Would the darkness of night and the empty nets paint an accurate picture of what your life was like spiritually before coming to Christ?

## Part II: A mysterious stranger speaks to the disciples from the shore (John 21:4-14)

1. What happened as a result of the disciples fishing all night and doing the work under their own power (**vs. 4**)? How does this picture relate to our lives spiritually today? Have you found it true in your own life that when you've walked away from God, Jesus was there on the shore waiting to feed you spiritually if you would just go to Him? Did the disciples recognize that it was Jesus speaking to them at this point (**vs. 4**)?
2. One might think Jesus would be upset at the disciples for fleeing and disowning Him during His trial and crucifixion, only John remained. How did Jesus relate to His disciples in **verse 5** after they worked all night and failed to catch even a single fish? Are you willing to forgive others when they've hurt you or let you down? Does **verse 5** indicate that Jesus had forgiven His disciples? What are some ways that you've let Jesus down in the past? What can we learn from **1 John 1:9**?
3. What question did Jesus ask His disciples in **verse 5**? Do you think Jesus knew the answer before asking them? Why did Jesus ask them this question?
4. What instruction did "*the stranger*" on the shore give to these seasoned fishermen (**vs. 6**)? Did the disciples do what the stranger told them to do? Why is this so unusual? What happened when the disciples obeyed the man's instructions? How was this miracle similar to that in **Luke 5:4-8**? How was it different?
5. Who was the first disciple to recognize Jesus? The "*disciple whom Jesus loved*" is believed to be the writer of this Gospel, the Apostle John (**vs. 7**). Do you think John may have remembered the event in **Luke 5:4-8**? What impulsive act did Peter do as soon as he realized the man on the beach was Jesus (**vs. 7**)? What makes Peter's actions so unusual?

6. How did the rest of the disciples get to shore (**vs. 8**)? How far from shore were they when they realized the stranger was Jesus? What was slowing them down? Do you have the ability to swim the length of a football field? Would it be easier with your coat on or off? What did Peter do? What are some possible explanations for Peter jumping into the water with all his clothes on, including his coat?
  
7. What did the disciples find once they arrived at the shore (**vs. 9**)? NOTE: Peter had earlier denied Jesus 3 times in public while next to a fire made of coals. Jesus is now preparing to restore Peter to ministry by having him affirm his love for Him in public 3x next to another fire of coals. How do we see Jesus tenderly meeting the needs of His disciples in **verse 9**?
  
8. What instruction did Jesus give to His disciples in **verse 10**? Who led the way in helping the disciples pull the heavy load of fish ashore (**vs. 11**)? According to **verse 11**, how many fish were in the net? Did the net break as it did in **Luke 5:6**? Was there any significance to the specific report of 153 fish in the net? What, if any, symbolism do you see in the net not breaking?
  
9. According to **verse 12**, did the disciples recognize the resurrected Lord? Do we find this true in other biblical accounts of Jesus? (See **Luke 24:13-35; John 20:11-19**) What can we learn about the resurrected body of Christ from these accounts? (See **John 20:26-29**)
  
10. What miracle should the bread and the fish instantly have reminded the disciples of (**vs. 13**)? (See **Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14**) Note: Interestingly enough, the Jews still eat fish for breakfast today in Israel.
  
11. According to John, in his Gospel, how many times had Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples following the resurrection (**vs. 14**)? Note: This does not include His appearances to the women.

### Part III: Jesus restores Simon Peter to ministry (John 21:15-17)

1. Notice that Jesus took care of the disciple's physical needs for food and warmth before dealing with Peter's spiritual need (**vs. 15**). What unexpected question did Jesus ask Peter? Why do you think Jesus questioned Peter on this? (See **Luke 22:54-62**) What name did Jesus address Peter by in **verse 15**? NOTE: Each time Peter reverted back to his old lifestyle, Jesus used Peter's old name, "*Simon*." Have there been times in your life when you've reverted back to the old lifestyle that you used to live before coming to Christ? What caused you to do so? How did you get right with the Lord?
2. How did Simon respond to this painful and penetrating question from Jesus (**vs. 15**)? How would you respond if Jesus asked you the same question? What instruction did Jesus give to Peter in **verse 15**? Why do you think it is so important for us today to shepherd our children and new believers?
3. What question did Jesus ask Peter for a second time in **verse 16**? How did Peter respond this time? It is important to note that Jesus and Peter were using different Greek words that we translate into one English word, the word "*love*." Jesus was using the word "*agapao*" which is a self-sacrificial love; it is the complete commitment to loving another. Peter was using the Greek word "*phileo*," which means "*affection*" or "*brotherly love*". It is the Greek word that we get the name of Philadelphia from, "*the city of brotherly love*." Why do you think Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him for a second time? Who needed to hear the answer, Jesus or Peter? What did Jesus instruct Peter to do to prove His love for Him?
4. What question did Jesus ask Peter in **verse 17** for a third time? NOTE: Jesus used a play on words here as He changed the Greek wording to ask Peter if he really did have a "*phileo*" love for Him? In other words, "*Simon, do you even have an affectionate love for Me?*" How did Peter respond to this painful question from Jesus? If Peter truly did love Jesus, how should he show it? Do you "*really*" love Jesus? Are you willing to show it?

5. Peter's restoration took place in front of a charcoal fire as Jesus had Peter reaffirm his love for Him on three separate occasions. This reminds us of Peter's three denials of Jesus before another charcoal fire when Jesus was on trial. Here Jesus proves that He not only forgave Peter, but He also restored him to ministry. Jesus was telling Peter, *"If you truly love Me, live like it and minister to the needs of others."* By the way you live your life, do others see your love for Jesus? Do you declare that love publicly? Would there be enough evidence to convict you in a court of law?
  
6. What do you see as your greatest spiritual gifts? Are you using your spiritual gifts to serve Jesus and to build up the body of Christ? If not, talk to a spiritual leader in the church about using your spiritual gifts.
  
7. Have you repented of your sin and received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? If not, why not repent and do so in prayer right now?

**MANNA TO LIVE BY ~ *Miner's Corner!***

- Even the most famous of Christians stumble in their spiritual walk at times!
- Little is accomplished spiritually when we minister in our own strength!
- No matter how badly we mess up our lives, Jesus is only a prayer away and waiting for us to return to Him!
- When we obey Christ, spiritual blessings beyond our greatest expectations come to us!
- The 153 fish may have been symbolic of all the people (or the nations on earth) and the catch may have symbolized that the disciples were to be fishers of men from all nations!
- It is significant that the net did not break; the Lord loses none of His own!
- If we truly love Jesus, we will live like it and care for the needs of others as we do!