

The Great Do-Over – *John 21:15-25*

Introduction – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3). Jesus was there, the Word of God, in the beginning. It was Jesus, the Word, that told Adam what to do. Having told Adam who he was and what he was called to, He basically said, “*follow Me.*” Adam did not follow God and in his fall he thrust all mankind into sin and misery. And so, God sent a second Adam, a new Man, not from the line of Adam and yet from his line. “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). It was the great do-over, and now, where sin abounded, grace abounded much more (Rom 5:18-21). “*...so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (v21). Grace now reigns. And that is not simply a philosophical or theological truism. That has the most practical ramifications for every sinner, and we are all sinners. Not only is it true for any sinner who turns to Christ for forgiveness and salvation. It is true for every Christian every day for every sin for every time we repent and return to God. Jesus said “*Follow Me*” at the beginning and says it every time any sinner comes to Him any time. The great do-over of Jesus has universal applications and has personal applications for you – just as it had for Peter.

Three Confessions of Love – Three times, while around a fire of coals, Peter had openly denied Christ. Now, after sharing breakfast with Jesus and the other disciples whom Peter had earlier said he was superior to in his devotion to Jesus (Mark 14:29), he is given the opportunity to restate his love and devotion. And so, three times near a fire of coals, Jesus asks Peter, “*Do you love Me...?*” Rather than referred to as “*Peter*” though, Jesus calls him “*Simon, son of Jonah*” recalling another fish story, another story of a follower of God who had to repent.

This was not a test of Peter’s love as much as it was a gracious opportunity granted by Christ to try again. Remember, after Peter denied the Lord, he went out and wept bitterly (Matt 26:75). How many times do you think he replayed that stumble over and over again in his mind? How many times do you think he wished he could have gone back to the beginning of his discipleship and faithfully follow Christ. Jesus grants this to Peter. Three years prior, Jesus had said to Peter, “*Follow Me*” (Matt 4:19). It is all grace that Jesus turns again to Peter and says, “*Follow Me*” (John 21:19, 22).

Profession that Leads to Mission (or What Does it Mean to Love God?) – Three times Peter says, “*Yes, Lord; You know that I love You*” and three times Jesus directs Him from that love to the mission He has called Peter to. This is because a vertical love for God always has a horizontal application. First, you can’t love Jesus and hate the church. You can’t love the Head and hate the body. You can’t love Jesus but hate His bride. Second, Jesus had already taught this principle that being authentic disciples of His would be manifest by their love for one another (John 13:35). Third, John would make this principle explicitly clear in his epistle (1 John 4:20).

But the flip side is true as well. The motivation for serving others must come from one’s love for Jesus (and not simply a general love for all of humanity). All of the commands of God flow from love for love is the first and greatest commandment (Deut 6:4-5, Matt 22:34-40). Our gaze upon Jesus in love and devotion is the great motivator for serving others. Peter’s specific call was to be one of the shepherds of the sheep, the apostles who, along with the Old Testament prophets, would be the foundation of the church, followed by the pastors who would pastor/shepherd the church. Peter would describe the work of faithful shepherds decades later (1 Pet 5:2-4).

So, if we say we love Jesus, He sets us (and often resets us) on our particular mission. It may not be what we expected. For Peter, it would lead to his martyrdom, but this is what it meant to follow Jesus and to love Jesus (vv17-19). What might be your mission? “*Yes, Lord, I love You,*” “*Respect your husband.*” “*Yes, Lord, I love You,*” “*Love your wife as I love My bride.*” “*Yes, Lord, I love You,*” “*Honor your father and mother.*” “*Yes, Lord, I love You,*” “*Forsake your sin.*” “*Yes, Lord, I love You,*” “*Take up your cross and follow Me.*”

There is only one thing that causes us to actually love God in this way – and that is the love of God for us – “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). Declaring our love for God is celebrating His love for us. And celebrating His love for us manifests itself in loving the things God loves.

Two Dimensions of Following Jesus – To be a follower of Christ is to be a disciple that abides in His Word (John 8:31-32). Abiding in His Word sets us free to walk in the light (John 8:12). Learning from Christ (in His Word by His Spirit) brings rest and contentment to our souls (Matt 11:29).

And to be a follower of Christ requires us to deny ourselves and take up our crosses (Luke 9:23-24). It requires us to make any changes in our lives that the Lord commands. It means being willing to gladly accept any calling the Lord may have for us believing that *“Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”* (Matt 10:39).

Two Challenges to Following Jesus – But that leads to two challenges that are right here in our text. The first is the necessity to deny our own story, the story of how things ought to be in our lives. Peter couldn’t believe in Jesus’ story that He would have to go to Jerusalem, suffer and die (Mark 8:31-33). Peter is told to feed Jesus’ sheep and that he will need to do so even in the face of deadly persecution (John 21:18-19). God’s story for us is not fixed on us getting what we think is best, but on what is forming us into what God wants us to become. Give up on your story and follow His.

The second challenge is just as deadly, at least for our joy in the Lord. It is the challenge of sidelong glances, of comparing our story to someone else’s story (John 21:20-22). We are often satisfied, or at least ok, with our situation until we see what someone else gets. This is the sin of envy and covetousness and it ruins our joy and leads to bitterness. It is a great temptation for you towards your siblings, or to many others in the same situations that you are in (vocationally, family, time of life, health, etc). Envy works like this: it doesn’t matter what you get – it matters what the other guy gets that you don’t get. One author says that this must be fought with the WITTY principle: *“What Is That To You”* (v22).

You at the Fire of Coals (v25) – We cannot begin to count the things that Jesus did in those three years of ministry, let alone what He has done and is doing now as He reigns over heaven and earth – and over you. But here you are, and His grace is overwhelming. Do you need to experience the kind of reconciliation that Peter enjoyed? Come to the fire of coals and be dealt with by Jesus. He has breakfast for you. The Lord is not more gracious to Peter than He is to you. You are invited (always) to come to Jesus to be forgiven and fed – and to become a people who then forgive and feed. His call to you is simply this – *“Follow Me.”*