

Lovest Thou Me

by Alan Redpath

Alan Redpath's sermon 'Lovest Thou Me' explores Peter's journey from disillusionment to renewed commitment and intimacy with Christ.

Duration: 45:41

Scripture: John 21:15, John 21:18

Topics: "Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the story of Peter meeting Jesus after his resurrection. The speaker acknowledges that many of us may have experienced disillusionment, defeat, and despair in our lives. However, the speaker emphasizes that just as the morning came for Peter, a new day holds something for each of us. The speaker encourages the audience to assess what they have learned, anticipate the future in light of their newfound knowledge, and respond with action in their commitment to Christ.

Transcript

I want to ask you, please, to open your New Testament tonight at the twenty-first chapter of John's Gospel, John chapter twenty-one. And you would help me again if you would mind reading this to me, all together in unison. We shall read from John twenty-one, chapter one, verse one, to verse nineteen, the first nineteen verses of the twenty-first chapter of John.

Are you ready? Well, go. Thank you. Verse fifteen.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lands. This has been a very wonderful week, much more than a conference for discussion.

It has been a meeting with God. And at the end of the week, I felt that as I thought about this meeting, my great desire was that I should leave you at the feet of a risen Lord. And we have almost reached the last moment of this convention.

And I should think there are probably three thoughts that are on our mind. There is the assessment of what we have heard and learned. And there is the anticipation of what the future holds in the light of what we have heard and learned.

And there's a call to action in response to our committal to Christ. I think these things are probably uppermost in our mind. The assessment of what we have heard the future in the light of what we have heard.

And a call to action of which we're all conscious in the light of a fresh commitment to our Lord. I want you to turn with me to this interview Peter had with the risen Christ, as it is recorded in the chapter that we have read. Perhaps some of you may feel that this convention has revealed so much of past failure that like Peter, you're tempted to give up and go fishing.

But let us see what the future does hold for us in the goodness and mercy of the Lord in the light of what it held for Peter. If you think back a minute with me at the experiences which led Peter to that hour, within the recent weeks of his life, three things had taken place. First of all, disillusionment.

Disillusionment. The cross had shattered all his dreams of earthly glory. And Caesarea Philippi, you remember, when the Lord Jesus first revealed the cross to his disciples, he said, be it far from the Lord.

And he was never in sympathy with the project. He thought of an earthly kingdom. He thought of himself probably as prime minister in the kingdom.

But the cross had shattered all his dreams. And how many Christians have imagined that the Christian life would be comfortable and pleasant and even acceptable until God has put the cross into your path? And you have discovered that the cross means reproach, apparent failure, and defeat. I remember Dr. Barnhurst speaking at the English Keswick on the enlightening subject, the way to up is down.

And the Christian begins to discover that truth. That the pathway that leads him up to a throne takes him down to a cross. For except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.

But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. And perhaps you never thought, never realized, until this week, that the Christian life would mean that for you, disillusionment. But then Peter also had experienced in recent weeks defeat.

Looking back beyond the cross a moment, Peter had known defeat. Just the laugh of a girl had done it. Just a servant girl who laughed at him.

How many sermons have been preached upon the disciple who followed afar off? But what about the other disciples who didn't follow at all? Many of us don't bear the scars that Peter bore. At the first sign of battle, we've run away. And when the torches of the enemies of Christ have come near us, we've fled.

Then in the security of a very comfortable life, we've done something which those disciples never did. We've shaken our heads so sadly over the disciple who followed afar off. You remember that there was a moment when Jesus looked upon Peter.

In the moment when he swore and denied they'd ever knew anything of him, Jesus looked upon him. And have you ever asked yourself how Jesus looked on him? It wasn't with anger. It wasn't a look of, I told you that would happen.

It wasn't even a look of sympathy. It was a look of love. As a matter of fact, it's the same word that was used when Jesus first met him on a country road.

And our Lord looked upon Peter, looked him through and through, that's the word. And at the moment of his denial, Jesus looked him through and through with a look of penetrating love because he had followed him so far. Some people don't even know what it is to follow Jesus afar off.

Comfortable Christians, knowing nothing of the scars or wounds, nothing of warfare, only defeat. It's the man who resists temptation that knows the power of it, not the man who goes down to it. And many, many, many Christians don't know anything at all about that.

There's a great word, you know, that the Apostle Paul spoke to the church at Corinth. When he said in the first Corinthian letter, chapter 10 and verse 13, "No temptation hath taken you, but is common to man.' But God is faithful, who with the temptation will provide the way of escape that you may be able to bear it. Not that you may be able to run away, but that you may be able to bear it.

Let me illustrate a minute just what that means. Here's a workman, an engineer, and he's testing a piece of machinery, and he's putting it under severe pressures, and he watches it being tested. He particularly has his eye on the temperature gauge.

He watches as the temperature goes up. And when it releases, when it reaches a certain point, a danger point, he releases a valve that takes off the pressure, so that the pressure may be able to escape. God will not suffer you to be tempted above that you're able, but will with the temptation provide a way of escape.

He knows when to take off the pressure. But some of us haven't dared to trust him for that, and we've run away and suffered defeat. Said it was too big, too great, too much for us, so we've gone off.

Peter had done that. He had suffered disillusionment, he'd suffered defeat, and he had suffered despair. He went out and wept bitterly.

That should settle forever, the place that emotion has in spiritual experience. And perhaps some of us have been very near to tears this week. Perhaps even we've shed them.

As God's word has searched our hearts. Here then is the man who met Christ at daybreak. And what a wonderful text is verse four of our chapter.

But when the morning was come, Jesus stood on the shore. Peter must have thought that the long night of despair would never end. But it did.

And the new day held something for him, as it does for you and for me. Disillusionment, defeat, despair. I wonder if in some measure we haven't all been faced with those things this week.

But the morning has come, and Jesus, a risen Lord, stood on the shore. Just watch, Christ and Peter, as they walk slowly away and begin talking together. We'll learn something of what that new day would hold for Peter.

First of all, I suggest to you it held for him a new humility. Verse 15, Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me more than these? Was that said, do you think, with a look round at the other disciples? As Jesus and Peter walked together toward the sea, there were all the others there, and the Lord had a little look at them and said, Now, Simon, lovest thou me more than these? Listen to his answer. The answer of a man who very proudly had said a little while ago, Though all men forsake me, thee yet will I not.

Simon says to him, Lord, thou knowest that I have an affection for thee? He dent rise to the word that Jesus used. Jesus said to him, Simon, lovest thou me with all thy heart? It was a word of absolute depth of love. And Simon didn't dare trust himself to say it.

Lord, you know I do care for you. And you remember that the Lord Jesus came back with the same question, Simon, lovest thou me more than thee? And once again, Simon said, Lord, you know that I have an affection for you. And the third time, back again, Jesus came.

And this time, he came off from the word that he had used, and he used the word that Peter had used. Peter, have you even got an affection for me? Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I do care for you. You see, a threefold defeat, a threefold denial, had to be met by a threefold confession of Christ, of his love to Christ.

Peter's defeat was in public, and his name and his witness were discredited. May I say very quietly, your defeat and mine, I mean the thing that really has mattered, have been in private, and they are known by and large only to God and ourselves. Had the record of our failure received the same publicity as did Peter's, our reputation would have shared Peter's fate.

Yet, we are critical of the faults of others, and sensitive to criticism of ourselves, while all the time we've carried in our hearts such a record of sin, which, if it were made public, would strike us down with confusion. It's an awful job having a photograph taken. Every time you come to this country, you've got to do it.

And you know, the thing to do is to get the cheapest thing you can possibly can. And I went to a shop in Edinburgh to get a photo taken. The whole job was done in three minutes.

There was the photograph, passport photo. And I looked at it, and I thought, my goodness, can that really be me? Is the story as bad as that? And I compared it with a photograph of myself, which we, my wife, strangely enough, likes to keep on her dressing table in the bedroom. Well, the contrast was ludicrous.

But the one was the touched-up, finished product of a photographer in Chicago who knew all the arts of photography, of taking out all the pimples and spots and blemishes. The other was the raw proof of a passport photo. Jesus isn't interested in the photography art.

He's very interested in looking at the truth. Looking into the proof. And the first step that led you into blessing during the days of this week, if you've come along that way, has been that you were willing for him to look at the proof.

He has seen you. And the exposure has given you a shock. We're just so glad that it isn't known by other people.

Ever since I first saw myself as God sees me, I've never been able to be angry with people who have been critical of me, because I've said to them, Well, Lord, you know that the truth is about a hundred times worse than that. But I wonder what there is that Jesus hears. And alone, he hears.

Can I define humility? I would define it this way. It is the silence of the soul before God. Lord, thou knowest.

No complaints, no arguments, no resentment now, Lord. No questioning, no challenging your way with me. Jesus looks into the heart that was once full of pride and once full of arrogance.

And that heart has seen him and seen itself. And in the presence of God, it is silent. A new humility.

Peter never forgot that lesson. And so it was that later on in years, as he wrote, an old man now, he said in 1 Peter 5, 5, Be subject one to another, be clothed with humility. God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble.

Is there some Peter here tonight? And the new day is dawning for you. And it holds for you a new humility. One of the most precious graces of Christian character.

And you know, when people, when God has really looked into your heart like that, and reduced you to silence, no arguments, people will soon notice the difference. They notice the difference by the way you walk down the church aisle. By the way you walk and talk in your home.

A new humility. Something else I see here. A new loyalty.

Watch them again, Peter and Jesus. As they pass, this time the boats and the fishing gear. Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than thee? Oh, we've been on the point of going back to the old life and old associations.

How much easier. At any time, a Christian, if he chooses, can take the heat off. At any time, he can move out of the path of God's will.

And so, be free from the attacks of the devil. At any time, he can cease to be a menace to the powers of darkness. If he likes, of course he can.

But the peace which is secured that way is different, as different as the peace which is enjoyed in the midst of the battle. As that is different from the peace that is enjoyed by tranquilizers. You can get out of the battle and you can quit and get out of the heat and spare yourself a lot of the battle, but you have no real peace in your heart.

Perhaps some people have been thinking of giving it all up. And taking off the pressure. Simon, lovest thou me more than thee? At that moment, the old affection died forever in Peter's heart.

And years later, he wrote, sanctify the Lord, Christ as Lord, in your hearts, 1 Peter 3.15. Tell me. No, don't tell me. Tell the Lord.

Is there something to do with that old life? The life which is something less than God's will for you. And it still has a tremendous hold upon you. A tremendous grip.

Is he taking you right past it? And saying, lovest thou me more than thee? After one of the services at Moody Church a year or two ago, just before leaving, there came up to me a man, obviously a very well-dressed, a very wealthy man. And he came and spoke to me and he said, 20 years ago, I knew everything that you were talking about. It was real to me.

The Lord was so precious to me. But he said, you know, I got in the rat race. And I got on the conveyor belt.

And I got to work it every morning at six o'clock to get my men out on the road. And I wasn't home till ten o'clock at night. And I made a great success of it.

I'm very rich and very wealthy. But he said to me with a choke in his voice, but oh God, what a price I've paid. Simon, lovest thou me more than thee? A new loyalty.

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. But the very essence of Christian experience, there is the fact of implicit obedience to the Lord Jesus. We don't obey him in order to be saved, we obey him because we are.

We don't obey him in order to comply with rules, we obey him because the love of Christ constrains us, because that's the whole message of the Bible. Listen, Romans 5:19, as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

The heart of sin is rebellion. The heart of salvation is submission. And I can find nowhere in my Bible, and I'm prepared for you to come and challenge me on this and point me out a verse if you can.

I can find nowhere in my Bible where it is even suggested that there is any possibility of receiving Christ as Savior and then at some future and more convenient time crowning him as Lord. He is either Lord of all or he is not Lord at all. Of course, there is an increasing area of his sovereignty extended over your life as the years go by.

He is Lord from the very beginning, but as he goes on and you go on with him, he begins to say to you, now look, that's not my will for you, that's not my purpose for you, this is the way for you, not that way, don't you do that again. And he begins to talk to you like that, all the joy of your Christian experience. And the joy of his life lies in your obedience to his voice, a new loyalty.

And thirdly, a new intimacy. Simon, son of Peter, son of Jonah, lovest thou me? I think that Peter had probably thought that his days of fellowship with Christ were all over. How could Jesus ever overlook his failures? How astounded he must have been to listen to the Lord defining the basis of their new relationship.

Simon, lovest thou me? Christ wanted his love. One of the most wonderful promises, John 14, 21, is, He that loveth me, I will love him and will manifest myself to him. One of life's greatest experiences is the fellowship and communion and given and received in mutual love.

Intimacy is the hallmark of love. How many of us really know the Lord Jesus? Oh, well, we know a bit about doctrine, but it doesn't impress him very much. There is something far greater than that.

Paul's great ambition was that I may know him. The great search in the church today, very largely, is that I may know truth, that I may get to know a system of doctrine. And now my heart filled, my head filled with truth and my heart empty with love.

Do we know Jesus? Do we walk with him in the quiet place and talk with him? Peter came to know the Lord in a new intimacy and years later he wrote about growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Now, that new day held all that for him. My dear friend, it can hold just that for you, a new love.

In our search for truth, particularly regarding eschatology, we tear each other apart like nothing on earth. And if you're not pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation or post-tribulation or pre-millennium or post-millennium, if you don't dot your I's like I do on the program of Christ's coming, finished. I knew a minister in Chicago, a

dear man he was, and he was away for six months on a tour of Africa on the mission field.

And he came back one day to O'Hare Field and his deacon's board and elders were represented to meet him and his wife was there also. And they got there about some time before the plane was due and they all went to look at their timetable. The flight so-and-so, I forget now what land it was, arriving, this time, such and time, they got all mixed up with flights and they were worried and arguing about it.

Eventually, they found the flight number and the gate number and the time and they sailed out to the gate and lo and behold, when they got there, what do you think? The pastor's wife was in the arms of her husband. They were concerned about the timetable, she was concerned about him. Lovest thou me? A new intimacy.

And fourthly, a new responsibility. Feed my sheep. Do you ever wonder, perhaps, why, you know, you want to serve the Lord and you haven't found a sphere of service or a place to work in or serve the Lord happily? Let me say this to you, the Lord Jesus never lets love lie idle.

And I don't know what failure has marked your life, but if you confessed it deep down in your soul to your love to the Lord, I'm sure that God has a task for that love to do. I don't think that many pulpit committees would have considered Simon Peter. I don't think he'd have been featured at any particular Keswick convention in his backsliding condition.

But listen, when the hour struck for the most vital and important sermon to be preached in all history, he preached it. Oh, what mercy and love, what a thrill it was for him to stand up as the mouthpiece of heaven on that day of Pentecost. Do you remember the hymn, one verse of which says, O hope of every contrite heart, O joy of all the meek, to those who fall, how kind thou art, how good to those who seek.

Never judge God's forgiveness by man's forgiveness. How unforgiving we are. We have a gospel of forgiveness for the unconverted.

But we have no forgiveness to offer sometimes to the Christian, to the brother, the sister, whom Satan has tripped up. We gather on our pharisaical robes around us and say, well, he's fallen, keep clear. I wonder how we can afford to behave like that in the light of God's forgiving mercy to us.

No wonder that years later Peter wrote on having compassion, 1 Peter 3.8, love as brethren, be pitiful, feed the flock of God, 1 Peter 5.2. Yes, a day of new responsibility had dawned. Listen, my friend, did you know that everybody in this congregation is either a missionary or a mission field? Did you know that? You stop being a mission field and begin to be a missionary. At the moment when you answer the Lord Jesus, thou knowest, Lord, I love thee, and that comes first, and you accept his responsibility, feed my sheep.

One more thing, a new intensity, verse 18 and 19. Verily, verily, I say unto you, when thou wast young, thou girdest thyself and walkest, whither thou wouldest. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee, whither thou wouldest not.

This spake he, signifying by what death he should die, he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, follow me. As Peter and Jesus stand face to face, there's a new light, I think, dawning in Peter's eyes.

He's got a, he's got a new glow. You know, it's been wonderful. I've been on the platform, of course, but to watch a new light coming in people's eyes.

I've watched that with this week. I've said in my heart, hallelujah. And some people will never be the same again.

New light, they've seen something and have gripped it, and it's real. And Peter was like that. And just as Jesus stood and talked with him for a morning, for a moment before rejoicing the others, before rejoining the others, so he talks with us before we rejoin the others with whom we work.

And he says, when thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whither thou wouldest, when thou shalt be old. By the way, a few weeks later, not much more than that, poor old Peter found himself in trouble. You remember? He was in prison.

I want you just to catch this glimpse, Acts 12. He was up against it, really. James had been killed and Peter was due to die the next morning.

Peter, therefore, was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Peter would have brought him forth, when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping. He was the only Christian in Jerusalem asleep that evening.

They're all having a night of prayer for him. And there he was, behind iron gates, and in the second ward, and four quaternions of soldiers, and chained up, two other men, and the man's asleep. Oh, I want to learn some good lessons.

How could Peter sleep on an occasion like that? I think I know. I'll tell you what I think, and then when we get to heaven, at least I for one, I want to ask you whether I was right. As he was chained up in that jam, he was doing a bit of thinking, thinking about his last interview with the Lord Jesus.

He thought about Christ's claim on his heart and his love, and then he remembered the little chat that Jesus had with him before he went back to work again. When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whither thou wouldest. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shall gird thee.

When thou shalt be old. But Jesus only said that to me a few weeks ago. I'm going to be old.

Here it can't cut my head off, praise the Lord, I'm going to have a jolly good nap. So he rested on the promises of God. But that day, around that seashore, Peter saw himself looking into the face of the Lord Jesus, and right down the way that Christ had planned for him for the future.

And there he saw against the brightness of the day a shadow of a cross, and in that shadow he was to live and to serve for the rest of his life. No wonder years later he spoke so much about suffering. Nobody understood suffering like he did, but then he lived in the shadow of a cross all his days, and history records that he died on one.

But he said, think it not strange, beloved, concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you, but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering, that when its glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. So the new day dawned, and Peter entered into it, entered into it in response to the Master's call. It had begun with disillusionment, defeat, despair.

But the day went on, and his experience was a new humility, a new loyalty, a new intimacy, a new responsibility, a new intensity, as he lived under the shadow of a cross. Lovest thou me more than thee? Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. Is that your answer? Well, Jesus saith to you, feed my sheep.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we would recognize afresh that the one thing that matters above everything else is our relationship with thee, that an ungrieved Holy Spirit may rule and reign and govern, guide and sovereign control in our hearts. Lord, we pray that if we began this week and we had to say, had to admit that what thou didst say to us was right, I have somewhat against thee in that thou hast left thy first love.

Grant, O Lord, that during these days thou hast cleaned this sacred, intimate place, and that, Lord, thou and each one of us are on intimate speaking terms. May we live and walk and talk and work in the light of the glow of the love of Jesus in our hearts. We ask it for thy name's sake.

Amen.

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