

John 21:15-25

by St. John Chrysostom

Jesus tests Peter's love and commitment, and instructs him to show the warm love he had always manifested, and to suffer for Him.

Scripture: 1 Kings 21:27, Luke 19:9, John 21:17-19, John 21:22-25

Topics: "Divine Forgiveness", "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the interaction between Jesus and Peter after His resurrection, emphasizing the importance of love for God and care for others. Jesus questions Peter's love for Him three times, symbolizing Peter's restoration and commission to lead the disciples. Despite Peter's past denial, Jesus entrusts him with the responsibility to feed His sheep, demonstrating forgiveness and grace. Jesus also foretells Peter's martyrdom, highlighting the sacrificial love required to follow Him. The sermon concludes with a call to prioritize spiritual matters over worldly concerns, emphasizing the transformative power of repentance and good deeds.

Transcript

So when they had dined, Jesus says to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me more than these? He says unto Him, Yea, Lord, You know that I love You.

1. There are indeed many other things which are able to give us boldness towards God, and to show us bright and approved, but that which most of all brings good will from on high, is tender care for our neighbor. Which therefore Christ requires of Peter. For when their eating was ended, Jesus says to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me more than these? He says unto Him, Yea, Lord, You know that I love You.

He says unto him, Feed My sheep.

And why, having passed by the others, does He speak with Peter on these matters? He was the chosen one of the Apostles, the mouth of the disciples, the leader of the band; on this account also Paul went up upon a time to enquire of him rather than the others. And at the same time to show him that he must now be of good cheer, since the denial was done away, Jesus puts into his hands the chief authority among the brethren; and He brings not forward the denial, nor reproaches him with what had taken place, but says, If you love Me, preside over your brethren, and the warm love which you ever manifested, and in which you rejoiced, show thou now; and the life which you said you would lay down for Me, now give for

My sheep.

When then having been asked once and again, he called Him to witness who knows the secrets of the heart, lovest thou Me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. "N.T.}--> and then was asked even a third time, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, Lovest thou Me; and he said to Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. "N.T.}--> he was troubled, fearing a repetition of what had happened before, (for then, having been strong in assertion, he was afterwards convicted,) and therefore he again betakes himself to Him. For the saying,

John 21:17

You know all things.

You know all things, means, things present, and things to come. Do you see how he had become better and more sober, being no more self-willed, or contradicting? For on this account he was troubled, lest perchance I think that I love, and love not, as before when I thought and affirmed much, yet I was convicted at last. But Jesus asks him the third time, and the third time gives him the same injunction, to show at what a price He sets the care of His own sheep, and that this especially is a sign of love towards Him. And having spoken to him concerning the love towards Himself, He foretells to him the martyrdom which he should undergo, showing that He said not to Him what he said as distrusting, but as greatly trusting him; wishing besides to point out a proof of love towards Him, and to instruct us in what manner especially we ought to love Him. Wherefore He says...

John 21:18

When you were young, you girded yourself, and walked whither you would, but when you are old, others shall gird you, and carry you whither you will not.

And yet this he did will, and desired; on which account also He has revealed it to him. For since Peter had continually said, I will lay down my life for You John 13:37, and, Though I should die with You, yet will I not deny You Matthew 26:35: He has given him back his desire. What then is the, Whither you will not? He speaks of natural feeling, and the necessity of the flesh, and that the soul is unwillingly torn away from the body. So that even though the will were firm, yet still even then nature would be found in fault. For no one lays aside the body without feeling, God, as I said before, having suitably ordained this, that violent deaths might not be many. For if, as things are, the devil has been able to effect this, and has led ten thousand to precipices and pits; had not the soul felt such a desire for the body, the many would have rushed to this under any common discouragement. The, whither you will not, is then the expression of one signifying natural feeling.

But how after having said, When you were young, does He again say, When you are old? For this is the expression of one declaring that he was not then young; (nor was he; nor yet old, but a man of middle age.) Wherefore then did He recall to his memory his former life? Signifying, that this is the nature of what belongs to Him. In things of this life the young man is useful, the old useless; but in Mine, He says, not so; but when old age has come on, then is excellence brighter, then is manliness more illustrious, being nothing hindered by the time of life. This He said not to terrify, but to rouse Him; for He knew his love, and that he long had yearned for this blessing. At the same time He declares the kind of death. For since Peter ever desired to be in the dangers which were for His sake, Be of good cheer, He says, I will so satisfy your

desire, that, what you suffered not when young, you must suffer when you are old. Then the Evangelist, to rouse the hearer, has added,

John 21:19

This spoke He, signifying by what death he should glorify God.

He said not, Should die, but, Should glorify God, that you may learn, that to suffer for Christ, is glory and honor to the sufferer.

And when He had spoken this, He says, Follow Me.

Here again He alludes to his tender carefulness, and to his being very closely attached to Himself. And if any should say, How then did James receive the chair at Jerusalem? I would make this reply, that He appointed Peter teacher, not of the chair, but of the world.

John 21:20-21

Then Peter turning about, sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following; who also leaned on His breast at supper; and says, Lord, and what shall this man do?

2. Wherefore has he reminded us of that reclining? Not without cause or in a chance way, but to show us what boldness Peter had after the denial. For he who then did not dare to question Jesus, but committed the office to another, was even entrusted with the chief authority over the brethren, and not only does not commit to another what relates to himself, but himself now puts a question to his Master concerning another. John is silent, but Peter speaks. He shows also here the love which he bore towards him; for Peter greatly loved John, as is clear from what followed, and their close union is shown through the whole Gospel, and in the Acts. When therefore Christ had foretold great things to him, and committed the world to him, and spoke beforehand of his martyrdom, and testified that his love was greater than that of the others, desiring to have John also to share with him, he said, And what shall this man do? Shall he not come the same way with us? And as at that other time not being able himself to ask, he puts John forward, so now desiring to make him a return, and supposing that he would desire to ask about the matters pertaining to himself, but had not courage, he himself undertook the questioning. What then says Christ?

John 21:22

If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you?

Since he spoke from strong affection, and wishing not to be torn away from him, Christ, to show that however much he might love, he could not go beyond His love, says, If I will that he tarry -- what is that to you? By these words teaching us not to be impatient, nor curious beyond what seems good to Him. For because Peter was ever hot, and springing forward to enquiries such as this, to cut short his warmth, and to teach him not to enquire farther, He says this.

John 21:23

Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die; yet Jesus said not that he shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you?

Do not thou on any account suppose, He says, that I order your matters after a single rule. And this He did to withdraw them from their unseasonable sympathy for each other; for since they were about to receive the charge of the world, it was necessary that they should no longer be closely associated together; for assuredly this would have been a great loss to the world. Wherefore He says unto him, You have had a work entrusted to you, look to it, accomplish it, labor and struggle. What if I will that he tarry here? Look thou to and care for your own matters. And observe, I pray you, here also the absence of pride in the Evangelist; for having mentioned the opinion of the disciples, he corrects it, as though they had not comprehended what Jesus meant. Jesus said not, he tells us, that 'he shall not die, but, If I will that he tarry.'

John 21:24

This is the disciple which testifies of these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

Why is it, that then, when none of the others do so, he alone uses these words, and that for the second time, witnessing to himself? For it seems to be offensive to the hearers. What then is the cause? He is said to have been the last who came to writing, Christ having moved and roused him to the work; and on this account he continually sets forth his love, alluding to the cause by which he was impelled to write. Therefore also he continually makes mention of it, to make his record trustworthy, and to show, that, moved from thence, he came to this work. And I know, he says, that the things are true which he says. And if the many believe not, it is permitted them to believe from this. From what? From that which is said next.

John 21:25

There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

Whence it is clear that I could not have written to court favor; for I who, when the miracles were so many, have not even related so many as the others have, but omitting most of them, have brought forward the plots of the Jews, the stonings, the hatred, the insults, the revilings, and have shown how they called Him a demoniac and a deceiver, certainly could not have acted to gain favor. For it behooved one who courted favor to do the contrary, to reject the reproachful, to set forth the glorious. Since then he wrote what he did from full assurance, he does not decline to produce his own testimony, challenging men separately to enquire into and scrutinize the circumstances. For it is a custom with us, when we think that we are speaking exactly true, never to refuse our testimony; and if we do this, much more would he who wrote by the Spirit. What then the other Apostles when they preached declared, he also says; We are witnesses of the things spoken, and the Spirit which He has given to them that obey Him. Acts 5:32 And besides, he was present at all, and did not desert Him even when being crucified, and had His mother entrusted to him; all which things are signs of his love for Him, and of his knowing all things exactly. And if he has said that so many miracles had taken place, marvel thou not, but, considering the ineffable power of the Doer, receive with faith what is spoken. For it was as easy for Him to do whatever He would, as it is for us to speak, or rather much easier; for it sufficed that He should will only, and all followed.

3. Let us then give exact heed to the words, and let us not cease to unfold and search them through, for it is from continual application that we get some advantage. So shall we be able to cleanse our life, so to cut up the thorns; for such a thing is sin and worldly care, fruitless and painful. And as the thorn whatever way

it is held pricks the holder, so the things of this life, on whatever side they be laid hold of, give pain to him who hugs and cherishes them. Not such are spiritual things; they resemble a pearl, whichever way thou turn it, it delights the eyes.

As thus. A man has done a deed of mercy; he not only is fed with hopes of the future, but also is cheered by the good things here, being everywhere full of confidence, and doing all with much boldness. He has got the better of an evil desire; even before obtaining the Kingdom, he has already received the fruit here, being praised and approved, before all others, by his own conscience. And every good work is of this nature; just as conscience also punishes wicked deeds here, even before the pit.

For if, after sinning, you consider the future, you become afraid and tremblest, though no man punish you; if the present, you have many enemies, and livest in suspicion, and cannot henceforth even look in the face those who have wronged you, or rather, those who have not wronged you. deservest punishment.}--> For we do not in the case of those evil deeds reap so much pleasure, as we do despondency, when conscience cries out against us, men, without, condemn us, God is angered, the pit travailing to receive us, our thoughts not at rest.

A heavy, a heavy and a burdensome thing is sin, harder to bear than any lead. He at least who has any sense of it will not be able to look up ever so little, though he be very dull. Thus, for instance, Ahab, though very impious, when he felt this, walked bending downwards, crushed and afflicted. On this account he clothed himself in sackcloth, and shed fountains of tears. 1 Kings 21:27 If we do this, and grieve as he did, we shall put off our faults as did Zacchæus, and we too shall obtain some pardon.

Luke 19:9 For as in the case of tumors, and fistulous ulcers, if one stay not first the discharge which runs over and inflames the wound, how many soever remedies he applies, while the source of the evil is not stopped, he does all in vain; so too if we stay not our hand from covetousness, and check not that evil afflux of wealth, although we give alms, we do all to no purpose. For that which was healed by it, covetousness coming after is wont to overwhelm and spoil, and to make harder to heal than before.

Let us then cease from rapine, and so do alms. But if we betake ourselves to precipices, how shall we be able to recover ourselves? for if one party (that is, alms-doing) were to pull at a falling man from above, while another was forcibly dragging him from below, the only result of such a struggle would be, that the man would be torn asunder. That we may not suffer this, nor, while covetousness weighs us down from below, alms-doing depart and leave us, let us lighten ourselves, and spread our wings, that having been perfected by the riddance of evil things, and the practice of good, we may obtain the goods everlasting, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, dominion, and honor, now and ever and world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/john-2115-25/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net