

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

This morning I would encourage you to take your Bibles and turn to John 21. I want to continue our series on spiritual maturity addressing once again the subtle ways we can rob ourselves of God's blessing and bring dishonor to Christ. We have already learned from past expositions that we can do this by professing Christ with our lips, and not our life. We can do this by having no fear of God. This morning I would like to demonstrate that another way that we can banish ourselves to an island of spiritual infancy is to love ourselves more than Christ.

Before we look at this text, I want to prepare your hearts a bit. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:12-13 that it is the unique responsibility of the pastor/teacher to help the saints grow up, to help you mature in Christ. We do this through the ministry of preaching and teaching and sacrament. And we measure our maturity by how we manifest this whole notion of being new creatures in Christ, how we follow Christ's example of obedience, of humility and love. In fact, in Ephesians 5:1 he says, "Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

Frankly, most Christians have little understanding of what this means. Many Christians have been asked somewhere in their life to make a decision for Christ and to accept Jesus into their heart and make Him Lord of their life, and then they can put the little bumper sticker on the back of their car that says, "God is my co-pilot." But my friends Jesus calls us to something far greater than merely making a decision. He calls us to deny ourselves and become His disciple. Frankly we don't accept Him into our heart, we plead with Him that He will accept us into His eternal kingdom by His free grace. We don't make Him the Lord of our life, we submit to Him who is already Lord; to Him who is already the creator, the ruler, the redeemer, the sustainer, the consummator of all things; the judge of heaven and earth to whom has been given all authority. And He is certainly not our co-pilot, He alone is the pilot, the risen Christ, the king of kings, the Lord of Lords, the judge of the living and the dead.

Friends, these kinds of gospel distortions have done great damage to the church, great damage to many believers. No wonder God is loved so little. No wonder in the minds of many Christians He is some kind of a benevolent buddy that hands out the goodies and helps us become successful and prosperous. Or for others He is merely a personal trainer that somehow lives in our heart and gives us inner tranquility and helps us to be all that we can be. As one professor of theology over at Vanderbilt University put it, "Jesus is a model of non-violent resistance and the cross, a symbol of dying to self." My friends these are blasphemous distortions of who Jesus is.

Michael Horton got it right when he said, "The early Christians were not fed to wild beasts or dipped in wax and set ablaze as lamps in Nero's garden because they thought

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

Jesus was a helpful life coach or role model, but because they witnessed to Him as the only Lord and Savior of the world. Jesus Christ doesn't just live in the private hearts of individuals as the source of inner peace, He is the creator, ruler, redeemer and judge of all the earth and now He commands everyone, everywhere to repent."

Beloved, your spiritual maturity will be directly linked to your understanding of who Jesus is and the more you know Him, the more you will love Him.

I want you to ask yourself this morning, do I really love Christ? Do I really take seriously His call for me to be His disciple? Does my life orbit around the gospel or am I the center of gravity? Is life all about me or Him? Do I truly serve Christ or do I serve my own agenda?

You might ask, how do I really know? Well Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments." That is not that hard to understand. By the way, those commandments encompass all of scripture, the full scope of the Father's will revealed in His word. It's a very long list. Let me give you one example, He gives us the great commission in Matthew 28. He tells us to, "Go and make disciples to teach them to observe all the things that I have commanded." Do you do that? How many Christians are serious about going, just telling other people about the gospel? What about making disciples? Are any of you discipling other people? Not many people do, unfortunately. What about teaching others all that Jesus has commanded? You see, when those types of things are seen as something that the pastor and other people do, that really betrays on one hand ignorance, but certainly betrays a lack of love for Christ. We are told to present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice. Do you do that? Are you serious about that? There are so many commandments. We are told to not forsake the assembling together of the saints. Some Christians will find every excuse imaginable to forsake the assembling together of the saints. Dear friend, if your heart's desire is to do the will of God then you will seek to obey His commandments.

Luke 6:46 he says, "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?" You see obedience is always what validates genuine saving faith. 1 John 2:3, "by this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments. The one who says I have come to know Him, and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in Him, but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected." So indeed the remnant of the old man makes it really hard for us to be brutally honest with ourselves. Our hearts are deceitful, we are hopelessly biased in our own favor, we are great at overestimating our love for Christ and underestimating our love for self.

Well today I want to examine the life of Peter, an apostle of Christ who greatly overestimated his love and devotion to Christ. I see myself in him so often. You will see yourselves as well. He was the one that vowed at Jesus' betrayal in Matthew 26, "though

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

all may fall away because of you, I will never fall away, even if I have to die with you, I will not deny You." Yet as Jesus predicted, he denied his Savior and Lord three times before the night was over. Dear Christian, one of the greatest marks of spiritual maturity will be our willingness to always be suspect of it, and the more we see our weakness in the light of His love and His grace, the more humbly dependent we will become and the more we will fall in love with the lover of our souls.

We come to John 21. Let me give you the background here. This is the epilogue of the gospel of John. Today I want to examine it in a more general nature than I would normally do by digging into every verse. I want you to see the big picture because I want you to see the danger of loving self more than Christ.

The context here is Jesus has already sacrificed Himself on the cross, He has risen from the grave and He has appeared to the disciples in the upper room where He found them confused and frightened, hid behind a locked door. They were weak in faith, prone to self love and self-protection. They were cowering in fear. Then suddenly Jesus in His glorified body just walks right through the door and stands in their midst and says, "Peace to you." Then He shows them His side and His hands, and He loving rebukes them for their hardness of heart and their disbelief.

So here in John 21, the first 14 verses, John deals with an unresolved question that is in the mind of the disciples at the end of chapter 20. And that question was this, what's going to happen to us now? Now that Jesus is gone? Will He still, provide, protect, can He still be trusted. Then in verses 15 and following we see His love and grace in action as he restores Peter.

Here we will learn that loving Christ above all else means that we will be willing to sacrifice everything to follow Him.

I believe the Spirit of God would have me address four dominate themes that emerge from this chapter.

1. The Subtlety of Faltering Faith.
2. The Marvel of Pursuing Grace.
3. The Sorrow of Deficient Love.
4. The Joy of Willing Sacrifice.

So I want you to join me this morning by subjecting your heart to the penetrating light of divine truth so that the Spirit of God will stir your heart and show you your weakness and show you your failure in love, as He has me, all this week. That we together might repent and follow Christ come what may.

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

First of all, *the subtlety of faltering faith*. Now earlier Jesus has commanded the disciples to leave Jerusalem where they were afraid of being captured by the authorities and maybe succumbing to the same fate as Jesus. So Jesus has told them, I want you to leave and go North back up into the Galilee to a certain designated mountain and there I will meet you. So here in the first three verses of chapter 21, we see that 7, out of the 11 disciples did this. Perhaps the others came in another group later on, we don't know. But this would have been a much safer place for them and the place where Jesus was going to meet with them. So notice verse 1: "After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (Sea of Galilee), and He manifested Himself in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing."

The key phrase here is "I am going fishing." Many commentators will argue that this phrase means nothing more than they went fishing, catch some fish, have something to eat. But with a closer look, I would humbly disagree. I believe it means that they returned to their former livelihood as fishers of fish rather than fishers of men. Remember now God has called them to the gospel ministry, but now all that is in question. Here is why I believe this.

First of all we know their faith was faltering. They were afraid, they questioned whether or not Jesus was going to still provide, protect and empower them. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them. So rather than wait for Jesus on the mountain, they take matters into their own hands. Like all of us tend to do, they resorted to an area of perceived confidence and safety. They took the easy, safe way. They resorted to their comfort zone, the zone, frankly, where soldiers become cowards and servants become sluggards.

But also notice in verse 3b: "They went out, and got into the boat." The definite article there in the original language, meaning there is a specific boat. No doubt this was the one that belonged to Peter. Having been to Israel and I've spent some time studying this, I have come to the conclusion that the boat that they are referring to here would have been the typical boat that the fishermen of those days would have used. A boat, frankly, that would have required significant preparation to go fishing.

These vessels were typically about 27 feet long and 7 1/2 feet wide. They would accommodate between 5 and 7 crewmen and up to 15 passengers. Many times they will have a smaller boat attached to them. I am going to argue that there are 2 boats in this scene, as you will see.

Now, they have been away for about 3 years. If you know anything about wooden fishing vessels, you will know that they have to be dry docked or they will rot, they will be destroyed. So I am sure that this boat was somehow dry docked. They have to be cleaned

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

and treated. All of their nets and sails and all of their riggings would have rotted by now. They would have had to have done something to get new ones. So it would have been a significant undertaking to prepare the vessel, to make arrangements even for the cleaning and the sale of the fish. So this is not a casual let's grab a pole and go down to the beach and wet a line, or back the boat into the water and kind of go out and do a little fishing here today. It would have been a major task to get everything prepared, not something that you would do if you were merely going to go out and catch a few fish, eat them and then go back up to the mountain to meet Jesus.

Moreover, Jesus predicted earlier in 16:32 that they were going to be scattered and that they would return to their own home. Notice in that text: "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home." Now the word "home" has been added by the translators. But it is literally in the original language, each to "his own," and this would cover everything pertaining to a person's life, his home, his property, his livelihood, his business. For example in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, the same Greek phrase is translated "your own business" or "your own affairs." (ESV).

Furthermore the omniscient Jesus knew their faith was faltering. The icy grip of fear had a hold on them. It's interesting how later when Jesus questions Peter in verse 15 He addresses him by using his former name because he is acting like his former self. He says, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" I think the "these" is best understood as a reference to all of the fishing supplies necessary to operate the fishing enterprise. The boats, the ropes, the nets, fish baskets, etc.

Now before I go on, dear friends, I want you to ask yourself a question right now, do I love Christ more than anything else in my life? Or do you have a faltering faith that you may not even see, a deficient faith that causes you to deny Christ in subtle ways and resort to areas of perceived competency and safety in your life? If so, such a path will lead you to regret. You will rob yourself of the amazing adventure of serving Christ and all of the joys that go with that. Not to mention, you are robbing Him of the glory and the honor that He deserves.

Before we go on, one of the things that we see here is that the Lord expects us to be committed, that's what He expected with Peter. To walk by faith, not by sight, to trust in Him. Moreover, the Lord expects us to be available to do His bidding. The disciples weren't willing to do that at this point. Most Christians are never used because they never make themselves available, there are more pressing priorities. Thirdly we've got to be patient, to wait upon the Lord, trust in His timetable. Peter is about to learn these things the hard way.

Notice verse 3: "And they went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing." The Lord is so gracious, isn't He? He is so gracious. Remember something folks, He only blesses His work, not ours. Not the things we do in the flesh. When He

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

tells you to do something and you ignore Him, you know what? You are on your own. So here, I'm sure, the disciples are discouraged and I believe their consciences were animated with guilt and shame thinking, "oh no, what have we done? God is not blessing this." Here the sovereign ruler of heaven and earth is going to confront them with their inabilities and dramatically expose their faltering faith. It's as if Jesus is saying, "Do you really think that I'm unable to meet your needs...that you can take matters into your own hands! I'm about to remind you who's the Almighty Sovereign Creator and who's not!"

Now before we go on you must understand something of the fishing methods of those days and frankly the methods they use today. Because this is important to my argument. They used what was called a Trammel net. This was really 3 nets in one. One that would go to the bottom at some level . . . from the top to the bottom and form basically a barrel. There would be two outside nets which have a large opening for the fish to swim into, but in between them there would be a finer net that the fish would many times get trapped in, or entangled in. These nets would require a great deal of cleaning, drying, and mending. Sometimes you read about the disciples mending their nets. After each use they would have to do this.

But then beyond that barrel net, they also used another net called a Veranda net. This was more of a casting net that would be thrown over the top of the barrel of the Trammel net and it would gradually sink down to the bottom. What they would normally do is have another smaller boat go out to throw out that net over the Trammel net. So, once the casting net would sink to the bottom, the fishermen would then dive down into the water to retrieve the fish. They would either put them in a basket or they would take the rope of that casting net and they would tighten it. Like a parachute, they would gradually be weighted and go down, they would take the rope and they would tie it to the other boat and haul in their fish. This is why Peter was dressed in a loin clothe we believe. This I believe was the method they used. This is a method that some still use in the Sea of Galilee today.

Now notice verse 4: "But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus therefore said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will find a catch." You must understand, the big Trammel net, the big barrel net, the barrel trap had already been set on the left side of the main boat and is attached to the boat. The smaller boat would go around and throw the veranda net over the top as the larger boat would drift along. But here Jesus is saying; don't throw your casting net over the top of that barrel, of that trammel net. Throw it out into the open sea on the other side of the boat.

Now I have to laugh, by now we have 7 very fatigued, frustrated fishermen in a boat. They fished all night and caught nothing. Moreover, these are experienced fishermen. It would be one thing if they were novices, but they knew what they were doing. By this

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

time they had no sense of humor. I would say they were down right grumpy, even churlish. "Who is this guy telling us how to fish?" But friends, isn't it at times like these when our precious Savior shows up? When things aren't working, we've blown it, we've gone off in the wrong direction and we know it. We are frustrated and all of a sudden we hear the voice of our Savior.

We move from the subtlety of faltering faith to 2. The *Marvel of Pursuing Grace*.

Verse 6: "They cast therefore, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish." I believe here the smaller boat cast that veranda net, the casting net over on the other side. Then they catch all these fish. Verse 7: "That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved (John) said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' And so when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on for he was stripped for work, and he threw himself into to the sea." I think he was the one in the larger boat because he would have been the one to dive down periodically to see if they had caught anything, and to retrieve the casting net. There was never anything there, and now the smaller boat has caught the fish. Peter dives in after he puts a respectful garb on knowing that he was about to come into the presence of the Lord of Hosts, and he swims to meet Jesus. Isn't it amazing! Even with all of his faults; he had a desperate desire to be in a relationship with Jesus. Folks, is that true of you? I hope it is. He longed to be worshipful; he longed to submit to the Lord. He longed to obey the Lord, but he struggled with it just like we all do.

Verse 8: "But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish." What a dramatic display of sovereign power over creation. Its' as if Jesus was saying, "You thought I couldn't provide?" Verse 9: "And when they got out upon the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid, and fish placed on it, and bread." You know when I read this passage I found myself being struck with what I think Peter was thinking. Do you realize the last time he was in the proximity of Christ and a fire? Do you remember what happened? He denied the Lord three times. Here he is in the presence of the Lord and he is about to be asked if he loves the Lord three times.

I want you to notice what happened in verse 10: "Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.'" He is now going to add to the things that He spoke into existence. I'm sure when it came time for Jesus to make breakfast, He just said, "breakfast" and there it was. But now he is saying, "bring some of your fish over here." Verse 11: "Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn." Peter was already wet, the others weren't. He was the one diving in to get the net all the time, so he said he would go get the fish.

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

Peter, by the way, must have been a pretty stout fellow. The fish that they caught were probably called Musht. Musht in Arabic means comb and it really describes the dorsal fin of these fish. They were about 16 inches long, 2 pounds a piece. Sometimes they are called St. Peter's fish. I have had them over there, or Galilea Tilapia. So that is probably what the fish were. So you do the math, you probably have 300 pounds worth of fish in a net, pretty heavy. Of course things lighten up in the water but he is probably pulling it out of the water up to the shore and then the other guys, I'm sure, come along and help him out. So they get the rest of the fish and they count them. Now every fishermen knows that this is a ceremony we all look forward to. You get to count your fish.

Verse 12: "Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.'"

Oh child of God, what a picture of sanctifying love of God that never leaves us, that never forsakes us. This is *the marvel of pursuing love*. Jesus is always seeking to restore us, to have fellowship with us, to have sweet communion with us. How many times we mess up in our lives, then all of a sudden we turn around and there he is. That is what's happened here. "Come over here guys, you must be hungry, have some breakfast."

You know I don't believe they had any appetite at this point. I believe they were so consumed with guilt and shame, and at some level awe. Standing before the Son of God who has been resurrected from the dead. Would you have an appetite? I don't think so. I would imagine what they are saying at this point was, "how could I have ever doubted the Lord? What was wrong with me? After all that we've seen Him do! Now here He is risen from the dead."

But what does Jesus do? Although He is about to ascend back into Heaven, He proves to them that He is going to continue to provide, He is going to keep pursuing His own with life sustaining grace. By the way, He promised to do this in a mind-boggling way in verse 16. He promised that: "the Father would give them another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you." So Jesus says, "come and have breakfast."

Folks let that just sink in for a second. Isn't it just like the Lord to make breakfast for us when we least deserve it. Maybe these truths today are His way of making breakfast for you as He desires to summon you back into fellowship with Him. Isn't it just like the Lord to prove Himself powerful on our behalf, especially when our faith is faltering and our love has grown cold. Aren't you glad the Lord calls feeble, sinful folks to be His disciples? These old clay pots in which He puts the treasure of the gospel. But what else can He do, because that describes us all, right? That's what He does.

And why does He use us? "That the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves." 2 Corinthians 4:7. It's not from ourselves it's from Him. Isn't it just

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

like the Lord to meet our every need? As you think about it, He doesn't just barely meet our needs, he does so bountifully. It's just overwhelming what He does. Why does He do this? Because He "is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." Ephesians 3:20. Philippians 4:19 we read "And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Here we see a vivid example of Jesus promise made earlier in John 14:13-14: "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." Folks remember this the next time you are defeated, beleaguered, and discouraged over your own failures and you're tempted to take matters into your own hands. Love Christ, not yourself, trust Christ, not yourself.

Verse 12: Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples ventured to question Him, 'Who are you?' knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread, and gave them, and the fish likewise."

Amazing! The one violated not only provides, but He serves. Isn't that amazing? Reminds me of the words of the hymn that we sang earlier this morning: "O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow May richer, fuller be."

Against the backdrop of faltering faith and pursuing grace, number 3, we see *the sorrow of deficient love*. Jesus is going to help Peter examine his heart. Something we should all do on a regular basis. The probing question is going to be, do you love Me? He doesn't ask him, do you fear Me, or do you believe in Me, or do you have faith in Me, do you worship Me? Because all of those things are the roots that support the limbs of love that bear the fruits of humble service. If we look at a tree and the limbs are dying, we know that there is something wrong with the root. Your love for Christ is always going to be the surest way of determining whether you are alive in Him. Where there is little love there is little faith, little hope, little power, perseverance, sacrifice, service, singing in the midst of sorrow. Jesus knew all of this.

You might want to ask yourself, do I really love Christ and if so, how can I prove that? What are the types of things you do with someone that you love? What happens? They occupy your mind. You long to be in fellowship with them, talk with them, to hear their voice. You would never wound them. You find your great joy and satisfaction in them. Do I love Christ? We tend to be madly in love with ourselves, that is why Jesus said in the second commandment, Love your neighbor as yourself.

Please understand, Jesus here is going to be jealous for Peter's love. He is jealous for all of us, for all of our love. For this reason we should welcome this question. He never asked this of those who are not His bride, only His own. Frankly, none of us love Him as

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

we should, none of us do. But we can be certain of this: He loves us perfectly. And this we can trust. We stand in need of His grace every moment don't we? Every single moment. Even when we come to Christ as Peter did admitting our love is deficient, we can be certain the Lord already knows, but He still loves us.

There's a word play going on here. Though they spoke in Aramaic, the Holy Spirit uses the term "agapao" to describe the Lord's meaning. When the Lord uses the word love, He uses that word which refers to the supreme kind of love, the highest form of sacrificial love that requires total commitment. Then Peter responds with "phileo" a different verb denoting a lesser form of affection and devotion. So with that in mind let's go back to verse 15: "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, (He reverts to calling him "the pebble" rather than the rock) do you love Me (agapas) more than these? Do you have that supreme commitment that self-sacrificial love for Me? Do you have that more than these? I believe He was pointing to all of the fishing paraphernalia necessary for them to pursue the life that they loved where they felt safe. Peter said to Him, "Yes, Lord' You know that I love (philo) you." In other words, I love you, but I don't love you with that supreme kind of love, I know that because I know that you know that. But look what Jesus said, "Tend My lambs." Another way of saying, "don't go back to fishing. Don't revert back to those areas where you perceive yourself to be competent and safe. I want you to follow Me, don't go back to fishing. I want you to tend My lambs."

Verse 16: He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love (agapas) Me? He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (philo-affection) You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." Literally, devote yourself exclusively to pastoral oversight.

Verse 17: He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love (phileo) Me?" Do you even love Me with a less noble, less devoted affection for me? Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love (phileis) Me?" Again, the same word for love that denotes a lesser form of affection and devotion. This is *the sorrow of deficient love*. So what do we do?

What we do is we humble ourselves before an omniscient Savior that can see into our heart, one who knows our weaknesses, and we praise Him for His steadfast love for us. That is what Peter says here. He said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." I have an affection for you but I can't claim the loftiest, supreme form of sacrificial devotion. But Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.' It's as if He is saying, "I know that Peter, but I want you to serve Me anyway. And as you serve Me this is how you will demonstrate even your deficient love for Me and this is how your love will grow over time."

Jesus knew all things, He knew Peter's faltering faith, his love for self, his arrogance, conceit, commitment to self-protection, all of his weaknesses, and yet He fully affirms

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

him into pastoral ministry. He forgives him. The Lord longs for fellowship with you, but we must first be grieved over our faltering faith and deficient love, and our love for self before we can be restored. Why does God do this? He does it because He loves to do so; it is His nature to be a merciful Savior. "God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Even as Peter denied Christ three times, Jesus presses for a confession of his love three times. And wherever there is sorrow over sin, there will be joy in restoration, and renewed zeal in service. Peter's sorrow over his deficient love and faulty faith was exactly what Jesus required for that full restoration and blessing. He then becomes submissive and obedient and confident in Christ. In fact later on he proved his shepherd's heart.

He says in 1 Peter 5:1-4 "I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, (take up the task of shepherding), exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

1 Peter 5:5 "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." I'm sure he remembered the Lord clothing Himself with the robes of a servant, to stoop down and wash His feet in the upper room along with the rest of the disciples. I believe he also has in mind that scene on the beach, with the breakfast and the Lord serving them breakfast? He goes and says, "For God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you." What a contrast between the brash and conceited fishermen and now the very careful and humble shepherd.

This brings us to number four, *The Joy of willing sacrifice*.

After pressing for Peter's love and restoring him as a shepherd, Jesus says to him in verse 18: "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself; and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." This he said signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God." This was of course a reference to crucifixion. "And when He had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me!'"

And Peter did—as a demonstration of his love. Jesus' love gave him great confidence because now for over 30 years following this scenario, he faithfully served Christ fearlessly—alongside his dear wife—until eventually they were both crucified because of their love for Christ and for the sake of the gospel. You will recall that he had to watch

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

Dr. David Harrell

his wife being crucified first, reminding her to "remember the Lord". Then he asked to be crucified upside-down because he wasn't worthy to be crucified as the Lord.

Friends this is the joy of willing sacrifice. How do you know he served with joy? Well you learn a lot from a man when he is close to death, especially when he knows how he is going to die. Notice what Peter later said in 1 Peter 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time? In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

My friends this is the joy of willing sacrifice. So I ask you in closing again this morning, do you really love Christ? Do you take seriously His command for you to be His disciple? Or are you cowering behind some door, afraid to take a stand for Christ, afraid that somehow He will not provide?

If so, I would encourage you to do as Peter did, to acknowledge that. To acknowledge the subtlety of your faltering faith, to marvel at the pursuing grace of the Lord who is always there, never leaving us, never forsaking us. And to sorrow over your deficient love so that you will be able to take pleasure in the joy of willing sacrifice.

Then like Peter you will learn what it means to be committed and patient, available, worshipful, submissive, obedient, and confident in Christ. For these are the marks of spiritual maturity. These are the keys to spiritual blessing. This is what it means to love Christ more than yourself.

And friend if you have never placed your faith in Christ, may the Lord grant that you do so today. May He reveal Himself to you, may He soften that heart of stone within you, may you understand that it was His blood that paid your ransom, so you too will be saved and fall in love with Christ and serve Him. Because Christ delights in saving sinners to the praise of His glory. Aren't you thankful for that?

Let's pray together. Father thank you for these great truths. We love You in such a deficient way. We are so prone to loving ourselves, but we know that You know that and we thank You that You keep pursuing us. Lord it is our desire to love You more so we

# Loving Yourself More than Christ

John 21

March 24, 2013

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commit ourselves to that end afresh this day. We pray all of these things in Jesus name,  
Amen.