

The Transforming Effect of Loving Christ

Scripture: John 21

Code: SC17-2

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Well, all week we have examined the glories of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's been a marvelous experience, hasn't it? Just rich fellowship, conversation, praise, instruction. We feel like we've been lifted to the heavenlies. We've seen His majesty and His glory. We have had our own Mount of Transfiguration event. And like the apostles, we have fallen before Him in humble amazement. And like the disciples on the mountain, we don't want it to end. "Can't we just stay and live in that tent? We've already got a tent." I think what I'm trying to say is we have been being sanctified this week, because sanctification occurs as a ministry of the Holy Spirit when we gaze at the glory of Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:18, we're moved from one level of glory to the next. To gaze at the glory of Christ is a transforming experience.

Not too long ago I completed preaching through gospel of John. For 116 weeks I prepared hour upon hour, day upon day and preached maybe a tenth of what was in my heart at the end of each week of study. I lived for 116 weeks in the gospel of John in the glory of Christ. Somebody said to me when I finished the gospel of John, "Don't you feel good that it's over?" I said, "No, I really feel sad that it's over." Day after day I saw His glory, and I can't count how many messages this week came from the gospel of John. John records His marvelous words, His miraculous works, culminating at His death and His bodily resurrection, followed by His appearances. And John brings his gospel to its great climax.

Open your Bible to the 20th chapter, verses 30 and 31. And John sums it all up by saying, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples." In fact there were so many that in the last verse of John he actually says, "The world couldn't contain the books that could be written on everything He did."

"Many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

The gospel of John is to provide evidence for the deity and messiahship of Jesus Christ, evidence that leads you to believe and have eternal life. That's the high point of the gospel of John. That's the pinnacle, the *höhepunkt* as the Germans would say. And when I hit that verse I thought, "That should be the end. That should be the end." But it isn't.

From the heights of that elevated summation of the evidential and evangelistic purposes of the gospel of John, from that elevated glorious revelation of the risen Christ, we come to chapter 21, and

it's like being dropped off a cliff and landing with a thud. It's a crashing descent. In fact, the contrast is so jolting that some have suggested John didn't even write it. And to make it worse, we run right smack into Peter again. What a pain.

Can we just end with Christ? Why do we have to go back to Peter? This is a very disappointing narrative at first. Do we really need this? Can't we just go flying into the book of Acts, and to the ascension, and to the Day of Pentecost and see that Peter? Why do we need this one?

There's an answer to that. It's because with all the glory that has come through to the end of chapter 20, eventually that glory ends up in clay pots. This is for us. This has to be part of the story.

When Luke wrote His gospel and then began to write the book of Acts, in Acts chapter 1 and verse 1, he said this: "He was writing in the gospel about all that Jesus" – do you know the next word? – "began to do and to teach."

As our Lord ascended and the Spirit came, the work was handed over to the clay pots we talked about on Tuesday: weak, and ugly, and breakable, and marred, and replaceable. We have been to the mountain. We have seen the majestic glory. We have seen it by a more sure word, Peter said, than even his own experience at the Mount of Transfiguration, a more sure word inspired by the Holy Spirit and written down. We too have been eyewitnesses to His glory, and now the deposit rests with us. We are to carry the glorious gospel forward, even in our frailty and our weakness.

Peter did enough things to lose his ordination papers. If he had presented his testimony as an application to The Master's Seminary he likely would have been rejected. Occasionally speaks for the devil, occasionally pulls Jesus aside and tells Him what to do; and when it gets tough, he denies, and denies, and denies that he ever knows the Lord, and then swears. Oh, that's great stuff for a minister.

The thud takes place in the first three words of verse 1: "After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas call Didymus the twin, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee," – who would be James and John – "two other disciples," – Philip and Andrew. What you've got here is all the people who were in the fishing business. These are all the Galilean fishermen; and you can throw in Thomas. Pretty startling here.

"Simon Peter said to them, 'I'm going fishing.'" You say, "Well, everybody in the ministry needs recreation." No. This is not about grabbing a rod and a hook on a sunny day and enjoying recreation. The Lord had told them, Matthew 28:16, "Go to Galilee, to a mountain that I tell you, and wait for Me there for further orders. I'll be there; you wait. I'll give the commission and you'll know what's next."

In a predictable, impulsive, disappointing move, Peter decides to go back to his former career. And he is a leader; and like a bunch of rubber ducks, all the rest of the fishermen go after him. "I'm going fishing."

In the original there's a finality in that statement. This is not recreation, this is going back to his old life. How do we know that? "They went out," – verse 3 says – "they got into the boat," – not a boat, and certainly not standing on the shore throwing a hook in the water. "They went back to the boat," –

definite article. They were back in their own area and they went back to their own boat, Peter's boat perhaps. This is a boat big enough for all of them. This is not a recreational boat, this is a fishing boat. And they took nets. And you don't use nets for recreational fishing. And in verse 7 it says, "Peter stripped down to a loincloth." He went back to work. Verse 8 says, "They were a hundred yards out." They weren't just wanting to enjoy a nibble or two.

Why does Peter do this? Why does he say, "I'm going back to fishing"? Hasn't he seen the risen Christ? Yes. Yes. Why is he going back to fishing? I think the answer's pretty simple: he had absolutely no confidence in himself. He was a proven failure. One minute he could be serving the Lord, and the next minute the devil. He could say, "I'll follow You even to death." And then when all he had to do was confess Christ, he would deny Him, and deny Him, and deny Him, and deny Him to irrelevant people in the dark. He had overestimated his wisdom, pompous way, he bragged about his strength. He had underestimated the power of temptation. He openly declared that he could handle any severe threat and never waver in his loyalty to Jesus. That foolish boasting led him to blatant betrayal.

At that part of the story we don't know if he's any different than Judas, full of self-doubt, sense of serious overwhelming weakness, a history of failure, lack of trust in Himself, inadequate: "I can't do this. I can't do this ministry, but I can fish. Let's go back to fishing."

Verse 4: "But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples didn't know it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, 'Children, you do not have any fish, do you?'" That is irritating, even if it's Jesus. You really don't need to punctuate that.

"And they said, 'No.'" This wasn't the first time this happened. This had happened earlier in Luke 5. And you remember on that occasion when Peter realized it was the Lord, what was his response? Lord, go away, for I am a sinful man. Here he was again, the same sinful man in the presence of the same Son of God. And when the Lord said, "You don't have any fish, do you?" He was saying this: "You can't fish anymore. I control the fish. You can't catch fish. I called you to catch men."

"So, no, no, no. No, no, that was just a coincidence. You know, they were in a bad spot. No, just a coincidence." Really? Look at verse 6: "He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you'll find a catch.' So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish."

There were no fish in the area. And when the Lord said to them, "Try the right side of the boat," you know your instinct would be to say, "What is he, crazy? You think we'd fished off one side of the boat stays in one spot. What are you talking about?" But the authority in His voice causes them to do what they did, even though at this point they didn't know who it was.

"So they cast their net on the right side of the boat. He said, 'You'll find a catch.' They cast. They weren't even able to haul the catch in because of the great number of fish. Therefore the disciple whom Jesus loved" – namely John – "said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.'" This is the final miracle in the gospel of John.

"When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he was stripped for the work), and threw himself into the sea." This is so Peter, just so totally out of control and

impulsive. He doesn't help the guys who are trying to haul in this massive amount of fish, he just dives in the water.

While he's thrown himself into the sea, "The other disciples came in the little boat," – big enough to hold all of them – "not far from land, about a hundred yards, dragging the net full of fish." They couldn't get it in the boat. So they're working like crazy to get the fish to the shore.

"Finally go to the land," – in verse 9 – "saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread." Jesus had made breakfast. You know how Jesus makes breakfast? "Breakfast."

"And Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish which you have now caught, we'll add that.' Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three." I love the number. It's an eyewitness account of a number, they counted them; and it's an indication this is a real miracle. "And although there were so many, the net was not torn." Just kind of a miracle; massive catch without tearing the net.

Now that Peter and the others know, they can't fish anymore. That's the lesson: "You can't fish; I control the fish. You can't fish for fish when" – Matthew 4:19 – "you've been called to fish for men."

And then the Lord does an amazing thing. He moves for the restoration of Peter and the others. "Jesus said to them," – in verse 12 – '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 it to them, and the fish likewise. This was now the third time Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead."

I don't know what the conversation was like, but it must have been intense. There must have been some apologies: "Sorry, Lord, we just didn't trust ourselves, and You weren't here, and we didn't know what we were waiting for. And we all ran, we all scattered, we all fled when You were arrested, and the only one who showed up at the cross was the one who leaned on Your breast and that was John, and the rest of us never showed up. And we're all guilty of defecting. And we're all weak, and we're all useless. And we just thought, 'We know how to do that, and we'll just go do that, that's familiar to us.'"

Then the Lord starts a restoration. You might have thought that He would have found a replacement group. I mean come on; three years, death, burial, resurrection. He's alive, they've seen Him, and they're still acting like this. This is time for the Lord to hit the reset. This is restoration redux. Now are you surprised that the Lord would restart these reluctant, weak disciples? Here's the good news. This is all He's got to work with is a bunch of clay pots with unclean lips. This is Isaiah all over again.

So how does Jesus – here's the question – how does Jesus disciple a disciple? You all are involved in discipleship. How does Jesus disciple a disciple? How does Jesus restore a disobedient disciple? How does Jesus do biblical counseling? How does Jesus shepherd a wayward sheep? How does He pastor them? How does He lead them to sanctification and obedience? How does He recover them for usefulness? It must be a long and very complex process. It's going to take months, if not years. How does He do it? How does Jesus disciple a disobedient disciple? You ready? He asks him one question three times: "Do you love Me?"

I hear a lot about counseling, biblical counseling, discipleship. I've seen complexity that looks like the backside of a Persian rug. I've read books, endless books, paradigms of sanctification. How did Jesus disciple a disobedient, weak, vacillating disciple? "Do you love Me?" Shocking for its simplicity. There's no ambiguity in that, right? There's no ambiguity. There's no mystery. "Do you love Me?"

I was a little guy, grew up in a pastor's family, and I was writing a kind of an afterward for a book that somebody wrote. It was wonderful, and I agree to write an afterward. Plus it'd be a little bit of personal reminiscing of my own kind of spiritual history. And I was thinking back about when I was a little kid and teenager, a young man, and all I could remember was that everybody said, "You need to believe in Jesus Christ. You need to believe in Jesus Christ." That was how it was, "You need to believe in Jesus Christ." I was taught that from a child in the home, in Sunday School, "You need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ."

As I got a little older, people began to say, "You need to serve the Lord. You need to serve the Lord. You need to do something." It wasn't really biblically qualified or defined, you needed to serve the Lord. That was what you did. And then a little later the emphasis was, "You need to witness for the Lord." So you need to believe the Lord, and you need to serve the Lord, and you need to witness for the Lord.

So I'm in high school and I'm believing and I'm serving, and sometimes I'm going down to Central LA in the middle of the park in the middle of the city, and I'm trying to witness for the Lord. But I'm not really, I'm not really experiencing any sanctifying power in my life. And finally I was told when I got into college that if I wanted power in my life, I needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And somebody gave me a little booklet on it at the campus crusade. I needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And then it was always described as, you know, being continually kept filled with the Holy Spirit. And that was a passive kind of instruction. So, okay, I'm here. I think I'm open. Go ahead, fill me. I was exposed to a lot of higher life, deeper life, Keswick, "Let go, let God." Shifted me into a passive mode waiting for something to happen to me, which left me struggling for sanctification.

I don't think I really understood even when I came here in 1969. I began to understand when I came across 2 Corinthians 3:18, "As you gaze at His glory, you're changed into His image by the Holy Spirit." That's not passive, that's aggressively active. And I began to realize that my sanctification was dependent not on creating a vacuum which the Holy Spirit would fill, but on the relentless pursuit of the knowledge of the glory of Christ. I said, "There's only one way to do that, I've got to go to the gospels."

And so for eight or nine years I taught Matthew, nine or ten years I taught Luke, several years I taught Mark, John. All I wanted to do was gaze at the glory of Christ. I went to Hebrews, I taught Hebrews. I went to Revelation, taught Revelation, and a few years later taught it all over again. Went to Romans, taught Romans; a few years later taught Romans over again. When I finished the New Testament, I did a whole series on "Find Christ in the Old Testament." I just couldn't let go of Christ.

I don't know what you've been taught, I don't know what you've been told about sanctification. But I will tell you this: the clear word of Scripture is that your sanctification is directly related to your pursuit of the knowledge of Christ in all His glory. It's not passive. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. The Word, the revelation concerning Christ, let it dwell in you richly.

And then I got to the end of John's gospel the first time through and I saw this, and I was just amazed at the simplicity of what our Lord said to recover and restore the most critical disciple of the bunch for the early church. He only asked him one question: "Do you love Me? Have you seen enough and heard enough to love Me?"

I'd always known I needed to believe in Him, and serve Him, and witness for Him. I don't think I ever thought about loving Him. But then I should have, because what is the first and great commandment? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength," Deuteronomy 6. Matthew 22:37, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind. That's the first and great commandment." And God has come to us in Christ. That applies to Christ.

What does God want from me? On behalf of Christ, He wants me to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's the Christian life. It's all tied to loving the Lord Jesus with all your faculties.

First Corinthians 16:22 says that, "Anybody who doesn't love the Lord is *anathema*, damned." If you're damned for not loving the Lord, and the opposite of that is being given eternal life which is defined as loving the Lord. The motive for all your sanctification and the motive for all your service is this simple: "Do you love Me?" So let's look at the conversation.

"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon,' – He always called him by his old name when he was acting like his old self – 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Do you love Me?'" Always the question for a disobedient believer. Go right to the heart: "Do you love Me more than these?" "You mean more than these other disciples?" That wouldn't work. They were as guilty as he was. They all defected. They all went back to fishing. They were equally disobedient.

"No. Do you love Me more than these boats, and nets, and corks, and weights, and anchors, and trappings of your former life? Do you love Me more than the stuff that made up your life?" which is like saying, "If any man will come after Me, let him" – what? – "deny Himself." You've got to let go of everything that made up your life. He uses the word *agapao*, the highest, noblest love of the will. "Do you love Me more than these things? Do you love Me more than anything in this world?"

Matthew 10:37, He said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. If you love your own life, the life that you have created more than Me, you're not worthy of Me." He's saying, "Do you love Me enough to deny yourself?"

John Calvin said, "No man will steadily persevere in the discharge of ministry unless love for Christ reigns in his heart." If we haven't set this week up to focus on Christ, just for the sake of information about Him, but for the sake of what I'm saying to you tonight that you might love Him in a greater way than you've ever loved Him before.

I think Peter must have been very sorrowful. He said to Him, verse 15: "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." But he changed the word. He didn't use *agapao*, the highest, noblest love of the will. He dropped it down a notch. He said, "I love you," and he used *phileo*, which simply means a warm affection. "I like You a lot." Why did he do that? Because he was exposed. He was guilty. He was broken. He was humbled. He would have been a fool to say, "I love You at the highest, noblest level." He couldn't say that. He says, "Lord, You know, You know that I like You a lot."

You say, "That's a sad admission." Well, isn't it kind of sad to have to depend on omniscience? I mean it isn't even obvious you got a call on omniscience. He didn't say, "Lord, You've seen my life. Isn't it obvious?" No. He said, "I have to call on Your omniscience, and You know that I have deep affection for You."

Let me tell you something; I think that moment was a moment of blessing. I think it's a blessing when the Lord knows everything and He knows that we love Him, even when it's not obvious.

I'll say it another way: I'm glad that the Lord knows the things I desperately want Him to know, and that is such a blessing to me. I'm okay if He knows the things I really don't want Him to know. I need Him to know I love Him, because sometimes it's not obvious. He knows I love Him truly. I don't love Him as I should. My love isn't everything it should be, but it's real. That's what Peter's saying, amazingly.

I mean this is amazing. The Lord says to him, "*Boske* My lambs. Shepherd My lambs." This is his ordination: "You're accepted." Really? After all the ridiculous things that Peter has done. And here's, just previous to this, another evidence of his impulsive disobedience, He puts him right back in the ministry: "Feed My lambs."

And I would just tell you to look at the pronoun here, personal pronoun. "They're Mine, and I'm turning them over to you." With far less than perfect love the Lord deserves and desires, with love lower in quality than the Lord receives from all those who are around Him in heaven, Peter is restored to the ministry with a love that isn't even visible to anyone except the Lord in His omniscience. "Feed My lambs – My little ones, young, tender, weak, vulnerable, prone to wander, prone to stray. I'm putting them in your hands."

You know, when I think about that, I think about John 17, where our Lord in praying to His Father says, "I'm going to the cross. Father, I guarded them. Now when I go to the cross I'm giving them to You to keep." When He couldn't care for them, He turned them over to His Father, and nothing could ever take them out of His Father's hand. But here's the wonder of wonders. He turned them over to Peter: "My little lambs."

"He said to him a second time," – in verse 16 – 'Simon, son of John,' – or Jonas – 'do you love Me *agapao*?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' And He said, 'Okay, *poimaino*, shepherd My sheep.'

"Third time, He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' – and this time He dropped down to Peter's word, and He questioned even the lower level love that Peter thought he could get away with – 'do you really have strong affection for Me?'" This really hurt. This probes into Peter's heart. This is a spiritual biopsy; cuts some of Peter's soul open.

"And Peter was grieved," – *lupeo*, to have a pain, a deep pain or grief in the heart, not because it was the third time. He needed three time. After all, he had denied the Lord three times. It wasn't because it was the third time, it was because the third time the Lord questioned even the love that he thought he could get by with. And again he calls on omniscience. "He said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'"

It's a lot like Isaiah, isn't it? "Lord, you don't want me. I'm a man with unclean lips," Isaiah 6. And then in the vision you hear the Lord, "Who will go for us?" There's nobody in the vision but Isaiah. This is not a rhetorical question. I don't think he said, "Here am I, Lord, send me. I'm a dirty-mouthed man; send me." He probably said, "Lord, You could send me." The Lord said, "Go, you're My man."

It's always clay pots, isn't it? With all our flaws and all our failures, all He asks out of us is that in His omniscience He knows our love is not perfect, but it's real, it's real.

I didn't know what it was to love the Lord as a young man, because I didn't know enough about Him to grow that love. Shepherding is merely an extension of sanctifying love into serving love. You say, "Well, I'm a weak guy – struggling, failing; sometimes an unclean lips experience, lack of self-confidence. I'm unworthy." "Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" We've tried this week to elevate Christ to increase your love.

Now this love has a cost, verse 18: "Okay, Peter, you love Me? Truly, truly, I say to you," – 25 times in the gospel of John we have that little formula meaning something very important; this is a verbal call to attention. "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself," – put on your own clothes – "walk wherever you wished;" – you did what you wanted – "but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands."

What in the world does that mean? It's a euphemism for crucifixion. "When you're old, you're going to stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." How do you know it's his crucifixion? Because the next statement is, "He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God." History tells us he was crucified.

"Deny yourself," – and then what? – "pick up your cross." This is a living illustration of Luke 9:23. "Peter, you will be arrested, and you will be executed by crucifixion. You will be a martyr. Welcome back into the ministry. Remember when I told you, if they hated Me, they will hate you?"

You say, "Oh, Lord, give the guy a break. What are You telling him that for? Do you want to live your whole life thinking around every corner is your crucifixion? Why did you tell him that?" I think it was the best news Peter ever heard in his life. "What?" Yeah, because what it told Peter is this: "The next time you face death for Me, you will not deny Me." I think he lived in the triumph of that promise. That's the best news he ever heard. That steeled him for the future.

And then on the Day of Pentecost, he was given the fullness of the Spirit, and he was dynamite right down to being crucified. And when he was to be crucified, he didn't think he was worthy to be crucified like his Lord, so he asked to be crucified upside-down. Can you imagine him saying, "I'm not going to fail again. When it happens, I'm not going to fail again. I'm not going to fail."

He had no confidence in himself. He had no history of faithfulness. In the face of danger he was a disaster. The promise that he would face death triumphantly and die was the best news he could have ever heard. This is like Luke 14:26, "If any man comes after Me, and doesn't hate his own life, he can't be My disciple."

"Do you love Me? Do you love Me enough to deny yourself? Do you love Me enough to take up a

cross if that's what I ask? Do you love Me that much?"

There's one other component. This is love that not only demands a sacrifice, but it demands obedience. Look at verse 19 again. And when he had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me!'" Again, those are the three components of Luke 9:23, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Me." That's what it means to be a disciple. He says, "Follow Me!" Love that sacrifices in the face of death is love that obeys in life.

But like everything else with Peter, everything is hard, everything. Verse 20: "The Lord says, "Follow Me!" Next statement, "Peter turning around." Give me a break. This is impossible. Move down one notch to Andrew or somebody else. Are you kidding me?

"He turns around" – he can't take one step following – "and he saw the disciple whom Jesus loved" – John never calls himself by his name. Why would he when he call himself the disciple whom Jesus loved? He turns around and he sees John, the one who not only is the disciple whom Jesus loved, but who also leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" John just – he can't get over the fact of the privileges that have been given to him to be next to Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.

"So Peter turns around, sees John, and he says, 'Lord,' – verse 21 – 'what about him?'" I mean this is remediation beyond comprehension.

And then you have really one of the funniest statements. And Jesus didn't say a lot of funny things, but this is funny. He says, "If I want him till remain until I come, what is that to you? If he lives to the second coming it's none of your business." That's called hyperbole. That's not only hyperbole, that's sarcasm. That is dripping sarcasm. I mean and that's what you say when you finally become so exasperated with your kids that you resort to dripping hyperbolic sarcasm.

My dad used to say to me, "You will never amount to a hill of beans." My dad was not into elevating self image. Amounting to a hill of beans had nothing to do with what I was doing. I wasn't working with beans or anything like that. It was just a hyperbolic sarcastic way to get a frustrated point across about my lack of quality behavior.

"What about him? I'm going to die, right? I'm going to die. What about him?" I'm telling you, Peter is a constant project. This is a project. So you're all worried about the people you have to disciple in your church; have a sympathy here, right?

"It's irrelevant," Jesus says. "It is irrelevant. If I want him to live till the second coming." And so, of course, the rumor went out, "You know what I heard? John is going to live till the second coming." We call that the grace vine.

"The saying went out among the brethren" – verse 23 – "that the disciple would not die. Yet Jesus didn't say to him that he wouldn't die, only that, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?'" It's irrelevant. Well, they became buddies, didn't they, Peter and John.

From Acts 2 to 11, John didn't say anything. Peter did all the preaching. You say, "Well, maybe John didn't have anything to say." Oh, yeah, he did. When he finally opened his mouth: gospel of John, 1

John, 2 John, 3 John, the book of Revelation. So he was holding it in.

So this is emphatic the statement that our Lord gives in the original: “You follow Me! You” – verse 22 – “you follow Me! Forget about anybody else.” Again, this is Luke 9:23, “Deny yourself, face death, follow Me.” John did die 30 years after Peter by the end of the first century, most likely on the Isle of Patmos, 30 years really after both Peter and Paul were martyred.

So the gospel of John, the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ rich, exalted, theological, profound, presenting the Son of God as the I Am, demonstrating His glorious deity by words and works, leading to the massive glorious conclusion of chapter 20, verse 30 and 31: “Many other signs Jesus performed in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these have been written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name.” That glorious conclusion is where the gospel reaches its zenith.

That’s kind of where we are tonight, we’ve gone to the heights with Christ. Tomorrow you’re going to go back with a thud. We tumble from the end of chapter 20 from the pristine heights of glory down to the difficulty of putting this glory in earthen vessels. That’s us. And all the Lord asks is this: “Do you” – what? – “love Me? I’ll accept less than a perfect love, but not less than a real love.”

The benediction at the end of Ephesians: “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.” That’s not the elevation of the love, that’s the nature of the love. It’s a real love. It’s an incorruptible love.

“If you love Me. Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Go feed My lambs. Go feed My sheep. Deny yourself, love Me. Be willing to die, if that’s in the plan, out of love for Me. Live obediently, and that is in the plan, loving Me.”

Peter learned his lesson. Turn to 1 Peter 5, and that’s where we’ll wrap up, 1 Peter 5. Now Peter’s going to talk to us as a faithful shepherd. I’m glad he finally got here, aren’t you?

Peter writes, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you,” – that’s us – “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,” – you know what he’s doing? He’s repeating exactly what Jesus said to him three times – “exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God, not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; not yet as lording it over to 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.”

Peter has gone from being a disciple who needed to be disciple to becoming our teacher, our inspired teacher, telling us to shepherd the flock of God, because, as we read earlier, “though you have not seen Him, you” – what? – “love Him.” I love how Peter closes his letter. “Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.”

Our Father, we come to You tonight with such gratitude, thankfulness. We don’t deserve to be in this ministry. You started with saying it’s a mercy, it’s a mercy; and we fall so short. And yet if we love You, not with a perfect love, but with an incorruptible love, that’s enough. We come down from the heights of the glories of Christ that we’ve seen all week long, and it’s all been deposited in us, clay

pots – the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ in a clay pot. Such a paradox. But then, of course, the explanation for our ministry could never be us, it can only be You.

We love You. We want to love You more. Increase our love. May we never, ever, ever stop searching to find Your glory everywhere it is revealed, so that we, by the work of the Holy Spirit, can be changed into Your image from one level of glory, and move toward that highest of all commands to love You our Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's our prayer. We ask these things for Your glory alone. Amen.

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