

Introduction:

Have you ever failed Jesus repeatedly? How did that make you feel? In those times, we want to turn to Him, but what will He say? Our prayer lives shut down. Our relationships suffer. Old habits return. How could Jesus ever take us back? In these times, one Bible character comforts me: Peter. How could Jesus take back that brash disciple who arrogantly claimed he would die with Jesus, but denied Him instead? Yet, in **John 21:15-23**, Jesus took Peter back. As we listen to their conversation, we can be comforted by the awesome love Jesus has for us, even when we have failed, and we can learn the love He desires from us when we return.

Discussion:

- I. The love Jesus gives to us.
 - A. Jesus still wants us in His family, even after we have failed.
 1. Peter may not have brought the soldiers to the garden, but was his betrayal any less? We would all understand if Jesus cut Peter loose. Yet, Jesus still loved Peter. He still wanted Peter to love Him. Therefore, He recalled Him to His side and commissioned Him to work.
 2. Have you felt the reality of sin in your life? I know I have. How could Jesus take us back into His loving arms and welcome us into fellowship with Him again? Yet, this conversation gives us hope and comfort. Jesus is not a master who gives us a chance and then cut us off when we fail. As long as we are willing to come back and humble ourselves before Him, He will take us back. As **I John 1:8-9** says, if we will confess our sins to Him, He will forgive us.
 - B. Jesus will accept us where we are.
 1. This is one of the few cases in which we lose part of the point in translation. Jesus and Peter actually use two different Greek words for love: “agapao” and “phileo.” According to Vine’s, these terms are not different in intensity. Jesus is not saying, “Do you love me?” while Peter responds, “You know I really like you.” “Agapao” love indicates selfless, ready to serve at all costs love. “Phileo” love represents an intense affection based on constant relationship. The first says, “I will do anything for you.” The second says, “I esteem you above anything else.”
 2. Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love [agapao] Me more than these?” In **Matthew 26:33**, Peter was willing to say he would love Jesus when no one else would. In **John 21:15**, however, he had been humbled. He was not willing to make that claim again. Instead he said, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You.” “You are the most important person in my life, Lord.” Instead of saying, “That’s not good enough,” Jesus asked again, but without the comparison, “Do you love [agapao] Me?” Peter was unwilling to use Jesus’ term “agapao.” He responded, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love [phileo] You.” “Lord, You know You are more important to me than anything else. But having failed so miserably, I am just not sure I can do all You ask.” Instead of saying, “That is not going to cut it,” Jesus asked a third time, but with different wording, “Do you love [phileo] Me?” Jesus accepted Peter where he was.
 3. One of the number one concerns expressed by new Christians is the fact that they know they cannot do what God is asking. Despite their intent not to, they are certain they will sin again. Jesus asks for complete, selfless, unconditional devotion. Who among us believes he will do it? Gratefully, Christianity is about growing, not about being already perfect (**II Peter 1:5-8**). Jesus will not reject us because we are not conformed to His image yet. We came into His fold because we loved Him. But even now we are still growing to be more like Him.
 - C. Jesus has a place and work for us, pushing us forward.
 1. Despite Peter’s earlier failure and his unwillingness at the present to step up and fully accept Jesus’ challenge, He still had a place for Peter. Without looking back, Jesus focused Peter ahead on the job laid out for him, saying, “Peter, if I am really that important to you, then do this for Me—Take care of my followers. Feed My sheep.”
 2. How many of us look at our sins and wonder what work we can do? Jesus has a place for us. He brought us into His fold, so we could grow and help others. He wants us to quit looking back and start looking forward. Instead of thinking about our past failures, we need to look ahead and do our best. We must forget what lies behind, reaching forward to grasp Jesus’ will for our lives so we may lay hold of eternal life (**Philippians 3:13-14**).

- D. Jesus gives us a clear picture of success.
1. **John 21:18** may seem morbid to us. In fact, we may think it odd for Jesus to bring up the great sacrifice Peter is going to have to make at a time when Peter is just not sure he is able to cut it. However, look at this statement from a different angle. A few weeks earlier, Peter had assured Jesus he would die for Him. But, he failed. Jesus' statement in **vs. 18** is telling Peter, "Though you failed in the past, a day is coming when you will love me enough to die for me. You will succeed." Jesus painted a picture of Peter's coming success.
 2. The same is true for us. Repeatedly, God gives us pictures of success. Peter's story is one. If Peter could succeed, so can we. Passages like **Romans 8:28-39** and **I John 1:8-9** help us see that God is working on our side and if we simply return to Him, confessing our sins to Him, loving Him, we will become like Jesus. God wants us to know we will succeed.

II. The love Jesus expects from us.

- A. He expects us to follow Him, sacrificing ourselves for His will.
1. In **John 21:18-19**, Jesus laid out Peter's responsibility; follow and sacrifice himself for Jesus. That would ultimately take place in his death. But Peter's sacrifice was not just in death. Peter was to sacrifice his life. Instead of focusing on self, he was to be devoted to Jesus' sheep, serving and feeding them.
 2. Jesus sacrificed Himself for us. Now He asks us to sacrifice ourselves (**Romans 12:1-2**). We are to be living sacrifices, no longer controlling our lives by our own wills, but with Jesus' will. We must follow Jesus' example and live as He lived, sacrificing ourselves, our comforts, our pleasures, our desires for His will (**Galatians 2:20**).
- B. He expects us to care for His sheep.
1. For Peter, loving Jesus meant taking care of Jesus' sheep. Three times He said, "Feed my lambs." "Tend my sheep." "Feed my sheep." Peter's job was not about providing for himself, but about looking out for Jesus' disciples.
 2. We are not apostles. But if we love Jesus, the Bible says we will love our brethren as well (**I John 4:20-21**). We are responsible to look out for others and their benefit, taking care of them (**Romans 15:2; Philippians 2:3-4**). Jesus expects this of us.
- C. He expects us to do the job, even when we do not feel like it.
1. Even though Peter did not feel he measured up to Jesus' questions, Jesus still had work for Peter to do. Jesus did not back off just because Peter did not feel up to it. Whether Peter could say "agapao" or only "phileo," he was still charged with feeding Jesus' sheep.
 2. Jesus is no different with us. He loves us. He died for us. He will accept us where we are. Yet, we may not live however we choose. No matter how we feel, He wants us to do what He asks. "If you love me, keep my commandments" (**John 14:15**).
- D. He expects us to stay focused on Him and our duty, not getting distracted by others.
1. As this conversation was winding up, Peter saw John and wanted to know about him. "What's going to happen to him? Will he love You? Will he sacrifice himself for You? Will he do what I am going to do?" Jesus explained that his duty was to follow Jesus, not spend his time wondering how Jesus was going to use any of His other disciples.
 2. We would do so much better if we would follow this same advice. We should not spend our time comparing our lives to others. If they can do more or less than we can, so what? Our job is not to be better than our brethren. Our job is to be what we can be, using our abilities to serve the Lord. The parable of the talents in **Matthew 25:14-30** drives this point home. We are to use what we have to serve God, not compare it to others.

Conclusion:

Though what Jesus expects of us is challenging, His ever present love provides comfort and encouragement to continue on. We began the sermon remembering those times when we had failed Jesus and the great swell of fear and uncertainty they brought us. Perhaps you were not remembering. Perhaps you are there right now. If Jesus would take Peter back, He will accept you. Why not turn to Him right now?