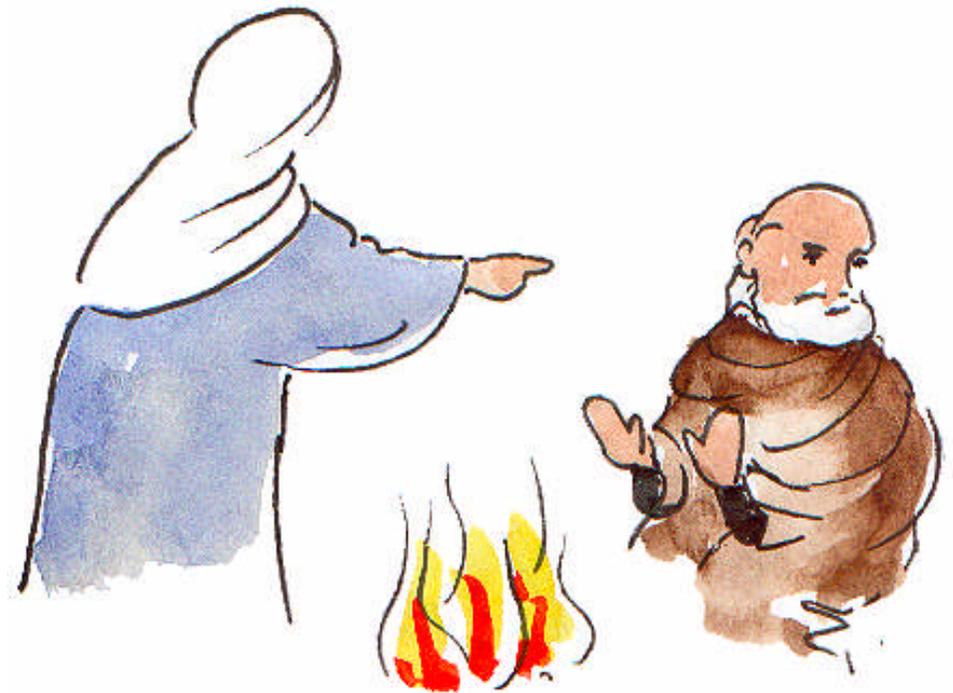


"Love For The Lord"



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*Do you really
love Him?*

by Pastor David Legge

“Love For The Lord”

Our Scripture reading is taken from John’s gospel 21. We’re looking at specifically ‘Love for the Lord’. Verse 1: *“After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing”*.

Now we have to understand that that was an expression of his despair, not only of the fact that his dreams had been shattered, and though the Lord Jesus was now risen from the dead, don’t forget Peter’s mighty failure - perhaps the greatest failure that we read of within the Scriptures: his betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ on the eve of the crucifixion. *“They say unto him, We also go with thee”*, because remember that it wasn’t just Peter who forsook Him, but it says all the disciples forsook Him - the only one that we find around the cross was John the Beloved. *“We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep”*, we end our reading at verse 17.

William Shakespeare expressed what he thought was the essence of true love in his Sonnet 116 which reads, you may be familiar with the words:

Love ought to be our life in Christ. Philip Brooks put it like this: ‘Duty makes us do things well, but love makes us do them beautifully’. Saint Augustine was asked the question on one occasion: ‘What is the secret of the Christian life? What is a code that we can live our lives by?’, and he simply said this: ‘Love God, and do as you like’. That is not licence, for if you love God you will not love sin, if you love God you will not love self, you will love the Lord of all your heart.

The first advice that I can give you if you want to love Christ more, is to spend some time with Him, and you will grow to love Him, you will grow to be like Him, and you will cry from your heart: ‘Abba Father, dearest Father I love you, I love you, I love you’. F.W. Faber said:

*‘O Jesus, Jesus, dearest Lord
Forgive me if I say,
For very love, Thy sacred name
A thousand times a day’*.

Do you love Him like that? In future booklets, God willing, we’ll look at the fourth love towards God, the outward love, the love of others, the love for the Lord’s people and the love for the lost.

*Father, teach us to love Thee, and to love Thy Son, and to love the Godhead, three-in-one.
To Thy glory we pray, Amen.*



Other Booklets in this series:

“The Morning Watch”

“The Fullness Of The Spirit”

“Temptation”

“Obedience”

“Fruit”

“Guidance”

“Love For Others”

“Love For The Lost”

*'I love my God,
But with no love of mine
For I have none to give;
I love Thee, Lord,
But all that love is Thine,
For by Thy life I live.
I am as nothing, and rejoice to be
Emptied and lost and swallowed up in Thee'.*

How do you love the Lord today? J.C. Ryle said this: 'Of all the things that will surprise us in the resurrection morning, this I believe will surprise us most: that we did not love Christ more before we died'. Who of us cannot sing:

*'Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is weak and faint'.*

A man or a woman's spiritual health is directly proportionate to their love for the Lord Jesus. If you're struggling in your Christian experience today, could it be that your motivation is something other than love, whatever it may be? You just don't love the Lord enough. We're all guilty of that. A man on one occasion was a tyrant as a husband, and he insisted on his wife doing absolutely everything for him. He made her rise early in the morning and prepare his breakfast. He was very demanding with regard to her care of the house. He required a strict accounting of all the money that was spent on groceries and clothes for the children. Then he died, and later the woman married another man who was the complete opposite: loving, tender, unselfish. One day she was going through the effects of her first husband, and she found a list of all the things that he had required her to do - and to her amazement, she realised that she was doing all the same things for her second husband, yet he didn't make her do them, she did them because she loved him.

Romans 7 verse 1 tells us: *'Ye know, brethren, that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren',* the illustration of marriage, the death and ability to marry another husband, is how we have become dead to rules and laws by the body of Christ and by His death, *'that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter'.*

*'...Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his beight be taken...
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom'.*

But none has matched the beauty of Paul's inspired definition of love found in 1 Corinthians 13. If you turn to it you find these words: *'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth',* and at the end we read, *'And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love'.*

Now I'm sure you've heard the expression: 'Love makes the world go round' - I'm not sure if that's true or not, it certainly helps the world go round a little bit better, but that ought to be true as a statement to the Christian. It ought to be love that makes our world go round. Love ought to be the motivation of everything that we are, and everything that we do for Christ, because Paul has defined love as being, if you like, the foundation and the chief motivation of the Christian experience - so much that he says: 'Without love, we are nothing, and our Christian testimony is nothing'. Now let the import of that statement not run off you like water off a duck's back, let it not miss you and hit the wall, but take it firmly between the eyes: that it doesn't matter, Paul says, what your devotion to God is - even if your devotion goes to such an extent that you're willing to give your body to be burned in martyrdom, if you don't do that in the expression and motivation of love you're nothing, and that means nothing. No matter what your service is to others, you give everything that you have, sell it and give to the poor, if it's not an expression of an act of Christian, agape, divine love it means nothing to God, and really means nothing to men. Love is everything, and if you don't have love as a Christian you are nothing!

Now we saw in our study on 'Fruit' in another little booklet in this series that love basically undergirded all the fruit of the Spirit. It certainly was the first fruit of the Spirit that is mentioned in Galatians 5:22 and 23, 'love' and then we go on to read about 'joy,

peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance’, but we defined all those other fruit of the Spirit as just being different expressions of love. Love undergirds all the other fruit, they’re all different expressions and manifestations of it telling us that the Christian life is to be a life of love. Our peace is to be love resting in Christ, our prayer is to be love keeping a tryst and an appointment with the Son of God, our sympathy is to be love tenderly feeling for others, our enthusiasm ought to be love working in our heart, our hope ought to be love’s expectation. In the future our patience ought to be love waiting upon God; our faithfulness ought to be love standing firm, sticking fast for Christ; our humility ought to be love submitting to His will, and even at times the will of others; our modesty as Christians ought to be love keeping ourselves out of the way, and pushing Christ to the fore. Our soul winning ought to be love pleading with others; our sanctification, our holiness ought to be love in action as, practically, we live out the love of Christ to others. The fruit of love is because the root of our Christian faith is love, because God is love!

Isn’t that what John tells us in 1 John 4 in two places? Therefore love is our life’s origin, John 3:16: *‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son’*. The reason why we are Christians is because God loves, God is love, and He expressed that love - Romans 5:8 - *‘When we were yet sinners, Christ died for us’*, and that is how we have come to know that love in an intimate way. It is the origin of our Christian life, but not only is it the beginning of our Christian life, it ought to be the source and continual motivation of our Christian life - love! First Corinthians 13 and verse 4 onwards expresses what that love ought to be. You may remember that when we looked at the fruit of the Spirit I asked you to replace the word ‘love’ or ‘charity’ in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians with the word ‘Jesus’, to show that all we have in this chapter is an expression of the character of Christ. Paul is telling us that we as Christians ought to be living the life of Christ before other people. Then I asked you not to substitute ‘Jesus’ for the word ‘love’, but to put your own name, and to ask the question: does your own name fit into that chapter? Do you express such a love, the love of Christ to others? That is what the Spirit wants to make every single child of God, into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. He wants to reproduce the life of Christ in us, that it might be seen before others; the life of God in Christ in these weak clay vessels. If we are truly living with the personality and the characteristics of Christ in us, we will be manifesting love continually because Christ is our life, and He is love. Romans says that the love of God is to be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, the very life of God in us.

Now that has happened at salvation, that is the origin of our salvation - the love of God being manifest to us, the Holy Spirit of love being planted in us. But do you know something? That isn’t where it ends: we have a responsibility in our everyday pilgrimage of the Christian life to continue to dwell upon that love of Christ, and draw upon the source, the motivation for our continuance in the faith. That’s why Jude says that we are to build up ourselves in our faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keeping yourselves in the

have a filio for me?’. He had asked twice: ‘Do you have an agape love for me? Do you have an agape love for me?’, and the third time, after Peter has replied twice ‘I have an affection for You’, the Lord says - if you like - ‘Peter, do you even have an affection for me? Do you even have that much?’.

Well, how do you think Peter felt? The first question challenged Peter’s stone-likeness and superiority of his love. The second question was asking whether he had an agape love at all. The third even challenged Peter’s humble claim to a less exalted affectionate love. Peter, the Bible says, was grieved, literally pained - but out of his pain he answered: ‘Lord, You know all things, You know that I have a friendship love for You’. He cast himself on the omniscience of the Lord. You see Peter did love Jesus, but at this moment do you know what had happened to Peter? He had been stripped of all his illusions, all his self-righteousness had been taken from him and been demolished as he stands before the holy Christ of God. What the Lord Jesus was doing was performing spiritual surgery on Peter’s heart. You remember at the last fire that they stood eye-to-eye at, there were three questions that were followed by three denials. Now over this fire that Christ had carefully laid, there were three questions, but now there are three confessions, and three commissions from the Lord Jesus Christ as Peter is restored in the love of God.

Which Love Do You Have?

Deuteronomy 6 tells us: *‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might’*. The Pharisees who debated so much over the laws, which were the ones that were important to keep and which weren’t, came and asked the Lord Jesus in Matthew 22: *‘What is the greatest commandment?’*. He replied: *‘To love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and to love your neighbour as yourself’*. My friend, what we’re saying is: it’s possible to be the best preacher in the world, the best Christian writer in the world, the best thinker, the best communicator, the best songster, and not love Christ! You can do it all without loving Him! One of the greatest exercises any of us could do today is just imagine yourself alone along the shore with Christ. There you face Him, silhouetted behind Him is the shore and sea of eternity, and He’s looking at you with His loving, piercing, all-knowing eyes - and He says: ‘David, do you love me?’. You have to answer honestly, because He knows all things, as Peter said. You must answer like Peter, because you can’t be helped unless you’re honest before Him and confess your need.

How are you living your Christian life? Is it through duty, is it through law, is it through fear? Or is it through love? Do you love the Lord Jesus? The love that God wants expressed to the Lord Jesus from you is His own love, the love that He had for the Son from before the world began. Not just an affection, and that’s good, but it’s His own love reciprocated back to Him by the Holy Spirit in our hearts. As Madam Guyon put it in her poem:

down so badly. What do you think he felt like? How do you think he even looked? There is silence, he is speechless. Then Jesus breaks the silence first with a piercing surgical question: *'Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these?'*

Now great speculation has been made what the 'these' were. Was it the boats? His fishing trade that he had gone back to? Was it the fish that they had drawn? Was He talking about his friends, or his family? Or was He talking about was his love greater than the love of the other disciples? Whatever it was, the Lord was asking him to make a comparison of his love for Christ to his love for other things. I think it probably was the love of the other disciples. He calls him 'Simon', He doesn't give him his divine title that the Lord had give him, 'Peter', which means 'stone', or something that is rock-like, hard, immovable. That was simply calculated to cut him to the bone - Peter who, all through his life, had this personality and characteristic of making himself look unmoveable, the hard big 'rock' fisherman would not be shaken: 'I'll go for You anywhere, Lord. You'll never wash my feet! I'll stand up for You'. You remember him with the sword in the garden, and then in the Upper Room, what was it he said? 'Even if all fall away on account of You', in other words, 'Even if the rest of these boys, these disciples, fail You and betray You, I will never!'. Jesus is piercing him, using this old name: 'Simon, who is not such a hard rock and stone now, do you really love me more than these?'

He answered by saying, if you look at it: 'Yes, Lord; You know' - and I give you the Greek rendering - 'You know the affection I have toward You'. Jesus used the word 'agape', which means 'divine love', the greatest love of all. Peter couldn't bring himself to use that word, and he just replied with the word 'filio': 'Yes, Lord; You know that I have an affection for You'. What agony Peter must have felt, that he couldn't bring himself, as Christ unblinkingly looks through His eyes, past the smoke into Peter's eyes of failure, and the question hangs in the air: 'Do you love me?' - and all that Peter can say is: 'I have an affection for You'! The word 'filio' is a word that means 'love', or 'friendship', or 'deep affection'. The reply that the Lord gave him was: 'Well, if you have that love, tend my lambs'. In other words, 'If you have what you claim then you may serve me'.

But then there's a second surgical question that He says: *'Simon, do you love Me?'*. He leaves out the comparisons now, He's not saying: 'Do you love me more than these, or this person?', but He's just asking the simple question, dropping all comparisons of others: 'Do you really love me? Do you agape-love me?'. Not just a 'filio' love, but an 'agape' love. He's saying: 'This is the bottom line: do you love me with this love?'. Peter says: 'Yes, Lord; You know again, I have an affection for You, I have a filio for You'. Now that was not a bad answer, or a wrong answer, because Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 16: if anyone does not have a friendship love, a filio, for the Lord, a curse be upon him. We all have to have an affectionate love for the Lord. So the Lord said: 'Shepherd my sheep' to him.

Then there's a third question, which literally was this from the Lord to Peter: 'Do do you

love of God. So we have a responsibility to keep drawing of the source of God's love - so I'm asking you right away today: how is your love life? I'm talking about your love life to the Lord, and your expression of love to others, how is it? Because God's word is saying there's nothing more important than this, because love is the lubricant of the Christian life. Love, if you like, is the oil that makes the cogs go round. A lot of people get into problems in their Christian experience and backslide and dry up spiritually, because the motivation for their Christian life is not love to the Lord and not love to others. They serve Christ out of duty, or they follow a list of rules and regulations and laws, and they can't keep going on their own steam of self-righteousness - or maybe they operate on fear, they fear God in some kind of terrifying way, or they fear a denomination or religious system or code. My friend, the motivation and source of your Christian experience ought to be love! You ought to have started with love, you ought to be continuing with love, it ought to be the motivation and the source of everything you are as a Christian - and if it is not, you will fail!

Four Loves

Now let's move on, because basically there are four loves that the Christian will encounter and have to face up to one way or another in his life. They are really, in my thinking at least, two pairs of loves that are pulling in two different directions. Two of them pull us away from God, and two of them pull us towards God - but also, in their own right, they, each four them, pull in different directions. Let me explain what I mean: the first two pull us away from God - loves that we will experience in our life. The first that pulls us away from God is a love that pulls us in a downward direction, it is a love for sin. The second love that will pull us away from God is the love that pulls us in an inward direction, and that is a love for self. The third love is a love that pulls us toward God, and that pulls us in an upward direction to the Lord. Then the fourth love that, God willing, we will look at in our next booklet, is a love that pulls us toward God in an outward direction, expressing it to others. We'll look specifically, God willing, in that booklet, at the love that we have to others - the love to the Lord's people, and the love to the lost.

A Love For Sin

At the moment I want us to look at these first three. Let's look at the first pair which express love that draws us away from God, and the first is a downward love - a love for sin. Now although we're converted, and of course we have to remember that, and I'm trusting that I'm speaking to most people this morning who are Christians. You may think: 'Well, this isn't a problem for me any more, I don't love sin', but the fact of the matter is: you, even though you're saved, still have an old nature. That old nature loves sin. Now, when you get saved, God gives you a new nature, and that loves the things of God - righteousness and holiness. But you don't get rid of your old nature, and it just depends on which nature you feed, as to which will have the preeminence and dominate

in your life. So if you're a Christian, and you feed the old sinful nature with sin and temptation, it's no surprise that you're defeated in the Christian life. The only way to have victory is to feed the new nature with righteousness.

Now, because we still have our old nature, the more we feed it the more we will love sin. But alternatively, the more we love Christ, the less we will love our sin. This is elementary, but so many Christians fail to grasp it early in their Christian life: true love for Christ will mean a hatred for all types of sin. The whole book of 1 John, the little epistle almost at the end of the Bible, is on this theme: that you cannot say that you love God if you're living a life of sin. You can't serve God and money, you can't serve God and sin, you can only serve God exclusively and love God exclusively. Martin Lloyd Jones, the great preacher who has now gone to be with the Lord, said: 'If you claim to love Christ, and yet are living an unholy life, there is only one thing to say about you: you're a barefaced liar'. Those are strong words, aren't they? But John said those words: 'If we continue in sin, and say that we love God, we make ourselves a liar and the truth is not in us'. You can't sin and love God, you can't love sin and live a life of love with God, because love is expressed in one word: obedience. In a previous study we looked at 'Obedience', but the Lord Jesus tells us this: *'If you love me'*, He said to His disciples, *'You will keep my commandments'*. Listen: if you love Christ, you will have put aside the love for sin, that love that pulls you downward and away from God.

The Love Of Self

We must move on, for the second love that pulls us away from God is an inward love, the love of self. You have to realise that not only do we love sin, but we are created as human beings that we must love something or other. If we don't express that love toward God, we will inevitably express it toward something else - usually ourselves. So you either love sin or yourself, and the Lord Jesus expressed this in Luke chapter 14, where He told His disciples that if they were going to follow Him they would have to hate father and mother, husband and wife, children for His sake; they would have to deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow Him, or they could not be His disciples. Now you might say: 'Well, that's a very negative statement', but it's not! What the Lord Jesus is saying is: 'If you really want to love people the way you ought to love people, you have to give me your exclusive and best love, the priority in your life'. C.S. Lewis put it like this: 'When I love God more than I love my earthly dearest, then I shall love my earthly dearest more than I do now'. Christ first, and then you will experience and express the very love of Christ to others! But you cannot love yourself and love the Lord! You've heard the expression in the cowboy movies, 'This town is not big enough for the both of us'. Well, our hearts are not big enough for self and the Saviour, for sin and the Saviour. His love will not share a place with anything else in our hearts. He yearns after exclusivity, priority in everything that we are.

Love For The Lord

Pulling us away from God is this downward love of sin, pulling us away from God is this inward love of self, but this is the one I want to dwell on: pulling us toward God ought to be this upward love to the Lord. The greatest and best thing that can be said of any man or woman is that he loved the Lord. Augustine, that great saint of God, said: 'I would hate my own soul if I did not find it loving God'. The great people of this world in the church of Jesus Christ and Christian history were simply those who loved God more than other people. They had a passion and a love and a zeal for God, and I honestly believe when I look into my own heart and I look into the church at large in the West, that we have no greater need today than to fall in love with Jesus all over again. Could the Lord not say to us, as He did to the church at Ephesus in the book of the Revelation: *'Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love'*. Have you left your first love? Is there another place in your heart that has preeminence over His place?

I think that the greatest dramatic question about our love for the Lord is found in John 21 that we read in our introduction, if you will look at it for a moment. The backdrop of this dramatic scene is the early morning Sea of Tiberius. The stage is a rocky beach set with a glowing fire. The characters present, if you read in verses 1 and 2, are Jesus, the apostle Peter and six other disciples. Now to understand this scene fully you've got to appreciate the sense of failure that gripped Peter's life at this time. His soul is anguished and troubled, he feels that he has completely let down the Lord Jesus, and he has backslidden into a place of no return. You remember the eve of the crucifixion, he denied the Lord Jesus three times, and the final denial was a sleazy, shameful cursing and swearing as he said: 'I do not know this man that you're talking about!'. What made it more painful for Peter was that when he said that, he didn't see the Master coming out of an inner chamber - he never realised until the last moment that the Saviour saw it all and heard it all! We read in the Scriptures that their eyes met, and the meeting of their eyes must have been electric, it must have been like a dagger going into the soul of Peter. Behind them was the echo of the cock growing in the dawn's darkness, and there was a cry from Peter's heart: 'I have failed Him, after everything that I said I would do for Him, I have denied Him!'. Jesus' crystal clear, x-ray, piercing eyes looked into Peter's heart, and weighed him, and found him wanting. The Bible says Peter went out into the night and he wept bitterly. Irrevocably he had failed Christ!

Well, the scene that we have in John 21, as the morning mists are rising from the lake, we find some of the same characters. We find Peter, we find the Lord Jesus, and just like the night of betrayal at the eve of the crucifixion they're standing face-to-face. The smoke of another fire is wafting into the air - can you imagine how Peter must have felt? The Bible doesn't tell us, but perhaps his heart, I'm sure, was racing, his stomach was churning, his face perhaps was blushing - and it wasn't the heat of the fire. His eyes were welling up as he thought of the similar scene not so long ago when he had let the Lord