

¹⁵ So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” ¹⁶ He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep. ¹⁸ Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” ¹⁹ This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”

Text: John 21:15-19 A 7/16/17 Exodus 3:1-15 Acts 9:1-22 Ps. 86 Resp. Ps. 51
Hymns: 764, 32 (tune #473), 423, 416

FOLLOW JESUS

- 1. We often don't follow Jesus as we should**
- 2. Jesus forgives us and enables us to follow Him**

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

– 1 –

In the first few centuries, Christians were severely persecuted by more than one of the emperors of the Roman Empire. In the face of persecution some of the Christians declared that they had renounced Jesus Christ and returned to their pagan beliefs, and some even handed over the names of other Christians to the Roman authorities. These Christians who became weak in the face of persecution came to be called “Lapsi” by the other Christians. Later, when some of the Lapsi wanted to rejoin their former congregations, there was a big controversy among the Christians over whether or not they should be allowed to.

Renouncing one's faith in Jesus to avoid persecution is a gravely serious matter in God's eyes. Jesus says, “Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 10:32-33). Today we're going to look at how Jesus dealt with Peter after Peter had denied Him in order to avoid persecution.

Before Peter denied Jesus, Jesus warned him that he would. Peter's response was, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” (Mt. 26:35). Peter meant what he said. His problem was that he was relying too much on himself and how strong he thought his faith was, instead of relying on Jesus. The Bible warns us, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). The devil is deadly serious about bringing us down and destroying our faith. There's no way we can fight and defeat the devil on our own. We're absolutely dependent on Jesus to give us the victory against the devil's attacks.

Peter ended up denying Jesus three times. After the third time Jesus was led near where Peter was. Jesus looked at Peter in a way that showed Peter He knew he had denied Him. The result was that Peter “wept bitterly” (Lk. 22:62), deeply sorry for what he had done.

There are times when we have the opportunity to stand up for our Lord and His Word, but we keep our mouth shut and maybe even ‘go along with the crowd’ so that people won’t make fun of us or worse for our Christian beliefs. We want to be accepted and liked and praised, not ridiculed and persecuted. Our natural inclination is to love the world, and to want the world to love us. John admonishes us, *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever”* (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

At the same time Jesus was on trial to be put to death, Peter was denying He even knew Him. Our Savior was misunderstood, misjudged, betrayed, lied about, beaten, and finally crucified in order to save us. How often don’t we fail to live for Him and let our light shine for Him as we should? Our Savior suffered so willingly for us. Are we willing to suffer for our Savior’s sake?

– 2 –

Our text takes place after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, reminding Peter of the three times He denied Jesus. We’re told, *“Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’”* Peter had wept bitter tears of repentance, and Jesus had forgiven him. Jesus was now making sure that Peter had learned from what he had done. Jesus first asks Peter, *“Do you love Me more than these?”* In the original text Jesus uses the word for the highest form of love the Greek language can express. He also asks Peter if he still thinks he loves Jesus more than the other disciples love Him. Peter replies, *“Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”* In the original Peter uses a different word for “love” than Jesus uses. Peter does not claim to love Jesus with the highest form of love. Peter no longer claims to love Jesus more than the others do. Jesus tells Peter, *“Feed My lambs.”* Jesus then asks Peter, *“Do you love Me?”* This time Jesus doesn’t ask if Peter loves Him more than the others do. But Jesus still uses the word for the highest form of love. Again Peter replies, *“Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”* Peter again uses a different word for “love” than Jesus does, again not claiming to love Jesus with the highest form of love. Jesus tells Peter, *“Tend My sheep.”* Jesus again asks Peter, *“Do you love Me?”* This time in the original Jesus doesn’t use the word for the highest form of love. He comes down to Peter’s humbled level and uses the same word for love that Peter had been using. Peter replies, *“Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”* Peter was no longer thinking about loving Jesus more, and being more faithful to Him, than the others. He was simply thinking that he loved his Lord Jesus, and wanted to continue to follow Him. Jesus tells him, *“Feed My sheep.”* Although Peter had failed Him terribly, Jesus reassured him that he was forgiven and that he could still be one of His followers, and apostles.

How much do you think that meant to Peter? Knowing Jesus’ love and forgiveness and faithfulness to him even after he had denied Jesus made Peter love and want to serve Jesus even more. We sin against Jesus every day. Every day we fail to love Him and serve Him and let our lights shine for Him as we should. Every day we ask Jesus to forgive us, and every day He does. Jesus’ love and forgiveness and faithfulness to us undeserving sinners make us love and want to serve Jesus even more. Titus says that Jesus *“gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works”* (Titus 2:14).

Jesus tells Peter, “*When you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.*’ *This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.*” Peter had denied Jesus out of **fear** of being persecuted. Jesus lets Peter know that one day he would be **martyred** for following Him. Then Jesus tells Peter, “*Follow Me.*” In the strength Jesus gave him, Peter faithfully followed Jesus for the rest of his life.

There’s a cost to following Jesus. As Jesus suffered for us, so He calls upon us to sometimes suffer for His sake. The Apostle Paul, who faced terrible persecution, and eventual martyrdom, tells us, “*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*” (Ac. 14:22). There’s a powerful and growing anti-God, anti-Christian sentiment in our country. Some Christians have lost their businesses because of it. There is increasing pressure to try to force us to conform to the world’s immorality. There are Christians in some places in the world who are being put to death for their faith. We think of them, of Peter and Paul who were martyred, and of the many Christians who were put to death at the hands of Roman emperors. If we should ever face martyrdom, would we remain faithful to Jesus? The Lord gives us the strength we need to face whatever tests of our faith He puts us through. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews tells us about many heroes of faith, many of whom were put to death for their faith, saying, “*Out of weakness [they] were made strong*” (v. 34).

Once when Jesus asked His disciples if they were going to leave Him it was Peter who said, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Jn. 6:68-69). Following Jesus means His forgiveness and salvation and His presence with us and all of His other blessings for us in life. Following Jesus means eternal life with Him one day in heaven. “Jesus, lead. We follow You.”

Jesus, I my cross have taken, All to leave and follow Thee;
 Destitute, despised, forsaken, Thou from hence my All shalt be.
 Perish every fond ambition, All I’ve sought or hoped or known;
 Yet how rich is my condition! God and heaven are still my own.

Take, my soul, thy full salvation; Rise o’er sin and fear and care;
 Joy to find in every station, Something still to do or bear.
 Think what Spirit dwells within thee, What a Father’s smile is thine,
 What a Savior died to win thee; Child of heaven, shouldst thou repine?

Haste, then, on from grace to glory, Armed by faith and winged by prayer;
 Heaven’s eternal day’s before thee, God’s own hand shall guide thee there.
 Soon shall close the earthly mission, Swift shall pass thy pilgrim days,
 Hope soon change to glad fruition, Faith to sight, and prayer to praise.
 Amen. (#423:1, 5-6)