

Jesus Reinstates Peter

John 21: 15-25

DIG: What is the difference between *agape* and *phileo* love? How and why did Jesus restore His relationship with Peter? Why do you think Messiah repeated the same question and charge to Simon three times? What does Yeshua mean by His prediction in verse 18? Why did Kefa ask about Yochanan? Why did Jesus have to ask Simon Peter three times? What is the connection between the kind of love Peter had for Jesus and His preaching mission, and the announcement of the kind of death Peter would endure?

REFLECT: What hope does this story offer us? How does this story inspire you to handle your mistakes and failures? When have you experienced God's forgiveness in a meaningful way? How can failure destroy a person? What hinders us from accepting and enjoying God's forgiveness? Betrayal, disagreement, and misunderstanding can fracture a relationship. Sometimes we feel that broken relationships are beyond remedy. But the Lord reminds us that what we conclude is impossible, He makes possible every day. Was there a time when you helped to restore a broken relationship? How did you help?

For at least one person, the joy of Messiah's resurrection was overshadowed by shame. Peter remembered his failure. Having boldly proclaimed that he would never forsake Yeshua, Kefa had to eat his words within hours. Not once, but three times he denied knowing Jesus. The Lord's resurrection suddenly gave him a new perspective. The question that must have been lingering in Simon's mind was whether or not the Good Shepherd would give him a second chance. Eventually Christ drew Peter aside for a heart-to-heart talk.

Now the Good Shepherd takes the fourth step in bringing His wayward apostles back to Himself and to their preaching mission. The Lord addresses Simon Peter, the ringleader, and deals with him at the campfire in the presence of the other apostles. Being the leader that he was, Yeshua knows that if He can turn Kefa around the others will follow. This was a continuation of the seventh appearance of Jesus after His resurrection.

Two kinds of love will be seen in this dialogue between Jesus and Simon Peter: *agape* love and *phileo* love. *Agapao* is used in its various forms in the New Covenant about three hundred and twenty times. It is a love called out of a person's heart by an awakened sense of value in an object that causes one to prize it. It expresses a love of admiration and esteem. Its impulse comes from the idea of prizing. It is a love that recognizes the worthiness of the object loved. Therefore, this love consists of the soul's sense of the value and preciousness of its object, and its response to its recognized worth in admiring affection.

Phileo is used forty-five times in its various forms in the B'rit Chadashah. This is a friendly **love**. It is a **love** called out of one's heart as a response to the pleasure one takes in a person or object. Both have things in common with each other. It is a **love** of affection for someone or something **loved** that is the overflowing of one's heart in delight to that which gives him or her pleasure. The words that best describes this kind of **love** are *fondness, affection, or liking*.

In contrasting *phileo* and *agapao*, we might say the former is a **love** of pleasure, the latter a **love** of preciousness; the former a **love** of delight, the latter a **love** of esteem; the former a **love** called out of the heart by the apprehension of pleasurable qualities in the object **loved**, the latter a **love** called out of the heart by the apprehension of valuable qualities in the object **loved**; the former takes pleasure in, the latter ascribes value to; the former is a **love** of liking, the latter a **love** of prizing.¹⁶⁹⁰

When they had finished eating, **Yeshua now takes the fifth step in His attempt to bring this renegade tamid back to his preaching mission. Jesus said to Simon Peter: Simon son of John, do you love Me more than these (fish, see John 21:3a)?** In other words, "Do you have a **love** for **Me** called out of **your** heart by **My** preciousness to **you**, a **love** which compels **you** to sacrifice **yourself** to **Me**? And with this **love** do you **love Me** more than you **love these**?" **These** were the **fish** that **they** had just caught, possibly still in the net, showing sporadic signs of life. The question came down to this, "**Peter**, are these **fish** more precious to **you** than **I** am? By **your** actions **you're** showing **Me** that **you** regard **your** fishing business is more valuable than the preaching mission that **I** sent **you** on."

This seems to be a terrible indictment of **Peter**, but we must remember that **his** sin nature (without the consistent indwelling of **the Holy Spirit**) led to **his** current condition. Satan was after **him**. This was no ordinary preacher who leaves the pulpit to go back into business. But how could one interpret the question of our **Lord**? **He** was attempting to bring **Simon** back to **his** preaching mission and appealed to **his agape love** for **his Master**.

To this question, **Peter** answered: **Yes, Lord, You know that I phileo love You.**" It was as if **Simon** was saying, "As for **You**, **You** know with absolute assurance that **I** am found of you." Then **Jesus** responded by saying: **Feed my lambs (Yochanan 21:15). Lambs** have to do with baby believers, feeding **them** the milk of the Word. Later, **Kefa** will say: **Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation (First Peter 2:2).**¹⁶⁹¹

Then the Lord has a second question for Peter. Again Jesus said: **Simon son of John, do you agape love Me?** He had already admitted that he didn't *agape love* Jesus more than the **fish** in the first question. So Messiah's second question was: **Do you agape Me** at all?" Peter responded: **Yes, Lord, You know that I *phileo* love You.** In other words he was saying: **Lord, You know that I only *phileo* You, I cannot claim any kind of *agape love* for You.** Then Jesus gave him another ministry opportunity, saying: **Take care of my sheep (Yochanan 21:16).** That meant apostolic authority and supervision.

Then Jesus asked the question for the third time. He said to him: **Simon son of John, do you** at least have a fondness for **Me?** Notice the downward progression of Christ's expectations. Yeshua now takes Peter at his word and in effect says, "**Simon, I AM** beginning to believe that you don't even have a fondness for **Me**, judging from your actions of deserting **Me** and your preaching mission." This time Peter was a little hurt because Jesus' diminished expectations of him. The point is not that **Simon** was hurt that the Lord asked about his **love** three times, but rather that Yeshua used the word *phileo* with the implication behind it. **Simon** answered: **Yes, Lord, You know all things; You know that I *phileo* love you.** In effect, saying, "As for You, You know by experience that I have a fondness for You." To that Christ said: **Feed my sheep (John 21:17).** These are mature believers and he needed to **feed them** the meat of the Word. This he did in **Second Peter**.¹⁶⁹²

Now comes what seems to be an abrupt change of subject matter in the conversation. Previously this conversation was about what kind of **love Simon** had for our Lord, but now in a most abrupt manner, Yeshua predicts the kind of death that Kefa will endure: **Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.** Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. This together with the tradition that **Simon Peter** was crucified upside down as a martyr clearly indicates that Messiah was speaking of Kefa's martyred death. Then He said to him: **Follow me (Yochanan 21:18-19)!**

So what is the connection between the kind of love Peter had for Jesus and His preaching mission, and the announcement of the kind of death Peter would endure? Yeshua had appealed to Peter for a **love** of devotion, a **love** that would cause him to sacrifice himself for Jesus. But all that Kefa offered at first was a **love** of emotion, a fondness or affection that did not deter his decision to abandon Christ and his preaching mission. In effect, the Chief Shepherd was saying, "Peter, I asked you for a **love** of devotion. You have given Me only a **love** of emotion. Nevertheless, some day you will have a **love** of devotion for Me, such a **love** that you will be compelled to die a martyr's death on a Roman cross for Me." **Only the distinction between the two Greek words makes the logical connection between the previous conversation and the way Peter would die.**¹⁶⁹³

Then it seems that the **Master** and the **servant** continued **their** conversation as **they** walked along the shoreline. **Peter** then **turned** and **saw** that **John**, the **disciple** whom **Jesus** loved, was **following** them. **John** was the one who had **leaned back** against **Jesus** at the **supper** and had said: **Lord**, who is going to **betray** you (**John 21:20**)? Of all the **talmidim**, **Yochanan** acted in the most honorable way. While he fled the assault on **Gethsemane** (**Matthew 26:56** and **Mark 14:50**), he soon returned and remained close to **Yeshua** throughout **His** trials and crucifixion. While **Simon** kept **his** distance and denied **his** association with **the Lord** in the courtyard, **John** stood firm. While **Kefa** cowered during **His** crucifixion, **Yochanan** stood at the base of the cross . . . comforting **Jesus'** mother **Mary**.

When **Peter** saw **John**, he asked: **Lord**, what about him? As if to say, "What's going to happen to that guy?" **Jesus** answered: **If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me** (**Yochanan 21:21-22**). This should be a lesson for us today. We must be concerned about **God's** will in *our* lives, not **His** will for *others*, in other words, don't play **Holy Spirit**. There are plenty of distractions and things to get upset about every single day. Satan is still alive and well. And opposed to those who espouse **Covenant Theology**, the world is not getting better and better. In fact it is getting worse and worse. **Jesus Christ** will come back one day to take possession of the title deed to the earth and reclaim it once again for **Himself** and **His** messianic Kingdom (see my commentary on **Revelation Ce - The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David Has Triumphed**). Until then the whole world is under the control of the evil one (**First Yochanan 5:19**). But **Jesus** says to us: **What is that to you? You must follow Me!**

Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this apostle would not die. But **Jesus** did not say that he would not die; He only said: **If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you** (**John 21:23**)?

The apostle **John** affirms that he has been an eyewitness to everything he has written. This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true (**Yochanan 21:24**).

We must remember that the **Messiah** lived into **His** thirties. If you read through the Gospels and count how many days were reported, we only know about 75 or 80 days of **His** ministry. Barely three months. How much more could have been written. Well, **John** tells us.¹⁶⁹⁴ **Jesus** did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (**John 21:25**).

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

When I was a Little Boy I liked to have my Face and Hands Clean. But I had no love for the process by which they had to become clean. And many times I assumed that they were clean, when an Unbiased Observer might have held a Different Opinion. And my sons, when they were small, liked Cold Water about as well as their father did in his youth. But my Little Grandson is a Miracle of Cleanliness, and he loves to have his Face and Hands Washed. That is to say, he loves our Little Joke.

And it happened like this. The little lad came to visit Keturah and I, and the time arrived for Lunch. And I said, Let us go and wash our Hands. And he said, They need no washing. Then I said, Let me wash One Hand and see how the other one looks beside it. So I washed one of his hands.

Then I said, Place the Two Hands side by side, and let us see whether they belong to the same boy. And when we looked at them together, he agreed with me that those Two Hands could not belong to the Same Boy.

Then I said, Shall we wash the one that will make the Two Hands look alike? And he said, Let us wash the Other Hand. And when I had done it, he said, Now the Two Hands belong to the Same Boy. And he was right about that.

Then I said, Let us see if we can match the Two Clean Hands with a Clean Face. And afterwards I said, Your face is Very Clean. Let us see if we can Comb your Hair. Now we have done this Many Times since that first day, and it has become a Very Pleasant Joke with us, and a Merry Game.

And this is the way we make progress in life. For the job of reforming any of us is too large for a Single Encounter. But now and then we discover that we have improved very little in one particular area, and then we sometimes have grace enough to Wash the One Hand to make it match the virtue that we possess. And if this process continues Long Enough, there is hope that in time, we may come to the point that all of us Shall be more like **Him**.¹⁶⁹⁵