

Series: God Is Patient #1810

Title: John 21.15-17

Jesus Is Patience Personified

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Last time, in our reading and discussion of John chapter 21, we left off with Jesus feeding some of His eleven disciples (Judas Iscariot no longer among them and others were elsewhere). The resurrected Lord fed them a breakfast of fish and bread on the seashore. There we saw the patience of the Son of God towards these men who had abandoned their call to be evangelists, fishers of souls so they could return to their fishing of fish business. Principal among them is Simon Peter. As we conclude our look into how Christ's relationship with Peter demonstrates God's patience with us, I want you to hear what happens next. So I am reading John 21, verses 15-17. This is the Gospel According to John chapter 21, verses 15-17.

"So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' [Jesus] said to [Peter], 'Tend My lambs.' ¹⁶ [Jesus] said to [Peter] again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' [Peter] said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' [The Lord] said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' ¹⁷ [Jesus] said to [Peter] the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And [Peter] said to [Jesus], 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'"

Here are a couple of points to keep in mind before we walk through the text. First, and this is big, with this exchange Jesus restores Peter. Jesus reconciles Peter to Himself. Remember, as we have read, Peter denied Christ three times before the Lord's crucifixion. And then Peter was left, in his shame, to stew over those denials until he again encounters the Lord – this time the risen Christ Jesus. Second, we learn from two other texts, that apparently Jesus appeared to Peter privately, but no details of that encounter are recorded for us. Luke 24, verse 34 says, **"The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon."** And 1 Corinthians 15, verse 5 says, **"He [Jesus] appeared to Cephas [that's Peter], then to the twelve."**

Third, because Peter's denials were public, the Lord's restoration of him needed to be public. This passage gives us the detailed story that Luke and 1 Corinthians do not. And, the other disciples on this beach for breakfast need to hear Jesus pardon Peter, because Peter will be the apostle who will lead them at the beginning of their apostolic ministry and the founding of the church (recorded in Acts chapters 2-12 with Peter as the main character). I hope you will keep this in mind as we proceed.

The Lord begins in verse 15 saying, "Simon, son of John..." He did not call him Peter. Why? This was Christ's way of rebuking Peter. It's very interesting. Here, as elsewhere in the Gospels, whenever Peter acts like his old self, Jesus calls him by his old name. So the Lord is saying, "You want to return to the way things were before I met you and called you to follow Me, OK, then let me address you by your old name Simon." Peter is getting the message.

And then the Lord asks him, verse 15, “Do you love Me more than these?” These are the fishing vessels, the nets, and other things fisherman use. Do you love fishing more than you love Me? Zing! Jesus goes straight for the heart. “You want your old way of life more than you want to obey Me by embracing your new way of life, *Simon son of John*?” Peter responds, “Lord; You know that I love You.” Here is something intriguing and points us to something many Christians miss when they read this text, unless they have been taught otherwise. There’s a nuance in the Greek language. The word Jesus uses for “love” is *agapao*. This is the highest love; love of the will, love of total and complete commitment. But Peter answers with a different word for “love.” His word is *phileo* and this word means affection. It is a lesser kind of love, not quite as strong or robust in commitment.

Why does Peter use this different word? It’s obvious why. Given what he has done with his denials, he did not find himself worthy of *agapao* love. He could not genuinely say he loved the Lord with *agapao*, because if he did he would never have denied knowing Jesus at His trial. Jesus accepts Peter’s response and gives him pardon saying, “Tend My lambs.”

Then comes the question again, “[Jesus] said to [Peter] again a second time, ‘Simon, *son of John*, do you love Me?’ [Peter] said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’” Again Jesus used the verb *agapao* and again Peter used the verb *phileo*. Jesus accepts Peter’s response and gives him pardon saying, “Shepherd My sheep.” Then, in this build up to full pardon, restoration and reconciliation, the vocabulary changes again. This time Jesus changes His word for love. Jesus uses Peter’s word for love. Jesus uses *phileo*. “[Jesus] said to [Peter] the third time, ‘Simon, *son of John*, do you love Me?’”

Why did Christ use *phileo* for love? He is calling into question even the lesser kind of devotion Peter was claiming! The Lord is saying, in effect, “Do you even love Me with *phileo* love?” Wow. This seared the heart of the disciple. The message hit him hard. And he got it. The Lord was accepting of him despite the fluctuations in Peter’s affection for Jesus. The Bible says, “**Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And [Peter] said to [Jesus], ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’**” The grieving Peter appeals to Christ’s sovereignty. “You know all things.” And so Jesus lovingly restores him, “Feed My sheep.”

“Tend My lambs, shepherd My sheep, feed My sheep.” Peter, I restore you to be the pastor I have called you to be. Oh my friends, the patience of Christ for Peter is the patience of God for us. I’ll say that again. The patience of Christ for Peter is the patience of God for us. Has it been with you that you have always, consistently had *agapao* love for Christ? Have you loved Him with the highest love, the love of the will, a total commitment love? I have not. What about *phileo* love? I have not, always. And yet – yet! – in His patience the Lord does not forsake us. We forsake Him, He does not forsake us. As we confess our failures to Him, like Simon Peter did, we will be forgiven and restored.

I trust you see – not just now but throughout this short series – how patient God is with us, as Christ was patient with Peter. No wonder Peter wrote this in 2 Peter 3, verse 9, “**The Lord is patient toward you.**” He could write that with conviction because he knew firsthand of God’s patience with him. We could also have studied the Apostle Paul’s life and found God’s patience for Him. Paul wrote, in 1 Timothy 1, verse 16, “**I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.**” Paul calls Jesus’ patience *perfect*! And says God’s patience for him is an example to the rest of us who believe in Christ. So, friends, God is patient.

He is the God of patience. Patience is one of His divine perfections. This adds to our ongoing look into the perfections and excellencies of God, His communicable attributes. I hope this will find practical application in your life, as it has in mine. *The* perfectly patient God exists. His patience exists for us today and every day. So, let us love and serve Him experiencing His amazing grace in this most blessed of ways. And let’s be patient as He is patient. Join us next time as we discover even more about the God who is.

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