

“Did Your Parents Lecture You?”

John 21:15-19

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
May 4, 2003

How did your parents discipline you? Did they lecture you before administering some form of punishment? If you were like me, you wished they had skipped the lecture and gone straight to the punishment.

Perhaps Peter felt this way, too. After the resurrection, Jesus asked specifically to speak to Peter. No doubt Peter felt like a lecture was coming and rightly so. After all, he denied Jesus three times after promising not to do so. So, Peter was bracing himself for the lecture he deserved.

This encounter occurred around an early morning campfire. The disciples had been fishing all night when Jesus spotted them. They caught nothing until Jesus told them where to cast their nets. Upon following his instructions, they filled their nets to overflowing and headed for the shore.

Once on the shore, they discovered that Jesus had prepared a fire and started cooking fish for them. After eating breakfast, Jesus turned his attention toward Peter, whom he addressed as Simon. **“Simon, do you love me,”** Jesus asked, not once, but three times. All three times Peter responded affirmatively. Each time he did, Jesus told him to feed or take care of his sheep.

I want you to notice what Jesus did not ask Peter. He did not ask him if he **loved himself**, for I doubt that he did. How do you feel when you have disappointed others and humiliated yourself? Do you love yourself? Chances are you don't and I don't think Peter did, either.

Furthermore, Jesus did not ask Peter if he **loved what he did** the night before the crucifixion. He knew Peter could not believe he had acted so cowardly and certainly did not like it.

Jesus did not ask him if he **loved how he felt** since the betrayal and crucifixion. No one loves guilt and shame.

Finally, Jesus did not ask Peter if he **loved what others were saying about him.** I'm sure many were talking about Peter's cowardly denials, even the disciples. The night they were gathered in the upper room before going to the Garden of Gethsemane, they heard Peter's bold claim about loyalty and his willingness to die with Jesus. They knew what he said and what he did. They also knew there was a big discrepancy between the two. People talk about things like that, don't they?

No, Jesus did not ask Peter any of these questions. Instead, he asked Peter, “Do you love me?” **Why do you think he asked this?** I think it was because this was the most important question of the hour. Jesus knew that Peter's past and future hinged on the answer to this question.

Peter's forgiveness and hope were linked to his loving Jesus. Overcoming this mistake, dispelling bad feelings, getting back on track and facing people again were all dependant upon Peter's answer to this question. I'm convinced that's why Jesus asked it. He knew a lot was riding on the question and answer.

I think he also asked this question of Simon because Jesus knew that behavior was radically and permanently changed by the motivation of love, not the manipulation of guilt, shame and fear. His disciples were more likely to make wise decisions, even in the midst of intimidating circumstances, if they loved Jesus and wanted to please him rather than being afraid of him. "Simon, do you love me?" was a question that could provide the answer for many more that were sure to come.

What was Peter's reply? All three times he replied the same way, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you," with the exception of the last when he added, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you" John 21:17. I sense some frustration from Peter, don't you? Even John said that Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the same question three times.

It was as if Peter said, "Lord, you know that I love you and always have. Even when I hurt you, I loved you. I never stopped loving you. I did not deny you because I didn't love you. I denied you because I was afraid and confused and did what seemed safe at the time. What I did had nothing to do with you and everything to do with me."

I know these are my words and I must be cautious about putting words into Peter's mouth. However, I think Peter would concur with my assessment. I think this was what was going on with him.

Now, how did Jesus respond to Peter? Each time Peter acknowledged his love for Jesus, the Lord said, "Feed my sheep or take care of my sheep." Why? Wouldn't you expect to hear an apology? Wouldn't you think that Jesus would at least ask Peter to stand before the other disciples and confess his sins and beg for mercy? **Why did Jesus say, "Feed my sheep?"**

Reconnecting to the Lord's work had something to do with Peter's forgiveness, cleansing and healing. Continuing his ministry was going to be Peter's "balm in Gilead." It was going to be the best medicine he could find to heal his broken spirit.

Furthermore, it would inspire others to carry on after they had made big mistakes. Peter would become a good role model for overcoming bad decisions that hurt and disappoint other people.

One thing I appreciate about Smoke Rise as much as any is the way our church encourages people to serve even in leadership capacities after they have made mistakes. I am grateful that our church does not disqualify people because of anything they have done. The emphasis at Smoke Rise is upon the present and future as it should be. It was with Jesus. How can it be differently with us?

"Do you love me?" What a question for Jesus to ask the man that acted so unlovely and unlovable the night Jesus was arrested. It almost catches us off guard. As a matter of fact, it does, but the more I think of it, the more I appreciate it. You know why? It means that I don't have to run and hide from Jesus any longer if I have been ugly and made a terrible decision. I can approach him with a humble spirit and contrite heart and trust him to handle my indiscretion as redemptively as he did Peter's. That's good news, real good news.