

# The Disciple's Challenge: Sacrifice of the Heart

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John 21:15-22

## *Introduction*

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### Last week:

As we continue with the series teaching on Discipleship, we need to remember these 3 things, keeping them in mind:

1. Jesus calls disciples into a direct relationship with Him over time (the rest of our lives).
2. Our focus has been on the statement of Jesus that if anyone wants to be a disciple, there are 3 things they have to do every day: deny self -> take up their cross -> follow Jesus.
3. This we have been applying to the sacrifice of our will; mind; and now - the heart.

### The Proposition this week:

The most difficult sacrifice to make is that of the heart, but it is the most important.

## *Learning with Peter*

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### Background – Encounter at Galilee

Peter arrived in the Galilee after Jesus had risen from the dead, but the condition of his heart could not have been good because of his personal failure. Peter had denied Jesus on the night of his betrayal and Peter had failed to keep to his word and commitment to Jesus. Then he denied any connection with Jesus 3 times. The cock crowed and Peter fled. His recovery was slow and painful. He had run to the tomb, found it empty and saw the clothes. He had received the message the women brought him. Now after days of waiting, Peter went back to fishing, only to fail again.

Then suddenly, in the grey, misty light of dawn Jesus called from the shore. John recognized that it was Jesus and Peter jumped overboard, wading ashore. Peter got one of the 153 fish that were caught on Jesus' instruction and after breakfast, Jesus spoke to Peter, confronting his hurting heart.

3 times Jesus asked him the question: "Peter, do you love me more than these?" These questions of Jesus are significant as are His responses to

Peter's answers. They raise 3 key issues for the disciple's heart, calling for the sacrifice of the heart.

### 3 issues of the heart:

1. Love – the matter of the heart
2. Age – the challenge it presents
3. Focus – the top priority of following Jesus

## ***Love – the Matter of the Heart***

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### John 21:15-17

The heart is the centre of our lives and affection. Your heart is like a fountain out of which flow the issues of life.<sup>1</sup> Jesus said some very compelling things about the human heart that we should keep in mind.<sup>2</sup>

Here Jesus used a special word to describe the kind of love that we should have for Him.<sup>3</sup> Jesus questioned whether Peter had this kind of love. Peter replied honestly, using another Greek word for love.<sup>4</sup> This was a painful stroke, reminding us that somethings can only be produced through experiences of pain and suffering.

Now it is important to note that Jesus challenged Peter's heart with whether he loved Jesus "more than ... fish?" It is clear that the fish represents something else. In the context it could only mean the following:

1. Peter's work and ministry. The fish represented what Peter did as work before he became a disciple of Jesus. It also represented Peter's ministry as a disciple.
2. The people who were there with Peter. Peter feared people because he was that kind of "people-person." He faced this challenge throughout his life.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Prov. 4:23; Mark 7:17-23; Matt. 6:19-24

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 5:8,28; 11:29; 13:15,19; 15:8; 22:37 etc.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word, *agapao* – to love (in a moral sense). This word was almost disused in classical Greek, but the Christians took it up to describe a special kind of love, revealed by Jesus and so it the characteristic word of Christianity to express ideas previously unknown. It describes the attitude of God toward His Son, and towards people, expressing God's essential nature. Altruistic actions, such as laying down your life for your friends, demonstrate this kind of love. It is a love that values and esteems; that is unselfish, and ready to serve.

<sup>4</sup> The Greek word, *phileo* means, "to have tender affection for." God loves like this too. God never uses it as a command for men to "love" God, but He does use as a warning.

<sup>5</sup> Gal. 2:11-21

All of these things present a challenge to the heart because they tend to capture the heart.

## ***Age – the Challenge it Presents***

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### **John 21:18**

Peter was hurt, but Jesus stretched Peter's heart further. He challenged Peter with the issue of one's age. When we are young we tend to be easier to lead and to teach. The older one gets, the more one is hindered by the knowledge one already has from learning something new. So Jesus dealt with this aspect of Peter's heart by reminding him that the carefree heart of a young person changes with age (and experience). Age tends to limit what you can do and that is often very hard to accept. The older one gets, the more one has to rely on others. Instead of leading others, one migrates to being led by others – that requires a change of the heart.

## ***Focus – the Top Priority of following Jesus***

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### **John 21:19-22**

This is a very personal challenge and Jesus saw that Peter was immediately distracted by John. People can challenge the focus of your heart and shift it from being on Jesus to being on them. This is common in the Church. Some distract us because we are jealous or envious of them and their ministry. Others distract us because they insist on positioning themselves with their needs in the centre of our ministry.

However, the personal challenge for Peter and for us is really the focus on self i.e. the focus on what you and I must do. Here there can a collision between our being a disciple that must focus on following Jesus and our being a leader or minister for the Lord. Peter had to be reminded of what Jesus called him to when right at the start Jesus said, "Come to me and follow behind me."<sup>6</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

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### **Next week**

We will start to concentrate on following Jesus, learning from Jesus' words; His works; and from experiences with Jesus. Join us then.

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<sup>6</sup> Matt. 4:19

### Application

1. How is your heart? Honestly?
2. What do you have to face up to in regard to your heart?
3. What adjustments are very necessary at this juncture to prepare you to follow Jesus as a disciple?
4. Out of all this what has the Holy Spirit impressed on your heart personally?
5. What must you do now? How must you do it?