



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 21:15-25

"The Public Restoration of Peter"

[TRANSCRIPT](#)

[Message] The subject for this morning, of course, is from the last section of the Gospel of John. And for our Scripture reading we are turning to verse 15 and reading through verse 25, which is the conclusion of the gospel. Now, remember the context, because some of the things said will have connection with it. The account of the resurrection has been given. And our Lord has commissioned the apostles. One of them, all of them may have questioned how are we going to get along since he is not to be here with us. That's one of the underlying questions that seems in the background of this entire section and must have been a big part of their musings as they thought about the fact that our Lord was going to depart from them. How are we going to get along if we do not have him here with us? And so the apostles seeks to show in so many ways from the upper room discourse and in other things, that though he is not here with us in the same way that he was when he was here physically with the apostles, he is nevertheless not only with us, but with us in more intimate ways in the sense that he is with everyone of us individually through the coming of the Holy Spirit.

As I think I've mentioned at least a couple of times in the course of this lengthy series, the question that faced them was, shall we be able to serve our Lord well having only a memory of him being with us? And then down through the centuries the church has had the question posed to them, shall we be able to survive on a tale that is given to us at second hand? And so the coming of

the Spirit is the answer to both of those questions. He has not left us, except in the physical sense. He is now with us in a more intimate sense. And this incident of the miraculous catch of fish, the one hundred and fifty-three fish, is designed by John who loves symbol, to express the fact that he is still with us, still performing his mighty miracles through us, but he's no longer in the boat with us as he was at the first miraculous draft of fishes. But he's on the seashore, still caring for us, still concerned and waiting for us, ultimately, to come to him.

Now there was one final thing that needs handling, and that is the question of Peter's denial of the Lord and his status as an apostle. Because the Apostle Peter must have been somewhat under a cloud when news of his three fold denial of the Lord Jesus was circulated. So not only did Peter need a special word from the Lord, but the apostles also needed a special word from the Lord regarding Peter. And so our subject for today will be "The Public Restoration of Peter." And we are reading these verses, which is John's account of it.

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John (The better manuscripts, I think, read John instead of Jonas. And you can see what his name is incidentally, Simon son of John; Simon John's son. And I'm in apostolic succession. [Laughter] I hope that makes you feel more confident that I will expound in accordance with the teaching of our Lord.) Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. (John adds his own special word here,) This spake he,

signifying by what death he should glorify God. (Probably, and there seems to be general unanimity on this point. Peter had died some twenty or thirty years before this. Since he was older than John and John is writing now in his old age. So John adds this, knowing the tradition perhaps that Peter was crucified in Rome.) And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved (That's John) following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? (The original text is very abrupt. It's something like "And as for this fellow, what?") Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. (There's a bit of emphasis in the original text on the "thou." "Follow thou me.") Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. (If you read that carefully you immediately want to say, "Why does the author of the gospel, if this is the author of the gospel, why does he say we know that his testimony is true? And why does he in the next verse speak again in the first person?" Well there has been a great deal of discussion over these two verses. And the general opinion of most students of the Greek text of the gospel of John have concluded, including the orthodox, that the 24th verse is really the testimony of perhaps some Ephesian elders, which has been added to the gospel. This is the disciple which testifieth of these things. In other words, they have affirmed that what John says in his gospel is true. And furthermore they have added, "And we know that his testimony is true." So it's perhaps an instance of the early church affirming their faith in the veracity of the apostle and his gospel. And then one of them speaks, perhaps the one who took the lead in this. By the way, in some manuscripts of the Gospel of John it is said that this is Papius who is doing this, one of the earliest of the church Fathers.) And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."

Well may the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to Thee for this magnificent gospel of the sovereign grace of God. We are thankful for the way in which it has ministered to us as we have studied its pages again. We thank Thee for what it reveals of Thee through the Lord Jesus Christ and his ministry. And our thoughts go all the way back to the beginning, the introduction in which the apostle had said, "No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." And truly Lord we confess to Thee that through the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in this gospel we have had the sense that he has revealed Thee. And if Thou art like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as this gospel teaches, Thou art a magnificent, glorious God. And we worship Thy name. We magnify the greatness of our God. The omniscience, the omnipresence, the omnipotence, the goodness, the mercy, the justice, the holiness, the righteousness, all of the things that characterize our God we praise Thee for. And Lord if it should please Thee through the Lord Jesus Christ we should like to become like Thee. Thou hast exhorted us, "Be ye holy, as I am holy." O God, in Thy wonderful grace, through the gospel and through the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ conform us to his image.

We thank Thee for the promises of God as well. And for all of those assurances that we have that Thou art with us through the Holy Spirit in all of the experiences of our lives. And we ask Lord, for those who are here in this meeting, we sense that there must be some here who do not yet have the assurance of the forgiveness of their sins, bring home to them through the Holy Spirit, the atoning work of Christ, the shedding of the blood, the bearing of the sins of sinners, and bring home to them the fact that this great fact of the forgiveness of sins through Christ's bearing of the penalty is available for all who come to him. And O Father, through the Holy Spirit bring some to Christ this morning.

For the saints, Lord, continue to sustain them, supply their needs, minister to them in the trials of life. We especially remember those in our calendar of concern. We bring them all before

Thee individually Lord, minister to them and supply their great needs. For our country, for the whole church of Jesus Christ, for those who are in the body of Christ through faith in Christ but who may not be in harmony with us on every doctrinal point, but nevertheless who are truly his, we pray for them as well. We look forward to the day when we shall all be at one in the knowledge of him. Bless our meetings of this day and especially Lord do we pray Thy blessing upon the singing of the hymn, upon the ministry of the word, upon our fellowship in this meeting. For Jesus' sake.

Amen.

[Message] You know, in the ministry of the word of God in Believers Chapel from the beginning the elders have assumed the authority of feeding the flock of God. That's part of their task, of course. And it has been their aim from the beginning to be sure that we as a flock were ministered to through men who proclaim the word of God. It is the responsibility of the elders ultimately to determine who ministers in the Chapel. And all of us who minister in the Chapel, minister of course under the authority of the elders.

Now the reason I'm saying this is in baseball, you know, it's customary for a team to have starting pitchers and relief pitchers. And as the innings go by it's not uncommon for one of the starting pitchers as he weakens near the end of the game for the manager to take him out. And I don't have any word from the elders that they want me to continue after having exposed you to over ninety messages I believe it is on the gospel of John. I would not feel upset at all if they were to yank me, as they say. [Laughter] And have someone else minister the word. But let me say this, if they do not yank me, I want to begin a series of studies shortly in the Book of Hosea, one of the Old Testament prophets. And let me say, if they do not yank me, they may, there's an elders meeting coming up in a few days [Laughter] and they said that they wanted me particularly to be there. So you know you never can tell. Let me assure you, I would be just as happy sitting out there as standing up here. So I don't know what's ahead. I'm making it difficult for you Howard and the rest of the elders [Laughter], but feel free to yank me if you want to. [Laughter] Great pitchers have

been yanked. [Laughter] So anyway, if I continue I will [not] be here the next two weeks, because next week I'll be in San Antonio and the following week in Lincoln, Nebraska to console those Cornhuskers over the loss of the number one ranking. But when I come back two weeks from today, I want to begin a series of studies in Hosea.

Of course Hosea is the Prophet of unconditional love, so you might find some of the same kind of ministry that we have been listening to in the Gospel of John. But let me say this, what I wanted to say is I would like very much for you to be reading Hosea, and read it in the New American Standard Bible, because that will be edition I will use for the exposition, since in the Book of Hosea there are a number of places where the text of the Authorized Version is not quite as true to the original as the New American Standard Bible. And it will save a little bit of time in the exposition if we have a version before us that does not require as many comments on the original text.

But now to come to our message for today. This is the public restoration of the Apostle Peter. As I say, I have [not] counted the exact number of messages, but I think it's over ninety now. And you may be surprised at this, but about twenty-five years ago in a church in Dallas; I gave a series of ninety messages on the Gospel of John. And my daughter, who is, of course, a member of Believers Chapel with her family, was then about ten to twelve years of age. And during the week she had asked me, "What will you be preaching on Sunday?" Because she had not been in church the Sunday before due to illness. And I said, "Well Gracie, it is the last of the ninety messages on the Gospel of John." And she said, "Oh, I was hoping you had finished that when I was sick last week." [Laughter] And this morning she was in the 8:30 service and had to hear it again with just a few variations.

Now in this last message, our Lord turns to the future of the apostolic ministry particularly, since he has dealt with the future of the apostolic ministry generally in the first fourteen verses. And what we have here is primarily Peter's reinstallation publicly in his apostolic office. Privately after the office the Lord encouraged Peter in the fact that though he denied him, he still belonged to the

apostolate. In fact, in Luke chapter 24 there is a reference made to the fact that he appeared privately to Peter following the resurrection. And then we remember the angels said to the disciples, "Go and tell his disciples and Peter." And so there is a private restoration of the apostle, but this is public reinstallation in his apostolic office. Because as I mentioned in the reading of the Scripture, Peter was probably under a bit of a cloud because of his threefold denial of the Lord.

One can see the parallels between this even and Peter's call to the apostolic office and thus you can see the sort of semi-official nature of this reinstallation. For example, Peter was called to the office of apostles after the first miraculous draft of fishes recorded in Luke chapter 5. And here, again, he is reinstalled in his apostolic office after a miraculous draft of fishes. Further, Peter denied the Lord three times before a charcoal fire. That's recorded in the Gospel of John in chapter [?] and verse 18. And here we are again around a charcoal fire, and our Lord calls upon Peter to confess him around a charcoal fire. The parallels John must have seen in this, and probably has given us that for that reason. In addition, he denied the Lord three times, and now three times he is called upon by the Lord to confess that he does love him. So what we have then is a kind of public restoration of Peter to his apostolic office.

There is one other thing that I would like to make a comment upon before we look at the particular passage, because you might wonder why I am neglecting to make a great deal over the difference in the two words for love that are found in this account. There are two Greek words for love that are used in the New Testament rather frequently. One is the term *agapeo*, which means to love with intent and purpose, the kind of love of intelligent purpose that is willing to sacrifice itself for its object. And then there is the word *phileo*, from which we get Philadelphia, for example, brotherly love, which is a word that lays a great deal of stress upon the emotions, upon the affections.

Now both of these loves are genuine kinds of love. Generally speaking most people think that the *agapeo* kind is a little deeper and more significant. But both are genuine and both are proper. In fact, the Bible speaks about the fact that Lord not only *agapao*s us, but he also *phileos* us. So the

two words are proper, they have a little bit different stress. It has often been thought in the past and some students think it is still true that our Lord and John the Apostle in recording this intends a difference between these words. In other words, we should pay special stress, give special stress to that. After all, when he says, "Peter lovest Thou me?" The first two requests he said, "Peter do you *agapeo* me?" Peter keeps saying, "I *phileo* you. I *phileo* you." And then our Lord it is said, stoops to Peter's *phileo* and says the third time, "Do you *phileo* me?"

Well, now there is a great deal that can be said for that, but I must say that I am unpersuaded that that is really John's purpose. The reason I'm unpersuaded is this, John has a habit of using words that are synonyms and varying them. There are several illustrations of this in the Gospel of John, and I am in the light of that persuaded that he means no real essential, important difference between *agapeo* and *phileo*. To give you one simple illustration, John the Apostle calls himself the one whom Jesus *agapeos*. But then in chapter 21 he says the one whom Jesus *phileos*. And so one would think from this that since nothing is made of that, that those two words may be used of the same expression of love and affection. So as I go through I'll not make much over that, and you'll understand why. I don't want to say that I think that a person who sees that is absolutely wrong. I just am unpersuaded by the evidence myself. So we will take the two words to be somewhat synonymous, perhaps a little different stress but that is about all.

Of course, I think that it's perfectly for you to want to know that God does *agapeo* us. And to young ladies in the audience, when that young man finally says to you, "I love you." I wouldn't object at all if you would say to him, "Do you mean *agapeo* or *phileo*?" [Laughter] And that might be revealing. But nevertheless it might not be absolutely necessary.

Now having left the counseling of young people let's turn to our text in John chapter 21. And they are gathered around the fire now, and in verse 15 we read, "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John." Now, let's stop and let me ask you to notice one thing. Did you notice that John calls Peter Simon Peter here, gives him his full name? He had originally been given the name Simon, and then the Lord remember changed his name to *petros*, or Peter, which

means "rocks." Simon means something like wishy-washy or watery. And that's the name of weakness. But John gives him his full name now, Simon Peter. And then our Lord says, "Simon, son of John." So his formal name again is stressed. And our Lord lays stress upon the Simon. So Simon, son of John, and John has said, "Jesus saith to Simon Peter." This is something of a solemn occasion then, and I think goes along with the public restoration of Peter.

But the use of the term Simon is a reminder of how the rock crumbled around that little fire when the little girl asked him, "Weren't you one of his disciples?" And three times he said no. Our Lord says then, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these?" What does he mean by "more than these?" Well it could mean more than you love these others?" In other words, do you love me more than you love John and Thomas and Nathanael and James, others who were gathered around that little fire? So far as the text is concerned that's a possibility. Or it could mean, "Simon lovest thou me more than these," Well the boat and the rods and the reels and the nets and whatever else they had of their fishing equipment. That, of course, has great possibilities of application toward any fishermen who are in the audience. But it's probably not what our Lord meant. He was not really asking, "Do you love me more than you love your fishing." That's a proper question; however, "Do you love me more than you love your business? Do you love me more than you love your family? Do you love me more than whatever occupation you may have?" Because our Lord is, of course, to have first place in our lives.

Probably what he means is "Do you love me more than these love me?" Because that's what Peter had suggested previously, remember. He had said, "Though all men should be offended in you, yet will not I be offended in Thee." And that will be a statement that comes back to plague Peter when he stands around the charcoal fire and three times denies the Lord, something that the other apostles did not do, although they forsook him and fled at the time of his crucifixion. So "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these?" And Peter's rather humble reply is, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I *phileo* thee." Jesus had said, "Do you *agapeo* me?" He said, "Yes, I *phileo*

you." So he omits, in I think a rather humble way, the more than these." "I love you; I'm not going to make any comparison now with the others' love. That is their responsibility.

When we were studying Peter's denials I made reference to the fact that in Romans chapter 7 the apostle describes that struggle between the mind and the flesh that is carried on in the life of every believer until the time that he comes into the presence of God. And I said that Peter has to learn Romans 7, the fact that there is a struggle going on within us, and we cannot expect to have absolute victory in this life. There is no such thing as sinless perfection, of course. So evidently Peter has learned a great deal by his denial. He has learned that the man who says, "Though all men shall be offended in Thee, yet will I not be offended in Thee," can nevertheless be offended at our Lord.

Later in his epistle, the first epistle, he will say to the believers to whom he writes, "Whom not seeing, ye love." And that expresses, of course, the characterized him from the time of his denial on. He went out and wept bitterly. He did love our Lord, but he was weak. He was Simon, and that is exactly what we are constantly. And if we do not lean upon the Lord, ah we shall deny him just as Peter did.

Well, the first response to Peter's "Lord you know that I love you," is "Feed my sheep." Literally this expression means, "Pasture my lambs, give them food." You'll notice that this is in a sense the first duty of any kind of shepherd of the flock. This is what the elders in a local assembly are called upon to do, to shepherd the flock of God. So he says feed or pasture my lambs, not fleece them, feed them. Not count them, but feed them. We have a lot of fleecing of the flock these days, but feeding them is the responsibility of the shepherds of God. The Apostle Paul when he spoke to the Ephesian elders. Incidentally those Ephesian elders, of course, were the elders who John had as his elders. And when he lived he was one of them. Paul said to them in Acts chapter 20 and verse 28, "Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over God over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed or to shepherd the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." That's the work of elders, to shepherd the church of God.

In verse 32 he says, "And now brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." It's clear from that verse too that when Paul said to those elders, "You are to shepherd the flock of God," he means to shepherd them with the word of his grace, which is able to build us hope and give us a hope. So to feed or pasture my lambs, the first duty of all the shepherds is to feed and shepherd them with the word of God. It is the responsibility of all who are elders in the flock of God to see that the sheep are fed. Organized Christianity is as a rule breathlessly busy about many things. It is hot and tired and panting, immensely energetic, but it's prone to lose its way along the way amid the secondary and the unnecessary and secondary matters. It forgets that Christ lays the stress on shepherding the flock, feeding them with the word of God. And I hope, of course, in Believers Chapel that is always the goal of the Chapel's elders, to be sure that the flock is fed. Milton said so many years ago, "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed." "Feed my lambs," Jesus said.

He says again a second time, "Simon, Son of John, lovest thou me?" He's omitted now more than these, for Peter's answer obviously has eliminated as well. And then we again have the reply in verse 16 from Peter. He saith unto him, "Yeah, Lord Thou knowest that I *phileo* Thee." And our Lord again responds by saying, "Feed my sheep." Now this time he uses a different word for feed, probably slightly different than the preceding in sense too. The first word laid stress on the food, pasturing the flock. This one lays stress on other aspects of shepherding as well. In other words, not only feed them but exercise the office of shepherd including leading them, guarding them, protecting them, protecting them, guarding them against false doctrine that's part of the work of elders, to lead and guide the flock. That's part of the work of the elders, who should have a special relationship with the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit. And so feed my sheep; exercise the office of shepherd over my sheep.

And then in verse 17 he saith unto the third time, "Simon, son of John, *phileo* me?" Do you love me? Peter was grieved, not grieved at the Lord, but grieved that it was necessary to say this the third time. After all, he has denied the Lord three times and no doubt this thing came back to his

mind too. He was grieved because he said unto him the third time, "Lovest thou me?" And he said unto him, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." Isn't it interesting that this apostle has this high regard for Jesus Christ, so high that he says, "Lord, thou knowest all things." Magnificent revelation of what the apostles thought of our Lord.

And our Lord repeats again, "Pasture," this time again "pasture" the first word that he used. "Pasture on my dear sheep," emphasis again on food and emphasis also upon the high regard that he has for the sheep. You know, frequently young men come to me. I have, as you know, taught in a theological seminary for many years, and frequently young men come and say, "I want to be an elder. I hope ultimately to be an elder." And then sometimes others who are not young men but older men who have been converted speak about how they want to be an elder. There's nothing wrong in wanting to be an elder. In fact, the apostle commands that.

But it's helpful for us to remember that number one, elders are appointed by God the Holy Spirit. No matter how much a person wants to be an elder, he should not be an elder if he has not been appointed by the Holy Spirit. That's what Paul told the Ephesian elders. "Take heed to yourselves and to the flock of God over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you bishops, overseers, elders." So first of all, it is the work of God to appoint elders. And ultimately the sovereignty of appointment as elder belongs with God. No matter how much we attend classes. No matter how much we study. No matter how much we may want to be an elder. If we have not been appointed by the Holy Spirit we should not be an elder. You can do a great deal of damage to the church of Christ if you've never been appointed elder by the Holy Spirit.

That's one of the reasons the church is in the condition that it is in today, because elders have been chosen not by the appointment of God the Holy Spirit, but have been chosen for other reasons, their influence in the community and various other types of things. Now, it's extremely important then for us to have the appointment of the Holy Spirit. But there's something else we forget. If we have been appointed by God the Holy Spirit as an elder, as a shepherd of the flock that will be manifest not by our confession of it verbally, but by our practice of shepherding. In other

words, if an individual says "I have been appointed an elder." And he does nothing but sit in the pew and never shepherds the flock, that is evidence, very strong evidence that he has not been appointed by the Holy Spirit. In other words, those men who have been appointed by the Holy Spirit are to be recognized by the work that they do. That's extremely important. And furthermore, let me say this, that that individual should be happy to exercise the office of elder, even if the men who are elders do not come to recognize him as an elder, after all he's serving the Lord. He's a representative of the Lord. So therefore, his concern is with the flock of God. They belong to our Lord. They are precious to our Lord, so precious that he has given himself for them. And our service is rendered first and foremost to him.

If of course, if we approach it in that sense, and he has truly appointed us and we respond by exercising the shepherding of the flock, the chances are that the elders will recognize the hand of God in the life of that individual if the elders were the men of God. So Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, pasture my dear sheep." You know, it's striking to me too that though Peter's been dead about thirty years, John does not know anything about any successor to Peter in the office of head shepherd of the church. In fact, there was no such office. And John, though Peter's been dead about thirty years might have had good reason to say, "Well, Peter's been succeeded now," a little parenthesis, "Now Peter has been succeeded now by, and the name, the present Pope of that time." But there is nothing like that, because the apostles did not know any of that.

Well now, he not only has encouraged Peter then by hearing his confession and then urging him to pasture his dear sheep. That would be the greatest reinstallation for Peter. The Lord still wants me to shepherd the flock. But our Lord goes on to say in verse 18, "Peter verily, verily, I say unto you, when you were young you girded yourself and you walked whither you would. You put on your own clothes and you were sovereign over your daily destiny. But when you shall grow old Peter, you will discover that you will be not sovereign over your affairs, but someone else shall gird you and they'll carry you where you don't want to go." Now Peter is to die, it seems, a martyr's death. Eusebius, the church historian of the fourth century writes about this, "At last Peter came to

Romans where he was crucified head downward, for so he himself desired to suffer." In Peter's second epistle he makes reference to his exodus. Others in the early church know of this tradition Tertulian, Origen, and others. So there seems to be good reason for believing that Peter was crucified, that he was crucified in Rome, and that he was crucified head downward, because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified in the precise manner that our Lord was. And so our Lord tells Peter that.

And then John adds the word now, he was talking about the way that Peter would die. And when he had said this he added the words, "Go on following me." That present tense in that follow me in verse 19 it seems to me is designed to teach Peter that while this is going to be his end, his duty is to go on continually following him. It's almost symbolic of the whole apostolic mission. And it's symbolic also of our lives. We are to go on following him regardless of what may happen to us. And it's possible, you know, that right at this point or shortly thereafter our Lord faded off into invisibility so to speak, and the ringing final words are "Go on following me." But there is a word for John. Peter's not jealous about John, he's just concerned. We are often concerned about other Christians, sometimes concern can become gossip. But there is a proper concern.

And Peter at this point as they were probably cleaning up things and moving off now, he saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, the one who leaned on his breast at supper, and the one who said, "Lord who is it that betrayeth thee." And when Peter said to him, he turned to the Lord and he said, "Now that you've told me what I'm going to expect, someone's going to gird me and carry me where I don't want to go. What about this fellow?" And the Lord said to Peter, "If I will that he tarry till I come what's that to Thee? Go on following me." And there's an emphasis on the "you." "You go on following me." I saw, I think that he may have walked off into invisibility at this time. And this is just a statement of the fact that this is the picture of the whole church after our Lord has gone.

There is a great deal of application that one might make at this point, and for time's sake we cannot do it. But it's obvious that our Lord's principle is we each, of us, stand or fall to our own

maker. We each, to use Paul's words, must bear our own burdens. I am not responsible for the way that the Lord guides you and directs you. If you ask me for counsel or I ask you for counsel, it's certainly proper for us to counsel with one another and discuss things with one another. But in the final analysis, you are responsible. So often we tend to be critical, and the application of this to the local church, and the relationship of the members to one another, and the relationship of the members to the elder is very patent to any thinking Christian. If you think there are things wrong in the local church, you should go to the elders about it, not to your friends, not your family. Because your family and friends will likely go to other family and friends, and pretty soon the church is murmuring. The thing that one learns from following the history of Israel is that that was the way they fell into difficulties. Constantly they murmured. Read the book of Exodus and notice how often Israel fell to murmuring, and God had to chastise them. And so when we think that there are things wrong we should go to the elders, and we should keep quiet about them to others.

Great damage is done in the church of Christ by loose tongues of earnest, sincere believers who do not realize frequently the damage that can be done. You go on following him. And if you take it to the Lord in prayer, you are amazed at the things that happen and the whole spiritual temper of the church is improved. What a wonderful thing it would be to have a congregation of people who followed those directions. So go on following me. You know, when Paul addressed Timothy he said to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 16 some words that we need to take to ourselves constantly. I need to take them to myself. He said, "Take heed unto yourself and unto the doctrine. Continue in them for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." In other words, our first responsibility is to ourselves. And did you notice that text in Acts chapter 20 and verse 28 when Paul referred to the elders at Ephesus, he said to them, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves and unto all the flock over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers." So even the elders are to consider their relationship to God first and then the health of the congregation.

Well the final words are words about Jesus and John's gospel. And I have suggested to you without any sense of dogmatism that the expression "and we know that his testimony is true" is

probably not John's word but the Ephesian elders who are passing judgment upon what he has written as being true to the knowledge that they have of these events. Some of the manuscripts I mentioned say that it is Papius who makes this comment. Well, he was one of the earliest of the church fathers and related to very closely the Apostle John and the early church. But at least, we do not know certainly what is meant by "And we know that his testimony his true, we simply know there is testimony that the gospel records as he has given it is true. And evidently this individual who spoke for the elders now speaks for himself and said "There are things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." We alluded to that recently and commented upon the fact that if you put all the four gospels together they would make a little book just about like that. But if you want the definitive life of some of the great men of the world, then you need a shelf about this big for a three or a four volume work. So the gospels are not intended to be lives in the historical sense. They are documents written from a particular viewpoint to teach particular truth under the direction of God the Holy Spirit.

Now, let me conclude with just a word for shepherds and a word for the sheep. The word for shepherds, of course, is very plain. Jesus said to Peter, "Pasture my lambs, shepherd my sheep, pasture my dear lambs." And it's clear from this that Christ's sheep are entrusted to those who love him. He is called forth from Peter a confession of his love. And it's to these, those who love him, to whom he commits his sheep. We love him because he first loved us. But it's very important that we respond and love him, and it's into the hands of those who love him that he commits his precious sheep. Yes, that's right; if you are a believer in Christ you are precious to our Lord. And as an elder or a shepherd of the flock, it is our responsibility to recognize that, even though there may be some characteristics about some of his sheep that we do not respond to, we still should remember that they are precious to him, not perfect but precious. There's a difference between perfect and precious as anyone who lives in a family knows.

Well that's a magnificent word. Luthart, the Lutheran commentator has said, "He confides those he loves to the man who loves him." And isn't it interesting too that the Lord feels that Peter's confession that he has loved him and loves him is more important than promises to do better or to be sorry. Jesus did not say to him first, "Now Peter, are you sorry because you denied me three times? Do you promise to do better?" But he really hinged everything on, "Do you love me?" And that's a good word for us too. It's a comforting word isn't it? It's comforting to know that we can fail the Lord miserably as Peter and yet he can entrust that which is precious to him to us. I think I like that because it especially applies to me. He trusts us in spite of our failures, what an incentive to follow him. That's the word for sheep.

The world likes to say, "Once burned, twice shy," or something like that, because we don't like to be burned. And therefore we tend to keep from trusting someone who has disappointed us or wronged us. We forget, of course, how we have treated our Lord. Well, these are important things and I would like to conclude by simply saying this, that one of the well-known preachers of a couple of generations ago was John Henry Jallit, he was called the "polite pulpiteer" of his day. He once surprised some friends by a rather sharp remark. He said, "I hate to meet a man whom I've known for ten years and find that he is at precisely the same point, neither moderated, nor quickened, nor experienced but simply stiffened."

In Christian church there are many who have come to faith in Christ, sometimes years ago who have not moderated. They have not become warmer. They have not even become more experienced in Christian things, but they have just stiffened in their confession of faith. And my earnest prayer is for those of you particularly who have followed us through this magnificent gospel that your Christian life is not described by that. You've come to faith in Christ, but you've grown very little beyond that. You've stiffened. May God help us to truly continue to grow, and then to reach that fruit-bearing stage where the flowers bloom or the fruit is born and the Lord God and the Son and the Spirit are pleased with us.

If you're here this morning and you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ we invite you to come to him who is the shepherd of the sheep. "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." And he has made them precious to him by virtue of divine election, efficacious grace, and his saving, atoning work. He has paid a tremendous price for them. And this great salvation is available for sinners. If you know that you're a sinner, this salvation is for you. Come to Christ, believe in him, give yourself over to him, to the Great Shepherd and enjoy the shepherding and the pasturing that he gives to his little lambs.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this magnificent conclusion to a great work, inspired by the Holy Spirit and penned by the disciple whom Jesus loved. Lord, we sense thy love to us. Perhaps we are not justified in saying we are disciples whom Thou hast loved as John the Apostle, but we feel that way. Thou hast in a special way loved us. We are grateful. And we are amazed and astonished that Thou wouldest commit the care of the sheep to the church, to its elders especially and to others as well. O God, help us to remember how precious they are to Thee. Deliver us from anything displeasing to Thee. May we be able by Thy grace to exhort one another and encourage one another. And enable us Lord to overlook the fact that all of us are not yet sanctified and have things that are displeasing to Thee as well trying to [love] our fellow Christians. And Father, if there should be some here who have never believed in Christ, O minister to...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**