

Bible Studies about Peter

Study 9: Peter's Great Commission

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Background

Later in this series we will look at the ministry of Peter and Peter's vision from God. In this study, we want to look at the commission that Peter received from Jesus, and how it impacts on our life and calling.

The Message

We begin by taking a look again at John 21:15-23, which we looked at in a different context in our previous study. This passage is fundamental in our understanding of the disciple Peter:

"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 him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.' Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!' So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?'"¹

In this account, Jesus gives instruction to Peter on 4 occasions:

1. "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15)

To pasture, feed or keep the flock.

2. "Tend my sheep" (John 21:16)

Tend as a shepherd and supervise in the context of provision of care, guidance and protection – as a shepherd would extend to his flock.

3. "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17)

To pasture, feed or keep the flock.

4. "Follow me" (John 21:19)

Accompany, follow, or reach - be in the same way with.

¹ John 21:15-23

We know that when something is repeated in scripture it implies great significance, even though here as in the questions relating to Peter's love for Christ, different words are used for 'feed' or 'take care' in the Greek. The context is brought out in the above list. The clear picture that is revealed – the commission laid upon Peter by Jesus – is for Peter to be a shepherd of his Lord's flock, catering both to spiritual, and physical needs of young and old alike. Perhaps we might better understand the role in a pastoral capacity. This reminds us so clearly of Peter's concept of Christ which we looked at in the second study in this series, and how Jesus responded to Peter at that time:

Jesus asked His disciples *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”*² It is later in this chapter that we read of Peter's response:

*“You are the Messiah³, the Son of the living God.”*⁴ Jesus' reply to Peter was *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*⁵

So Peter's great commission was to be become the rock upon which the Church would be built, and at the heart of that to be a pastor - a shepherd - to the flock. For Peter, this could only happen as a result of the incredible grace that was extended to him following his denial of Christ. This was the only way perhaps that Peter could be entrusted with such a charge without relying on his own strength, looking rather to the enabling and provision of God.

Questions

1. What commission has the Lord laid on your heart?
2. If you could do anything for the Lord, what would you choose to do?
3. Do you know anyone in your Church with a heart to pastor the flock? What is the 'fruit' of the heart that they have?
4. What lesson can we learn from Peter?

² Matthew 16:13

³ Or 'The Christ'

⁴ Matthew 16:16

⁵ Matthew 16:17-19