

Synchronizing the Resurrection Narratives, Event #20d: Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?”—Internal integration and personal love (John 21:15)

Review of the resurrection *events* up to this point (I have narrowed down the *approximate* hour of the events based on sunset of Saturday, April 4, 33 and the sunrise of Sunday, April 5, 33; MM is Mary Magdalene):

- Event #1: Saturday, 5:45 p.m., April 4, 33: Two Marys go to “look” at tomb, Matt. 28:1.
- Event #2: Sunday, 3:00 a.m., April 5, 33: Earthquake and angel from heaven, Matt. 28:2-4.
- Event #3: Sunday, 4:00 a.m., April 5, 33: MM visits the tomb before daybreak, Jn. 20:1.
- Event #4: Sunday, 4:15 a.m.: MM reports empty tomb to John & Peter, Jn. 20:2.
- Event #5: Sunday, 4:30 a.m.: Peter and John run to the tomb, Jn. 20:3-9.
- Event #6: Sunday, 4:40 a.m.: MM returns to tomb & sees 2 angels, Jn. 20:10-13.
- Event #7: Sunday, 4:50 a.m.: MM sees the Risen Lord, Jn. 20:14-17.
- Event #8: Sunday, 5:00 a.m.: MM tells disciples who do not believe her, Jn. 20:18; Mk. 16:9-11.
- Event #9: Sunday, 6:00 a.m.: MM & other women go to tomb of Jesus, Mk. 16:1-3; Lk. 24:1-2.
- Event #10: Sunday, 6:30 a.m.: Women enter tomb; 3 angels, Mt. 28:5-7; Mk 16:4-7; Lk. 24:3-8.
- Event #11: Sunday, 7:00 a.m.: Women run in fear; Jesus meets them, Mt. 28:8-10; Mk. 16:8.
- Event #12: Sunday, 8:00 a.m.: Women went to tell disciples; soldiers report, Mat 28:11-15.
- Event #13: Sunday, 8:10 a.m.: Once again, the disciples do not believe the women, Lk. 24:9-11
- Event #14: Sunday, 8:30 a.m.: However, Peter runs to the tomb a second time, Lk. 24:12.
- Event #15: Sunday, 8:45 a.m.: Private meeting between Jesus and Peter, 1 Cor. 15:5; Lk. 24:34.
- Event #16: Sunday, 10 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Jesus & 2 travelers to Emmaus, Mk. 16:12; Lk. 24:13-32.
- Event #17: Sunday, 5:00 p.m. The 2 travelers tell the 11 Disciples, Mk. 16:13; Lk. 24:33-35.
- Event #18: Sunday, 5:20 p.m. Thomas leaves; Jesus appears, Lk. 24:36-49; Jn. 20:19-25.
- Event #19: 8 days after the resurrection. Jesus appears to Thomas, Mk. 16:14-18; Jn 20:26-31.
- Event #20: 2 weeks after the resurrection. Jesus appears on shore of Sea of Galilee, Jn 21:1-25.

Let’s recall when the Lord addressed Peter in John 21:15-17 that it was not the first time that they had seen each other since Peter’s denials. There had been a private meeting between Jesus and the denier (event #15)—which discourse God did not see fit to reveal to us. It was personal and private. Let’s just say that there are things between the Lord and every believer that really are no one else’s business.

The question arises as to why the Lord would ask Peter thrice if he loved Him, since there had already been a private reconciliation which would have included at least a demonstration of

Peter's love. I believe what we have in John 21 is a special case of public "confession/acknowledgement"—not an acknowledgement of sin but of love. Peter had made a very public denial of the Lord which the other disciples were well aware of, and so this was needed lest they view his denial as a trivial matter. Peter's triple denial would be displaced with his triple acknowledgment which was needed for reinstatement to his ministry.

The meal seems to have passed in silence. That awe which hung over the disciples in all their contacts with Jesus lay heavily on them, and they sat there huddled around the fire, eating silently the meal which Christ had provided. No doubt they were gazing silently at the silent Lord. Then, the Lord broke the tense silence with the question, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" (John 21:15). The colloquy between the Lord and Peter includes Christ's threefold question, Peter's threefold answer, and the threefold charge. I shall attempt to shed a bit of light on some of these very profound truths in the next few essays.

Note the nomenclature the Lord uses in addressing Peter: "Simon, son of John." This was the name Peter bore in the days before his discipleship. It was the name by which Jesus had addressed him, therefore, on that never-to-be-forgotten turning-point of his life, when he was first brought to Him by his brother Andrew. It was the name by which Jesus had addressed him when he had been able to see so profoundly, and thus boldly declare: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). So the name by which Jesus addresses him now says to him in effect: "Remember your human weakness; remember how you were drawn to Me; remember the high-water mark of your discipleship, when it was crystal clear before you that I am the Son of God, and remembering all these, answer Me—do you love Me more than these?"

But who or what are "these?" They do not refer to the fish, nets, or any of the material things of life. "These" refer to the other disciples. What Christ is doing is moving Peter to remember how he, about a dozen hours before his denial, averred that although *all* may fall away, yet he will not (Mark 14:29). Jesus is forcing Peter to look at his own arrogance before the same disciples whom he so easily discredited. One of the greatest acts of love of Christ is when He reminds us of our arrogant weaknesses so we will see our critical need of Him. The easiest thing to be in life is to be arrogant. It is also the most deadly as far as spiritual growth.

Let's not lose sight of the grace here. Christ did not say: "Simon, son of John, are you sorry for what you did? Simon, son of John, will you promise never to do it again." No. What Christ primarily wants from us is not repentance, not vows, not conduct, but a personal love for Him, for if there is this love then all other aspects of the Christian way of life will follow naturally, authentically, and beautifully.

Personal love for Christ is not the same thing as a general love that is experienced by every believer at one time or another. Personal love is only possible through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and spiritual growth. It is one thing to have a general love or appreciation for what Christ has done (1st and 3rd person emphasis), it is quite another to have a strong 2nd person orientation to Christ that can be described in terms of personal love.

Personal love requires internal integration. Apart from internal integration there can be no personal closeness, presence, or *shared* union of love between the believer and Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the believer must be internally integrated in himself before he can be close to anyone—let alone the Lord. If the believer's volition and interests are not the same as the Lord's, he is precluded from having personal love with Him. We know on a human level that there cannot be any true or rich human fellowship or closeness between two people (even if they are sitting next to each other) if one is distracted and really does not care what the other person says or thinks. Likewise, it is impossible for a believer to have personal love for Christ if there is not

rich shared attention. Where there is no rich shared attention there is no true or deep personal love. General love? Maybe. Love for what He has already done for you? Yes. Love for His grace and faithfulness? Perhaps. However, do not make the mistake of thinking that love for what He has done for you is the same as personal love *for Him*. There is a whole new level of love for those who truly care for what Christ cares for—mutual shared interests. However, this requires internal integration of the believer’s thoughts and desires. This integration is impossible apart from the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Without a robust spiritual life the believer will miss out on personal love for Christ and be counted among those who are double-minded and unstable in all of their ways, setting their minds on the old sin nature and the things of kosmos diabolicus (James 1:8)—even though they may retain a bit of “love” *for what* Christ has done. Christ wants so much more, and that is one reason for the tests and trials of life that we have been studying in Job!

On the Glory Road,

Paster Don

