



## Daily Verse and Comment

### John 21:15-17

(15) So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, 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. (16) 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. (17) 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.

*King James Version*

Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him "more than these." It is not obvious what He is referring to in this phrase. Some have suggested He is referring to the nets, boats, and other aspects of their earthly profession, or perhaps He is asking if Peter loved Him more than he loved the other disciples. But there is another possibility, which has its genesis in the night of Jesus Christ's arrest:

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples. ([Matthew 26:31-35](#))

Jesus predicted that *all* of the disciples would stumble on this [Passover](#) night. Yet, Peter was so sure of himself and so filled with confidence in his own strength that he proudly asserted himself above the other disciples. To paraphrase, he said, "Lesser men may stumble, but *I* will never stumble." He was essentially claiming to be spiritually stronger than the other men whom Jesus had also called and taught.

With this in mind, we can understand why a number of translations render Christ's question in [John 21:15](#) as, "Do you [love](#) Me more than these *do*?" This indicates that the word "these" indeed refers to the other disciples, but it specifically speaks of *how much* they loved Christ. That Passover night, Peter had basically claimed to love [Jesus Christ](#) more than the others did. Now, Jesus brings this back around to see if Peter still held to his lofty opinion of himself, claiming to love Jesus more than the others did.

Notice also that with each question, Jesus uses his family name, "Jonah." The original Greek does not have the word "son" in these verses—Jesus simply calls him "Simon of Jonah." Names have special significance in the Bible, and it is not coincidental that three times Jesus makes use of the name of Jonah.

We are all familiar with the story of the prophet by the same name and how, even though he nominally followed God's instructions, he is never shown fully surrendering to God's will. He eventually does what [God](#) tells him to do, but he resists God throughout. Twice, Jonah says that it is better for him to die than to live, and a third time, he tells God that he is angry enough to die. Jonah would rather die than accept not living on his own terms.

In this, we can see an aspect of Peter, though not nearly to the same depth of wretchedness. The various gospels record that Peter pledged to lay down his life, that he was ready to go to prison and death, and that he would die before denying his Messiah. When the time came for Jesus to be arrested, Peter pulled out his sword and was apparently ready to back up his words—he was ready to take on the whole mob and go down fighting. Yet, he ended up denying Jesus three times. Now the resurrected Christ asks Peter three times

if he loved Him. Three times, Jesus calls him "Simon of Jonah," perhaps pointing out that he was not doing so well in completely surrendering to God's will.

Peter never asked Jesus if it were His will for Peter to follow Him to a violent death! Peter decided for himself what needed to be done and how he would serve God. Like Jonah, he seemed more inclined toward death than toward living life in a way that was not on his terms. Jesus planned to meet the disciples in Galilee after His resurrection, and He wanted Peter to strengthen the others. Jesus had already expressed that He would use the disciples in preaching to others. In other words, Christ's will was for them to live and to carry on with what He had been training them for.

But Simon of Jonah had his own ideas. Because of Peter's willfulness, Jesus questions him three times about his love for Him. Peter neglected to seek God's will before plunging into a course of action, and he ended up stumbling badly in trying to show love. If we act by our own will, even if it is out of the deepest of human regard and affection, it will not bear the same good fruit if it is not also God's will.

— David C. Grabbe

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