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"LOVEST THOU ME MORE THAN THESE?"

– JOHN 21:15-22. – MAY 5. –

WE NOW come to our Lord's fifth manifestation of himself after his resurrection – some would say the seventh, not counting, as we do, that our Lord's manifestation to Mary was the same referred to in Matthew as his appearance to "the women," and that his showing himself to Peter was in the walk to Emmaus. All of these manifestations, whether we count them four or six, occurred within the first eight days after our Lord's resurrection – on the two first-days or Sundays, and were in or near Jerusalem. What we designate the fifth appearance was in another part of the country altogether – in Galilee – and was probably at least two weeks later. No account is given of the doings of the apostles in the interim, but we can surmise them. They probably waited in expectation at Jerusalem over the third and possibly over the fourth Sunday after the resurrection, and were disappointed that our Lord made no further manifestation. They then remembered, perhaps, the message which Jesus had sent by Mary, that he would meet them in Galilee.

Having no business further at Jerusalem, and their Master and leader having thus disappeared, "changed," so that altho they believed him to be no longer dead he was invisible to them except as he would appear for a few moments talking to them, and again disappear indefinitely, they were at a loss what to do, and decided to return to their home country on the Sea of Galilee. More than this, as active men in the prime of life, they must be doing. Several of them had been fishermen, and Jesus had called them from their nets to be "fishers of men," and they had left all to follow him; but now they could no longer follow him. Everything was changed when he was

changed, so far as they could see. They could not carry on the work longer, for what could they preach? How could they tell others of their hopes in a King who had been crucified, and whom they, altho he was risen, could no longer see nor point out to others? They had not yet received their new commission; nor were they quite ready for it.

It is not surprising that under these circumstances seven of them with one consent, under the lead of Peter, determined to reengage in the fishing business. This was the one business in which they had experience, and that only three years before. They fished with nets, and the habit seems to have been to do the fishing at night. This was the very occasion Jesus was waiting for. He wished the disciples to reach the extremity of thinking and reasoning on the matter of his resurrection, and what they should now do, in order that they might be prepared to receive definitely and profitably the instructions he had to give respecting their future course. The reactionary tendency to turn from preaching to the fishing business would be sure to come; and he considered it expedient that it should come while he was with them, that they might be profited to the utmost in respect to it. Now that they had reembarked in the fishing business the time had come for our Lord to demonstrate to them two things: **(1)** That he had a mission for them to perform in connection with the fishing for men which they had not yet accomplished, and which his death and resurrection would not interfere with, but rather stimulate and make really effective. **(2)** It would enable him to demonstrate in a most practical manner that the divine power by which he had hitherto provided for their necessities, and had at times fed multitudes, was still his, and would be continually exercised in their interest if they would continue to obey him.

It is interesting for us to note thus that while our Lord was invisible to the disciples they were visible to **[R2806 : page**

148] him, and all of their plans, arrangements and doings were fully known to him; and he was ready to take advantage of every circumstance and to make all things work together for their good. Thus, by miraculous power exercised in some manner unknown to us, he hindered fish from going into their nets that night. They, not knowing the true situation, were no doubt greatly disappointed, grieved, vexed, at their poor success, and perhaps classed it as a part of failure and tribulation which had in some respects followed them ever since they had espoused the cause of Jesus. And there is a lesson here for each and all of the Lord's people today: We know not what is for our highest welfare. Sometimes those things which we crave and desire to grasp, considering them to be good, might really be to our disadvantage. Blessed are they who are able by faith to pierce the gloom of every trial and difficulty and perplexity, and to realize that "The Lord knoweth them that are his," and that he is causing all things to work together for their good. So it was with the apostles: their disappointment became a channel of blessed instruction.

In the dawn of the morning Jesus appeared to them as a man, standing on the seashore. He called out to them to inquire if they had any fish, as tho he would purchase. They replied that they had toiled all night and caught nothing. The stranger then suggested that they cast the net on the other side of the ship, and so humbled were they by their disappointment that they did not stop to argue the question and to declare that they were old experienced fishermen, and that they did not know if he had any experience whatever; they merely concluded that as they had been lifting and casting the net all night they might just as well do it again, and thus demonstrate to the stranger that there were no fish in that vicinity. But behold! immediately the net filled with great fish, so that these seven strong men (Peter, Thomas, James, John, Nathanael, and two

others whose names are not given) were unable to draw it, and were obliged to drag it ashore.

Immediately the disciples grasped the thought that the stranger on the shore was Jesus, and none of them more quickly than loving John. The devoted and impulsive Peter whose heart still burned as he remembered the Lord's words, and perhaps as he remembered also his own weaknesses in connection with our Lord's last night of earth-life, could not wait for the boat to take him to the shore, but swam, – apparently fearing lest the Master should disappear again before he would have another opportunity to see and converse with him. When the disciples got to shore with their netful of fish they found, not only Jesus, but a fire and fish thereon already cooked. Here they had the lesson that under the Lord's care and supervision they could either be successful or unsuccessful in the fish business, and that he had the power, not only to give them fish in the ordinary way, but to provide cooked fish by miraculous power if it better served his purpose so to do.

They breakfasted with Jesus, for they knew him – not by any marks of nails, but by the miracle which he had performed. We read rather peculiarly, "None of them durst ask him, knowing it was the Lord;" they were so sure that it was he that they could not think of even seeming to question the fact by inquiry. The conversation while they breakfasted is not recorded, the Evangelist coming directly to the important words by our Lord addressed to Peter, the senior and leader of this new fish-business partnership. He addressed Peter, not as he had been accustomed, by his new name, Peter, but by his old name, Simon, possibly as an intimation to Peter that he had not manifested in the last few days the rock-like qualities implied in his surname, and was now inclined to leave the work for the Church for secular business. And the inquiry was

most pointed, "Lovest thou me more than these?" – boats, nets, fishing tackle, etc.? You started out to be my disciple, and now I ask the question, In which place is your heart – with me in the service of the Kingdom, or in the fish business? Peter's answer was prompt, "Lord, thou knowest that [R2807 : page 148] I love *thee*." Jesus responded then, "Feed my lambs" – my little ones – instead of longer following the fish business. Then Jesus said the second time the same thing, and Peter made the same reply, and then our Lord answered, "Take care of my sheep" – give your thought, attention, care, to them, rather than to these fishing implements, boats, etc. Jesus asked him the third time the same question. Peter was grieved with this: it seemed to imply doubt on the Lord's part, and perhaps the third time reminded him that he had denied the Lord three times, and that now the Lord was requiring him three times to confess his love for him. It touched a very tender spot in Peter's heart and experiences, and we may be sure that it was not done by our Lord, even in this delicate manner, with a view merely to pain Peter, but with a view to his blessing, his profit. Peter's confession this time was still stronger: "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

It is worthy of notice that our Lord's words on these three occasions were not exactly the same altho the Common Version so represents them. In the New Testament Greek two words are used for "love," *agapee* and *phileo*. When our Lord said "lovest" in the first two inquiries, he used the former word, *agapas*, which signifies kind *love* in its strongest, purest and most disinterested [R2807 : page 149] form; but in his third inquiry our Lord used the other form, *phileis*, which signifies attachment, duty-love, the obligatory love such as relatives bear toward each other, even when the other, deeper, love is lacking. Peter in all of his answers uses the latter form of the word, thus asseverating his personal attachment and devotion to the Lord, but, in view of recent experiences, he

refrained from claiming the highest love for which our Lord inquired. This humility was an excellent sign, as showing that Peter had learned a needed lesson and had ceased to boast, but rather to fear his own weakness. Our Lord's use the third time of the word indicating duty-love grieved Peter specially because by changing the word he implied – Are you sure that you have even the duty-love, Peter? This discrimination as between these two words is borne out by other uses of the same in the New Testament.

DUTY-LOVE (PHILEO) ILLUSTRATED.

"He that *loveth* father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that *loveth* son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. – Matt. 10:37.

Duty-love to our family relatives is right, but it must not equal our duty-love toward the Lord, else we can never follow him as "overcomers."

"He that *loveth* his life shall lose it." – John 12:25.

It is our *duty* to *love* life, in the sense of appreciating it and being unwilling to destroy it or waste it foolishly; but he who has become Christ's disciple and who is pledged to walk in his footsteps even unto death is to remember that he has already surrendered his life as a man, exchanging it for the hope of life as a "new creature," a spiritual being. He is no longer to be controlled by *phileo* or duty-love toward earthly life, but, moved by *agapee* love, he is to willingly lay down his natural life in the service of God – "for the brethren."

"For the Father himself *loveth* you, BECAUSE ye *have loved* me." – John 16:27.

In both of these cases *phileo* signifies duty-love. This was the highest form of love the disciples as a whole could as yet appreciate, as Peter testified. And the Father's love for them was the same duty-love: the disciples had not yet received the holy spirit and its *agapee* or higher disinterested love and its character, and hence the Father could not love them for themselves but exercised a duty-love toward them merely *because* they had attained a duty-love toward Christ and had become his friends and disciples.

"If ye were of the world, the world would *love* his own."
– John 15:19.

Phileo or duty-love is exercised by the worldly parent and child and neighbor on the selfish basis – "*his own*."

"If any man *love* not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be *Anathema Maranatha* [– he shall be accursed or condemned to the Second Death when the Lord comes]." – 1 Cor. 16:22.

An appreciation of the work of Christ will be expected of all when brought to a knowledge of the salvation which God has provided in him: and whoever refuses to respond in *phileo* or duty-love will be cut off from life early in the Millennial reign. But those who exercise the *phileo* or duty-love will be expected to press forward and to attain the "mark" of *agapee* love, true, disinterested character love, – if they would attain life everlasting. Thank God that the present life does not close the door of opportunity to any that have never known *phileo* or duty-love, nor to *many* who have known this, but have not yet attained *agapee*.

"*Love* of money," "*lovers* of their own selves," "*loveth* to have preeminence," "*lovers* of pleasure," "*lover* of hospitality," and *friend*, are from *phileo*, duty-love or a love

which has a cause or demand upon it. Peter exhorts that we add to brotherly *kindness (phileo)* the next and higher grade of *disinterested love – agapee*. – 2 Pet. 1:7.

DISINTERESTED LOVE (AGAPEE) ILLUSTRATED.

"God so *loved* the world that he gave his only begotten Son." – John 3:16.

The love prompting man's redemption was not *phileo* or duty-love, for God had not wronged his creature in the sentence of death; nor had man ever done anything for his Creator which could put the latter under obligation or duty-love in return. God's love prompting to our redemption was *agapee*, or disinterested charity, benevolence, love.

"God commandeth his *love* toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly." – Rom. 5:8.

This *love (agapee)* which God exemplified is the kind he sets before us as the highest standard or "mark" toward which we must run if we would gain the prize; – a mark which is impossible to our fallen flesh, but which is attainable by our renewed minds, wills, hearts. This standard is expressed in the words: –

"Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy soul, mind, strength; and thou shalt *love* thy neighbor as thyself." – Luke 10:27; Rom. 3:9.

"The end of the commandment is *love*." – 1 Tim. 1:5.

That is to say, the object of all instruction and discipline on God's part is to bring us to this character likeness to himself represented in this word *agapee* – love; for "God is love [*agapee*], and he that dwelleth in love [*agapee*] dwelleth in God and God in him." – 1 John 4:16. **[R2807 : page 150]**

We are to recognize as "brethren" those who have only the *phileo* degree of duty-love, as Paul did when he wrote, "Greet [for me] all that *love [phileo]* us in the faith" (Titus 3:15); but we are to see to it that we "*love* the brotherhood" (1 Pet. 2:17) with *agapee* or higher love, which counts not present life precious and to be saved, but gladly lays down life for the brethren – in daily and hourly sacrifices of time and money and all earthly interests on their behalf. – 1 John 3:16.

Peter contrasts the two loves in one verse, saying, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the spirit unto [the extent of] unfeigned love [*phileo*] of the brethren, see that ye [go on to] *love [agapee]* one another with a pure heart, fervently." – 1 Pet. 1:22.

"Love [*agapee*] worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love [*agapee*] is the fulfilling of the Law." – Rom. 13:10.

It is *agapee* that is mistranslated "charity" in 1 Cor. 8:1 – "Knowledge puffeth up, but *agapee* buildeth up."

It is *agapee* that is misrendered "charity" in the Apostle's great discourse on love in 1 Cor. 13:1,2,3,4,8,13; 14:1. Here he styles *agapee* love the principal thing of Christian character, the crown of all Christian graces, telling us that without it all sacrifices and self-denials would be valueless in God's esteem, while with it as the inspiring motive our feeblest efforts are acceptable through Christ.

PETER WISELY AND GENTLY REPROVED.

So far as the record shows these questions respecting his present love were the only reproof our Lord gave Peter on account of his temporary deflection and denial of his cause; and here we have a lesson which many of the Lord's people will do well to lay closely to heart. Many feel as tho they must

exact from a brother or a sister a very decided apology for any act of discourtesy, even tho much less important than Peter's misdeed. Let us learn well this lesson of reproofing others very gently, very considerately, kindly, by a hint rather than by a direct charge and detail of the wrong – by an enquiry respecting the *present* condition of their hearts, rather than respecting a *former* condition, in which we know that they have erred. We are to be less careful for the punishments that will follow wrongdoings than for the recovery of the erring one out of the error of his way. We are not to attempt to judge and to punish one another for misdeeds, but rather to remember that all this is in the hands of the Lord; – we are not in any sense of the word to avenge ourselves or to give a chastisement or recompense for evil. This is not to be understood as annulling parental obligation to judging and chastening children; tho the principle of love is to have full control there also, to the extent of our judgment. We are to have kindness, love and benevolence toward all, especially toward those who are followers of Jesus. As for Peter and his denial of the Lord, and as [R2808 : page 150] to the offences which may come to us through brethren, we may know that under divine providence some corrective penalty or discipline, direct or indirect, always follows; but we are not to attempt to inflict those penalties, nor to impress a condemnation, upon those who are in error and who realize their error, but rather to sympathize with them wisely, by helping them to learn the good lessons.

On the other hand, however, we would all have considered it a noble act on Peter's part had he fallen at our Lord's feet at his first opportunity and entreated his forgiveness for the weaknesses of the past. We would have loved and honored him the more for so hearty a manifestation of his repentance: indeed, altho the account does not so state, he may have done this. And brethren who at any time trespass upon

the rights, interests or feelings of others, however unintentionally, should be prompt and hearty in their apologies; even tho brethren filled with *agapee* would not demand this as a condition of fellowship.

In replying to Peter our Lord uses three different Greek words in his three different exhortations: the first time he exhorts him to feed the lambs; the second time to care for or tend the sheep; the third time to feed the weak or delicate sheep. This gives us three views of the Lord's flock. There are the young, the beginners, the lambs, the babes in Christ, undeveloped in Christian *character*, and who need special feeding with the truth, – "the milk of the Word." Secondly, there are the more matured sheep of the Lord's flock, of riper knowledge and character, who have learned to attend to their own feeding upon the precious truth, but who, nevertheless, need tending or guidance, direction, oversight. Thirdly, there are the weak sheep, who for the time ought to be strong, ought to be able to feed themselves upon the bounties which the Lord has graciously provided in his Word, but who, through weaknesses of the flesh, or besetments, or bad provender, or some reason, have not made progress, and are therefore weak in the faith. These are to be fed, cared for. And all of these matters are parts of a bishop's or overseer's duty in the Lord's flock.

While the Lord's words were addressed specially to Peter, as the leader of the group, undoubtedly the instructions were meant also for all of the "eleven," for the apostles were all bishops, all caretakers of the Lord's flock. And the same message is applicable, tho not in the same degree, to all ministers of the truth today; whoever, by the grace of God, is placed in a position of opportunity to feed the Lord's flock should **[R2808 : page 151]** consider it one of the highest privileges of life, and should gladly lay aside every weight and

hindrance, that he might thoroughly enjoy and perform this service. Thus the Apostle said to the elders at Ephesus, "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the holy spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God." – Acts 20:28.

These three classes of the Lord's flock are to be found today: the young, the advanced and strong, and the weak and delicate, who need special assistance. Of this latter class many today are in Babylon, and need the helping hand which the Lord's people are able to extend to them – they are weak, impoverished through lack of nourishment, through a famine, not of bread nor of water, but for hearing of the word of the Lord. (Amos 8:11.) They have been hearing the words of human theory and "tradition of the elders" for a long time, and have been starving upon its inconsistencies; and so, wherever found, they are hungering and thirsting for the truth, and need that Peter and all of the Lord's followers shall do with their might what they are able to do to deliver such from the chains of error and darkness by which they are held – to liberate them and bring them in contact with the spiritual food which the heavenly Father is now so abundantly supplying.

In view of Peter's prompt and unhesitating answers respecting his filial or duty-love, the Lord gave a prophecy indicating that he would indeed be faithful to the last; and implying that he would be a martyr by crucifixion, his hands being extended. And tradition tells us that Peter was faithful even unto death, and that being ordered to be put to death by crucifixion by Nero, at his own request he was executed head downward, as being unworthy, according to his own statement, to be crucified as was his Lord.

Our Lord's words, "Follow me," referred not merely to a spiritual following, but he walked along the shore of the sea,

the disciples following. Peter having heard the Lord's prophetic declaration respecting himself, seeing John near, inquired respecting his future – What will he do? What will happen to him? Will he be faithful unto death, and will he also be a martyr? Our Lord's refusal to answer may be considered rather in the light of a reproof to Peter and a lesson to us all. We are not to question divine providence, but rather to submit ourselves thereto. It seems to be a trait of human nature to think of companionship even in trouble, persecution, etc., and many, like Peter, have wondered why they should have trials and difficulties different from those which came upon some others of the Lord's flock. The Master's answer to Peter is his answer to all such: "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." Each of us should learn the lesson of reliance upon the Lord's wisdom in all of our affairs, whether he has particularly indicated them or left them still obscure. We may know of his love and wisdom and power, and may trust him where we cannot trace him, and be contented whatever lot we see, since we know it is his hand that it is leading.

"IF I WILL THAT HE TARRY TILL I COME."

These our Lord's words respecting John, seem to have raised the suggestion in the minds of the disciples that John would not die – that while the others would die he would remain alive until the second coming of Christ. But John himself tells us that Jesus said nothing of this kind; it was purely an inference on the part of the disciples. We may see in John a figure of some of the Church living in the end of the Gospel age – unto the second presence of the Lord. John is not alive, but a class whom he represented has continued and still remains and will then be "changed," etc. Let us who are privileged to remain to this time of favor and blessing and enlightenment give glory to the Lord, and see to it that the loving disposition of John is manifested in us, and also his

energy, his zeal; for while he is called the loving disciple we are to remember also that he was, because of his impetuous zeal, styled, with his brother, Boanerges – sons of thunder. Let us be full of energy, full of sacrifices which love prompts, that we may glorify our Lord in our bodies and spirits which are his. To this end it will be well that we remember the Lord's words, which applied to the entire seven as well as to Peter, tho he was spokesman for the entire number: "Lovest thou me more than these?" The same question arises with all of the Lord's people today. It is necessary that we have more or less contact with the world, with business, with home duties, with social amenities, etc., and the question is, How shall we discharge our duties, balancing them with our duties toward the Lord, as "new creatures," his "royal priesthood"? Shall the Lord see that we love the earthly things better than him? If so, he declares that we are not worthy of him, and he will not recognize us as members of his Bride. He will have in that select little flock only such as love him supremely – more than they love houses or lands, husbands or wives, or children, or any earthly thing. – Matt. 10:37.
