November 19, 2017

**The End of the Beginning**

John 21:15-22

Growth Track Step 3 today …

**Intro:** We’ve spent quite a bit of time in the Gospel of John on and off for the past couple of years. I love the Gospels - The word means, “Good News” - we always get Good News when read and study Matthew, Mark, Luke & John -

One of the reasons for that is they are all about Jesus. If you love Jesus, you want to know more about Him. Even if you are simply curious to know more, these books are the place to go first - here we get firsthand eyewitness account information.

The passage we are looking at today is the last passage in John - In fact, this may be the last passage written in the Bible - some think that this Gospel was written last of all the books, so these could be the final, final words.

But it’s far from the end - it’s just the beginning - That’s why I like to call it, “The End of the Beginning!”

Luke carried the story on in the Book of Acts of the Apostles - then Paul, Peter, James, John wrote letters to teach the Church even more -

But what did John want to leave us with. We often encourage new believers to read the Book of John before they read anything else in the Bible, because he so clearly tells us of Jesus and His purpose - which is wrapped up in our purpose for living.

If we are reading this as a key message to us - and these are the final words of influence John wanted to give us - what does he want to leave us with? What does he want us focusing on … thinking about?

 **> Do you love me?**

John 21:15-17 - After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

 “Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.”

 “Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.

 Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

 “Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.”

 “Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.

 A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

 Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.”

 Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.

What would accurately describe your relationship with Jesus? If your relationship with Jesus were accurately described in just a few words - or even just one word - what would it be?

Do you love Him?

How deep is your love? How great is your love?

It is true - there are two different Greek words used in this passage that are translated “love” -

1st time - Do you love me? - Agape - to love dearly - God’s kind of love - the deepest love.

Peter’s response - Lord, you know I love you - Phileo - to approve of, to like, to befriend.

2nd time - same words -

Jesus: Peter, don’t you love me more deeply than the love of a friend - isn’t there more to our relationship than just your approval of me?

Peter: Lord, you know I like you - as a friend - I approve of you.

3rd time -

Jesus changes His word - phileo -

So, your love is not deep - you don’t love me dearly with the same kind of love that I have for you - the kind of love that caused me to die for you?

Peter - grieved - Lord, you know all things - you know how deep my love is - and it’s not agape love - it’s not the deepest love. I can’t go beyond the like of friendship or affinity - I am not ready to give me life for you.

How deep is your love?

***“Do You Love Me”? video from Fiddler on the Roof***

How deep is your love?

Has your love deepened or lessened in the time you have been in relationship with Jesus?

Letter to Ephesus -

Revelation 2:4 - But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!

Just like with Peter - He knows how deep our love is.

But Jesus knew something Peter didn’t know.

John 21:18-19 - “I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don’t want to go.” Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, “Follow me.”

This day on the beach, Peter’s love was not the love of Jesus - the love of giving your whole life - but Jesus knew He would get there.

Isn’t it awesome that Jesus knows we can grow more than we believe we can grow? Isn’t is awesome that Jesus knows there is more in us than we realize ourselves? More love -

**There is the potential in you for a deeper love, a deeper relationship, and a deeper passion for Jesus than you have or know right now!**

It wouldn’t take long -

Jesus would leave … Peter and the others would do what He said to do … go pray … and wait …

The Holy Spirit came - and Peter was changed!

He was able to stand up in front of thousands of people, some of whom were responsible for Jesus’ death, and say, “You killed Him! But God raised Him from the dead!”

He was thrown in prison - He was beaten - again and again -

He was put in jail right after Stephen was stoned and James was beheaded - he was destined to die the next morning … but God sent an angel to open the prison and Peter escaped!

Many years later, as a very old man, Peter would be sentenced to death by Rome, everything Jesus said here would be fulfilled - and Peter would request to be crucified upside down … not worthy …

If Jesus were to ask him this question after the Holy Spirit came and he is proclaiming Jesus before people who killed Jesus - Peter’s answer would be different.

If Jesus were to ask Him this question when he was getting ready to be stripped naked and crucified upside down … Peter’s answer would be different.

On this day, he didn’t think he could grow - he thought he had reached his limit - he didn’t think his commitment could get any deeper - but it got much deeper.

How deep is your love? There is a greater depth in you than you know!

Here’s a problem for us - we get distracted -

John 21:20-24 - Peter turned around and saw behind them the disciple Jesus loved—the one who had leaned over to Jesus during supper and asked, “Lord, who will betray you?” Peter asked Jesus, “What about him, Lord?”

 Jesus replied, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me.” So the rumor spread among the community of believers that this disciple wouldn’t die. But that isn’t what Jesus said at all. He only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

 This disciple is the one who testifies to these events and has recorded them here. And we know that his account of these things is accurate.

What about John? What about him? Why don’t you ask him these questions?

What’s going to happen to John?

Jesus says, “Let me worry about John. I’m talking to you about you.”

We come to church, we hear messages, and we nod our heads thinking about how much they apply to someone else.

Jesus is asking you today, “Do you love me? How much do you love me? How deep is your love? How much are you willing to give in love for me?”

And He already knows the answer. He knows the answer before we do - and He believes in us more than we believe in ourselves!

But, when He is trying to convince us of how deep our love can go, we want to distract to someone or something else.

People come to marriage counseling wanting the counselor to fix their spouses - they are not interested in what needs fixing in them.

“What about them?”

People get distracted in the depth of their love and service for Jesus because they don’t like something in the leadership - There is something in the pastor they don’t like.

I get it! There is tons in me not to like!

You may have a list - I can add to your list! I’m my biggest critic! I have fallen so far short of my own goals, I have been ready to quit, over and over and over and over again.

But in spite of my stupidity and failure, there is this thing about a call. Jesus called me a long time ago - and He is patient with my mistakes, stupidity and failure, no matter how impatient people may be.

And Jesus still trusts me with leadership no matter how much you and I know I don’t deserve it.

But - you will let my failures, my shortcomings, your disagreements with me - or any other leader - keep you from going deeper in your love for Jesus?

You will get distracted by cultural style - style of music - tempo - lights - the way people dress - whether or not they bring their coffee into the so-called holy place -

People are dying and going to hell and we are pointing at John saying, “What about him!”

Jesus says, “Don’t worry about him - quit complaining about the music, the lights, the dress, the tattoos, the coffee, the way the various groups and programs are structured. You’re just trying to distract!”

With all your distractions - you miss what Jesus is trying to say to YOU!

Hebrews 12:1-2 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

Quit distracting - quit looking at others - quit making excuses - quit wanting everything the way you want it or else you’re not going to fully support -

John 21:22 - Jesus replied, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me.”

You - you - you - it’s not about anything else - it’s about you - Get your eyes off all this other stuff - let Jesus deal with other people - Let him deal with leadership -

He tells us to honor leadership and follow leadership and most importantly - FOLLOW HIM!

You! Follow me!

John 21:25 - Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written.

Oh - there is so much more!

There is more than we know! If only we could focus on what He wants - what He wants for us - how He wants to use us to reach others.

He loves you - do you love Him?

How deep is your love?

Song of Songs - Song of Solomon - tells the story of a King and a young maiden and their deep love for each other.

It’s a true story - it is also a picture of the deep love that is to exist between Christ and His bride -

Song of Songs 8:6 - Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy as enduring as the grave.

Death is pretty strong - it comes for everyone. Without Christ’s resurrection power, death is unbreakable and undefeatable.

That’s how He loves us - that’s how He wants us to love Him - unbreakable - undefeatable.

This is the End of the Beginning - How deep is your love?