

“Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? Knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.

This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?” John 21:12-16.

I.e., Lovest thou me more than the rest of the apostles who were gathered about? It may be to give Peter the opportunity to publicly recover himself from his shameful denial of Christ; to wit: *“Then said the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold; and they warmed themselves; AND PETER STOOD WITH THEM, & WARMED HIMSELF.” Jn. 18:17-18.*

AND SIMON PETER STOOD AND WARMED HIMSELF (Note: This is the second time that these shameful words are used: to wit: *“AND PETER STOOD AND WARMED HIMSELF.” Jn. 18:25.* Yes, in the hour of His greatest need, the dear Lord Jesus was abandoned by the very disciple who claimed to love Him best. *“They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I AM NOT. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again; and immediately the cock crew.” Jn. 18:25-27.* And, Dr. Luke’s more colorful account; to wit:

“Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him; for he is a Galilean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.” (Lk. 22:54-62)

And so, when the resurrected Lord Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him more than the other apostles loved him, it was not the first time that the issue had arisen. Just a few days earlier, Peter had insisted with great passion that if all the other apostles should deny their Master, he would never do so, even if it meant Peter’s death; and then proceeded to deny Christ – three times in a row – under most cowardly circumstances. And now, here was the Lord Jesus, graciously offering Peter another opportunity to publicly declare Peter’s undying love – in the same expansive way; to wit: *“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.” Jn. 21:15.*

Mind you, Beloved, that these events we’re now dealing with occurred in the last sliver of time between the resurrection of Christ and the holy ascension of Christ; to wit: *“But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” Eph. 4:7,8.*

“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty.)”
(Acts 1:9-15)

Whereupon, the approximately 120 people gathered in the upper room – male and female – set about the business of selecting a replacement for the traitor Judas Iscariot; ***“And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”*** Acts 1:26. And so, you see, Beloved, that from the colloquy between the Lord Jesus and Peter regarding Peter’s love for the Savior; and from the Lord’s meeting on Mount Olivet with those who witnessed His subsequent ascension; etc., that there was great, vital, and extensive activity involving the King’s business on earth during the few days just following the resurrection.

To say the least, it was a time of wide-spread transition, and the anxieties that profound transitions and the disruption of the status quo of fundamental lifestyles brings. Mighty movings and shakings in nature, such as the Joplin tornados; and movings and shakings in political/governmental powers, such as recent rebellious overthrows of Middle Eastern and African states – I say, all such movings and shakings – without exception – do but constitute the direct and immediate handiwork of God Almighty. And, further, each and every such so-called travesty, devastation, disaster, adversity, calamity – pick your strongest word – each one is a visitation from God in wrath, and each one is an adumbration of the ***“great whirlwind;”*** to wit:

“A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a “great whirlwind” shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground. Howl, ye shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves in the ashes, ye principal of the flock; for the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are accomplished.”(Jer. 25:31-34)

For many years now this humble church has taken the position that the preachers are primarily to blame for the backslidden condition of the nation and the world. Put another way, the shepherds are mostly to blame for the sad and lost condition of the sheep and of the flocks. Now let us return to the unique exchange of words between the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostle Peter, which is recorded for us near the end of the Gospel of John shortly after the resurrection of Christ, and which is fraught with prophetic lessons for us; to wit: ***“Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. 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. He saith to him again the second***

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time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He said unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. 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.” Jn. 21:13-17.

As a general proposition, where the Holy Ghost records a thing twice in close proximity, an extraordinary degree of importance may be suggested, or at least considered. Certainly, where a thing is recorded in virtually ditto language, are we not warranted in concluding that something VERY IMPORTANT is afoot? Listen. God the Son is speaking. Yes. And he is speaking standing on the threshold of a new dispensation of things. Call it the glorious post-resurrection modus operandi for visiting the Gentiles to call out of them a people for His Name (Acts 15:13,14 - *“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me; Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.”*), to continue until the times of the Gentiles shall be brought in (Rom. 11:25 - *“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”*); to wit: Feed my sheep! Feed my sheep! Feed my sheep! FEED MY SHEEP (!) FEED MY SHEEP (!) FEED MY SHEEP (!) The word *“feed”* carries with it the idea of providing all things necessary to properly care for the little sheep – body, soul, and spirit – 24/7.

As a metaphor, sheep usually stand for God’s Elect; especially in the New Testament, where our dear Lord Jesus is often portrayed as *“that great shepherd of the sheep;”* e.g.; to wit: *“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever.”* Heb, 13:20,21. To draw out the figure further, our dear Lord Jesus is also portrayed as *“the chief shepherd”* – and that aspect of His blessed name appears to attach to the Savior throughout eternity; to wit:

***“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”* (1 Pet. 5:1-4)**

There is another eternal principle at work here, which is well-described by the apostle James in his direct and rustic manner; to wit: *“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.”* Jas. 3:1. Pastors, including prophets, benefit greatly from their positions in society; and they therefore are held to a much higher standard of conduct; to wit: *“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask for more.”* Lk. 12:48.

Now, applying this principle to the faithless pastors and false prophets that dot the landscape of America and the world, one can well understand Jeremiah’s broken heart and shaking bones; to wit: *“Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness.”* Jer. 23:9. Especially is the spectacle of the false prophet abominable and utterly reprehensible in this dispensation, which the Savior has characterized and identified as one in which His preachers are charged with the duty to ***“FEED MY LAMBS. ...FEED MY SHEEP. ...FEED MY SHEEP.”*** Jn. 21:15,16,17.

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Beloved. After His resurrection, and during the time before His ascension into Heaven, Jesus told His disciples many things, including the so-called Great Commission; to wit: *“Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. ...So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word, with signs following. Amen.”* Mk. 16:14-16,19,20.

But none of these very important things did Christ speak but once. However, **“FEED MY SHEEP,”** He repeated three times. Surely, there is something highly unique here. And surely there is something of surpassing importance here that deserves our close attention. Since we have taken the position that faithless, backslidden preachers are primarily to blame for the irrevocable apostasy that has doomed America and the world today, we must study and rightly divide the Word of God on the subject; to wit:

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15)

We were warned anciently of these days, when rather than feed the sheep, the pastors would destroy and scatter the Lord’s sheep; to wit: *“Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord.”* Jer. 23:1,2.

Preachers are in a sensitive and a very confidential position to heavily influence thought and conduct of the masses – either for good or for evil. Therefore, if, for example, *“the land is full of adulterers,”* it is more than likely the preachers’ fault. Alexis de Toqueville, in his classic book, Democracy in America (c. 1830), said that America was great because America was good; and that when he sought for the reason that America was good, he found it in her churches; that from thousands of pulpits across the land, there thundered a demand for righteousness; and that when America ceased to be good, she would cease to be great. de Toqueville also warned us of what he called the worm in the American democracy’s apple. He reasoned that by and by, in the natural course of things, the majority of voters could become bad people rather than good people; and, as a consequence, America could cease to be good; and, thereupon, cease to be great. Far more serious than the warnings of the Frenchman, are the warnings of the Great God Almighty about the dangers of following the Arminian doctrines and the sodomite sins of the flesh of false prophets; to wit:

“I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing; they commit adultery, and walk in lies; they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness; they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.” (Jer. 23:14)

(Beloved. To say that all the prophets, or all the preachers, of Jeremiah’s time – in the judgment of God – were as morally and spiritually depraved and corrupt as Sodom and Gomorrah – which is as wicked as humanly possible; to wit: *“Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”* Jude 7.)

Thus you see that today’s crop of shepherds, so far from feeding the sheep, are actually poisoning them to death; and the evidence is overwhelming that the thesis of this sermon is true; to wit: The preachers are mostly to blame for today’s irreversible apostasy.

I love you. Amen.