

# Do You Love Me More Than These?

by Erlo Stegen

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*Jesus' question to Peter: 'Do you love me more than these?' is a call to prioritize our love for God above all else, and to be obedient to His call.*

**Duration:** 1:27:28

**Scripture:** Exodus 13:8, Matthew 4:19, Matthew 6:33, John 21:3-5, John 21:15-17, John 21:19

**Topics:** "Serving God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to share his personal testimony before delving into the analysis of various Bible verses. He recounts his upbringing in a loving family and how God called him to preach the gospel. The speaker then shares an experience of witnessing rough behavior among some individuals and realizing the need for them to be saved. He also reflects on the importance of remembering the judgment seat of Christ and how all our actions, words, and thoughts will be judged. The sermon concludes with a reference to the Old Testament command to teach children about God's redemption.

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## Transcript

We find our text in John 21. To reach to the very depths of our hearts. That you would reach the uttermost parts by your grace.

Amen. From John 21. From verse 1, I will read quite a few verses even though I'm not going to comment on all of them.

After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias and he manifested himself in this way. They were together Simon Peter and Thomas called Didymus and Nathanael of Cana and Galilee and the sons of Zebedee and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, I'm going fishing.

They said to him, we will also come with you. They went out and got into the boat and that night they caught nothing. But when the day was now breaking Jesus stood on the beach yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus therefore said to them, children you do not have any fish do you? They answered him, no. And he said to them, cast the net on the right hand side of the boat and you will find a catch. They cast therefore

and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

The disciple therefore whom Jesus loved said to Peter it is the Lord and so when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord he put his outer garment on for he was stripped for work and threw himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat for they were not far from the land but about 100 yards away dragging the net full of fish. And so when they got out upon the land they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it and bread.

Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish which you have now caught. Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of large fish, 153 and although there were so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast.

None of the disciples ventured to question him, who are you, knowing that it was the Lord? Jesus came and took the bread and gave them and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. So when they had finished breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him, yes Lord, you know that I love you.

He said to him, tend my lambs. He said to him again a second time, Simon son of John, do you love me? He said to him, yes Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him again a third time, Simon son of John, do you love me? He said to him, yes Lord, you know that I love you.

He said to him again a third time, Simon son of John, do you love me? He said to him again a third time, Simon son of John, do you love me? He said to him again a fourth time, Simon son of John, do you love me? He said to him again a fifth time, Simon son of John, do you love me? He said to him again a sixth time, Simon son of John, do you love me? There is a text, a word that hasn't left me these days. And as I read this story, it returned to me yet again. We parents often assume that the children know, but you'll find a child gets to 10, even 20 or 30, and they don't know the things that we assume that they should know.

There were many people, there were tents, the tents were pitched and we slept in tents. In the Old Testament And there was a certain man, his name was Lorry Veet. He hadn't been a Christian, and he started a business there.

In the Old Testament And so his crop of tomatoes which he had planted was really enormous and he filled lorries. In the Old Testament Everything he planted was successful and money poured in. In the Old Testament He became a rich man.

In the Old Testament But then he became anxious about his riches, remembering the word of the Lord where it says, It is difficult for a rich man to enter into heaven, it is impossible. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to heaven. He said, I'm rich, I'm on the way to hell.

He got such a fear, he said, I'm damned and doomed with my riches. He said, I must seek the kingdom of God, I must repent, I must get right with God, otherwise this will lead me to hell. In the Old Testament And indeed he repented.

Became a child of the Lord. And as a child of God he said, I can't just sit here enjoying my wealth, I must use it to further the gospel. And so he invited people to come and hold a convention yearly on his farm.

He said, at no expense I will arrange the tent and the food, all of that, it will be my own expense. And so in 1951 we went to his place. Do you young people know that in 1951 we went there? If you remember that, put up your hands.

I'm asking the young people. I'm just probing a little, just checking because you might say that you were born in 1971 if you're a young person, just to see whether you're lying. I just wanted to see whether there's some liars amongst the young people.

They all seem to be honest. Now we got there, the tents were pitched. There were young men busy pitching the tent as I looked on.

They were rough men. And they would answer each other in a very rough way. I noticed that they would get upset with each other easily and in passing a hammer, they wouldn't just pass it, they would throw it.

Speaking together in an unkind way. And I said to myself, these people still need to get saved. That night we went into the tent and there were at least 600 white people there.

We sat down and the chorus leaders came. As I looked at those who were the chorus leaders, I was confused. I thought, are they the same men who pitched the tent earlier on, those who were getting angry and losing their tempers? It can't be.

And it was them. I was disappointed. Then it was announced that before the preacher comes, there are going to be people giving their testimonies.

Who were they who gave their testimonies? The very same people who were pitching the tent. I lost my respect for them. I said to myself, such a thing I do not know.

I was young myself. I was still immature and didn't know much, but I did know that this wasn't right, that the same people who were getting angry and that were the ones singing and giving their testimonies. And so you make sure, you person, if you lead in some way, maybe you lead in singing, that your life, remember it's observed by others, witnessed by others around you.

I didn't listen to them. God, we are born. You see, you husband, you demand respect from your wife, but don't be surprised if she doesn't take notice of who you are, doesn't respect you, because she observes how you are and how you are not alive spiritually and the life you live.

And with women, vice versa. It's the same. Man and wife, wife and husband, and children.

If you pray for them, let them live. If they live in holiness, let them live in holiness. Stop the beck.

Our German says so. It's not a mountain. It's a beck.

It's a mountain. The first day, the second day, the third day passed there at Khartmaden, until I said to myself, well, I'm just going to go back home to our home in Mbalana. I'd rather be a farmer, make money, and I'll propagate the gospel with money.

I'll allow missionaries and them to come to our home and we'll assist. Let them do the work. But that I should go, no, never.

But the pastor with whom I was with was a very wise man and he was nicknamed Mapiga. He was the father of people like the manager of our shop here. As I tried to explain to him what I'd made my mind up to do, he wisely pointed out that I was being double-minded and he said, didn't you say this just the other day? Now you're saying something new.

You've got to make up your mind. You can't speak two things otherwise you are mentally deranged. Schizophrenic.

Troubled are such people who cannot stand solidly on one thing. On one day they make a certain claim, the next day it's a different one. Now there every morning one went off to a prayer meeting.

But I decided I'm not going to the prayer meeting, I'm going to go with my Bible and go and pray on the other side of a little hill that was off on one side. I sat down there on a rock. I said, oh God, I want to go back home.

And I don't want to preach the gospel. And I laid out before God all my conditions. I said, Lord, I will certainly support the work of the Lord.

And if there are missionaries who need a rest, they can come by me there and I will support the work financially. I continued to say, Lord, and I want your seal of approval upon this plan of mine. And I need you to say something because then it will justify my going to my pastor and saying the Lord has said I should go back home.

God said to Abraham, slaughter your child, kill him, bring him as a sacrifice. And when God saw that he was willing to do it, God held his hand to the angel and said, don't kill him. I've seen that you are going to do it.

Here's the lamb. And so God has seen that I was prepared to become a preacher. And now he says, all right, I've seen.

You can go home. You needn't do it anymore. And then I go to my minister and I say, I was prepared to be a missionary.

But now I got the word. And God says I can go home. Now that's foolproof.

What will this clever preacher say now? He can't say anything against it. That's foolproof. If God speaks to you, what can we do but obey? Then I say, Lord, give me a word that will be a soul on all my plans.

Even in the smallest detail I went. And then there was a word that just stood out to me. You know, in our Lutheran Bibles, we've got some verses that are printed with bigger letters than the others.

So this verse just stood out. I just saw that verse. Afterwards I looked in my Bible and they weren't in capital letters, just as the others.

But God just did it to arrest my attention, to catch my attention to that word. Well, Well, I started reading. I read Matthew 4, verse 19.

He then said, follow me and I'll make you fishes of men. It was as if the lightning from heaven had struck me. I closed the Bible.

It was only by God's grace that I didn't discard the Bible altogether. I got angry. When you're at a dead end and you can't go further, the only way is to get angry.

And those that use alcohol, that's the time they go to the pub and go to the bottle like a little child when it cries, it wants the bottle. I said, Lord, I'll show you I won't do it. I went to my pastor.

I said, pastor, I'm going back home to Natal. I kept quiet for a very, he kept quiet for a very long time and then asked me, hello, he said in a quiet voice. Are you sure that this is the will of God for you? I blurted out, yes.

Indeed, even children of God can lie. And I lied. I packed my suitcase.

I went to Pretoria, took a train to Pietermaritzburg, phoning on the way that they should fetch me the following morning at Pietermaritzburg station. I had said, God, no, I will not do it. Because what you say is in contradiction to what I feel and my own plans and ambitions.

The next morning I got off at the station in Meritzburg. And there was my brother, Uncle Heinof from Tunzini, and I, we got along well. We were very used to each other.

And so he greeted me warmly and said, oh, how great it is to have you here. It is God's love to bring you safely back home again. But he didn't know that it wasn't God's love.

It was because I had become a Jonah, a Jonah who had been sent to Nineveh, but who had gone off to his own place, to Joppa. The love story can go very far. Even here in South Africa, when a man loves another man, or a woman another woman.

It's not bad, it's an act of love, but a dirty love. When I came to South Africa, I didn't know that there was such a thing as love. And now you find the situation And now you find the situation Parents, here is my wife, but it's another man.

How will you feel, father, mother? Here your son comes along. Mom, here's your daughter-in-law. In Romans 1 it says they go against what is natural.

Okay. And so I arrived home. Now when I'd left home to go up to that convention, I told them that the Lord has called me to go there and here I was arriving back again.

I told them that the Lord has called me to go there and here I was arriving back again. My mother didn't utter a word. And after some days out there on the porch in the morning, in the enclosed veranda, she asked me, what do you say about your calling? I replied in a way that I am now ashamed of.

I said to her, look, mom, if you don't want me here, just say so. And I went off in a huff and slammed the door behind me. If you don't want me here, tell me, then I'll go.

Young people can be cheeky. If it would have been a man, he should have kicked me that I flew out of the door. Maybe I would have got to my senses.

And then for 18 months, I went through hell. I would hear a noise and I'd say, is it judgment day? Have I got to appear before the throne of Christ? I went through hell. That's when I learned that to be disobedient costs thousands of times, ten thousands of times more than being obedient.

I feared the day when I would have to stand before God on judgment day. I look at the clouds and say, what if suddenly a cloud comes and he stands on there and the last trumpet will sound? What will happen to me? To stand before the judgment seat of Christ, it's good if we remember it. He'll judge all our works.

He'll have to give account of every idle word we have spoken. He'll even judge our thoughts. We are five boys in the family.

The youngest one is a girl. When she was still small, I was alone with her at home. The rest of the family had gone.

I could show you the place where we stood outside of the yard. I said, I'm afraid, you know Jesus is going to come again and he's going to judge us. She started trembling, shaking.

She started crying. I couldn't stop her crying. I didn't know how to help her.

So I said, Sister, I've just told you a lie. He's not coming. That was the only way to comfort her.

If I see her the next time, I must ask her whether I have apologized to her that I told her that lie. Most probably, I've made right with her. But I want to make double sure.

If I haven't confessed to her that I told her a lie, I said I'm doing it now, I'm repenting of it, forgive me, he's coming. And then to make it clear what a day that will be. That one day will be more than 10,000 years.

And hotter than any oven can be. After 18 months, I went into my bedroom. And I knelt by my bed.

I somehow felt I've got to draw close to God. I opened the Bible, kneeling at my bed. And I read that God was still loving me.

I've made him sick and tired with my sins. But he's still loving me. My hardened and hard heart just melted.

And I began to cry and to weep. I said, God, I showed you my fist in your face. I went against you, I rebelled.

And you still love me. My heart melted. I think it was the next day or after three days.

I went into my bedroom again. I knelt down on my knees next to the bed. I said, God, please speak to me.

I just opened the Bible at random and started reading. And this is what I read. This is John 21.

Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? Just a few days prior to that, he showed me his love. And when we see that, we can't but love him. We love him because he first loved us.

Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? Just a few days prior to that, he showed me his love. Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these? It was as if Jesus Christ himself was right there in the room asking me this question. Peter said, yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

Then he said, tend my lambs. And then the second time he asked him, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? For me, it wasn't like just a text or a question asked of Peter. For me, it was directly aimed at myself.

Then tend my sheep, shepherd my sheep. Then he said to him the third time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? And Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? And I too at that

point, I grieved. I stood up, I went to the kitchen, found my mom standing at the stove, at the pots.

She was cooking. I said, mother, Jesus has called me. I have no other choice.

I have agreed to do his will. She said, I'm glad, my child. I went out looking for my dad.

I was afraid. I was scared because we did have a fear of my dad. I was scared what he might say.

I found him on the yard. I said, father, I have something on my heart. I feel that the Lord has called me to follow him and preach the gospel.

I received a reply which was totally unexpected. He said, Olo, I am grateful. I will have a child among my children who will always carry me in prayer.

You will always pray for me and you will always remember me. I am thankful and I agree. I was astonished.

Some parents get upset if a child says to them, I feel that the Lord has called me to work for him, and they start asking questions like, well, how will you survive? Look at all the things you've got to leave, but I'm grateful that both my parents said we agree and we are grateful. A certain Afrikaans girl from our country of South Africa, who was 18 years at the time, went to a meeting, a service, came back at night, touched by the Lord, went to her parents' bedroom. She knocked.

I said, come in. And as she entered in, her father was a very rich and renowned man. They had only this one child.

Troubled are parents who don't have children. There are some people that haven't got a child, but not of their own choosing. We feel with them.

There are some mothers that don't want a child. Some have only got one child. They can't have more.

And some rich people can't afford it. It's always a strange thing that the poor people have many children and the rich few. But this rich man had just one child.

I feel that God has called me to China as a missionary. The father said, no, definitely not. What will happen to your inheritance? I've got no other child, I've got no boy.

Look, my child, you're going to inherit all the farms. Everything that I've got. You can't go to China and be a missionary there.

He said, I won't say yes. The girl stayed at home, obeyed her father. After two years she got very ill and she died.

She was 20 years old. When the coffin went down into the grave, suddenly he said, Oh God, if I would have said yes, this daughter of mine would be alive far away in China. But I would still have a daughter.

But I said no. And now you've taken her and I've got no person for my inheritance. This is a true story that happened here in South Africa.

To be disobedient costs much, much more than to be obedient. And he who wants to save his life will lose it. After I told my parents, brothers, family, God opened the door and I could go.

I said to my brother Heino, Heino, as I walk out of this house, my father's house, it's like death. As if I'm in a coffin, I've got to die. But because of the love to Jesus, I do it gladly.

Now let's get back to the text. Jesus asked Peter, Simon, son of Jonah. Now, his name was Peter.

Jesus gave him that name. Simon, son of Jonah, was his name before Jesus named him Peter. Jesus asked Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, Do you love me? At that time when I read it, I didn't know what the Greek text said.

We in our translations, we just read, Simon, do you love me? Jesus said literally, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? Do you love me as God loves, with a godly love? Jesus asked Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, Do you love me as God loves, with a godly love? He said, yes Lord, you know everything. It's good for us to know that Jesus knows everything. But a man or a woman who isn't in right standing with God, it's a fearful thing to hear.

He knows everything and he will run away from it. But the person who walks with God, it's a comfort that God knows everything. We are glad that there is nothing hid from his eyes.

He sees everything. That's a comfort to us. But if we allow and give room to the devil and sin, it's a terrible thing, we'll commit.

And then Simon Peter said, Lord, you know everything. You know that I feel for you. Two different words.

Peter said, you know everything. You know that I feel for you. Jesus asked him, do you love me? Do you love me with a godly love? And Peter said, you know that I love you as a friend loves his friend.

You know that I love you in the way a child, a brother, loves his brother. He said, and feed my lambs. Then he said the second time, Peter, do you accompany me? He says, Lord, you know everything.

You know that I love you as a friend loves his friend. But the third time, Jesus came down to his level and said, Simon, do you fill me? And Peter was heartbroken that he should say, fill me. He couldn't say I love you with a divine love.

He had just denied his Lord three times before the croc was thrown. And he was heartbroken because Jesus the third time used the word he used. Jesus came down from that level, that godly level, to that of a friend, of just a brother.

And said, Simon, do you love me? Do you fill me? I hope that you've got that straight. Another point. He said, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? He didn't only say, do you love me? Do you love me more than these? Now, there are a few points concerning that matter.

There were seven. Seven disciples that went with Peter when he says, I'm going fishing. Six said, we're coming along.

Nathaniel was there. Thomas is the one, Thomas, who's mentioned next to Peter. Peter and Thomas.

You remember Thomas' experience. And now he was there before he wasn't. They were seven there.

It's nice when disciples of Jesus, when God's people are together. It's hell if they're not one. That's the dirty work of the devil, to separate them.

But when they're together, my, it's like that precious oil flowing down from the high priest, down his beard, his garment. That's a sweet perfume, sweet scent to God. When one doesn't find fault with the other, or criticize him, or speaks behind his back, it's the worst kind of criminality.

Worse than those criminals that kill people and steal cars, etc. Because you kill them spiritually. That's worse, much more, worse, much more than just killing the body.

It's enough not to say, you love him as much as the others love him. Jesus says, you love me more than these love me. Jesus, in other words, he expects more from you than from the others.

Who studied it? Doesn't help to say, I love him similarly to the others. Jesus wants you to love him more than the others. Jesus was speaking to Simon Peter.

The man who said, the others can deny you, I won't. You can expect that of them, but not from me. I lay my life down for you.

He looked down on the others. But he failed miserably, just as the others. Maybe more than the others.

Jesus was speaking to Simon Peter. The man who said, the others can deny you, I won't. You can expect that of them, but not from me.

I lay my life down for you. Jesus was speaking to Simon Peter. Now listen to this.

I want you to get this straight. When you remain on the right path, you know more about your own sin than the sin of others. You will see your own sin.

You will be kept busy more with your own sin than the sin of your colleagues. Do you understand? You keep yourself busy with a bunch of hypocrites. And hypocrites they may be.

But know one thing. In God's eyes, you are a greater sinner than what they are. And then you say, well, what shall I do, what shall I say, look what they are.

Do you compare yourself with others? He says more. Do you love me more than those love me? And you are guilty in the sight of God if you don't love him more than what the others do. And if the whole world is wrong, God expects from you, Jesus expects from you, more than he does from the others.

Do you love him more? One person said do you love me more than these? And he pointed to the fish, do you love me more than you love the fish. Do you love me more than you love the fishing? Do you love me more than you love the fish? Do you love me more than sport? Do you love me more than silver and gold, riches, money? Do you love me more? Do you love me more than you love your work, your ambition, your goals, your dreams, your Do you love me more? What kind of a life must that be if you agape, not phileo, agape him more than the others and you don't, you won't judge the others, you'll love them as well. You'll love them as God loved us, who gave his only son, he didn't criticize us, he didn't find fault with us, he gave the best he had for us, now the question, are you doing that? I wouldn't like you to leave this place with this question unanswered, if you do, I call you a Pharisee.

And you young girl, do you love me more than you love the boys, getting married, having children? I can tell you it's, nicht alles gold was glänzt, you want to get married, but when you're married, sometimes not only your nose will be full, you'll be full, I heard people saying these days, blessed are those that didn't get married and bear children, they are those as well. So the best is to love him more, he'll take care of you,

get the center right, first things must come first, and he'll add everything that you need. And Peter grew in this love, and Jesus said, now in closing, Peter when you were young, you dressed as you liked, oh dress can spiel, play a big role in your life, dress, dress.

Many women are like that, and some men are women like as well, Peter when you were young, you dressed as you liked, you wore the clothes you liked, but when you get old, somebody else will dress you, somebody else will take you by your hand, you won't be able to go where you want to go, somebody else will take your hand and lead you where you don't want to go, that's the person who agapes God. Then the things that were hard and difficult and impossible for us, things we don't want, we'll count as a privilege, you won't say, Lord Jesus I spent so many years for you, I only got this or that, it will be a privilege, and Jesus spoke about his death, Peter was crucified on a cross, but when they crucified him, he said, folk, you can't crucify me the way you crucified Christ, I'm not worthy of that, crucify me with my head down and feet up, because I'm not fit, I'm not worthy to be crucified the way I am here, crucify me with my head down. He honored Jesus, Jesus was precious to him, more than his own life, or his own pain, or discomfort.

Matthew Henry says, you know when Jesus was in the boat, the disciples, the seven disciples, Jesus stood at the shore, such a pity that time is short, how wonderful if we could talk about that. He said, children, have you got any fish, no, throw it on the right-hand side, the net, they did it, 153 big fish, and John said, Peter, Peter, it's the Lord. When Peter heard that, he jumped into the water, he was a hundred yards away.

Now whether it was shallow or not, Peter, the Bible says he was naked. Now in biblical times, when a person had something on till here, but not on top, they said he was naked. So it's not necessarily that he was stark naked, he could have a short, a bathing trunk on, but he was naked.

And when he said, John said, it's the Lord, John had a sharper ear, or eye, than Peter. The others were covered by doubts and things, but John, this young man, he says, it's the Lord. Peter, what did he do? He put on his coat.

And Matthew Henry says, he respected Jesus so much that he put on the best garment he had, out of respect to be in the Lord's presence. He says, a person will wear the best garment he has. When he approaches the presence of Jesus Christ, he could have thrown it off.

To swim with a garment makes it difficult. You throw it off. But he says, that's my Lord, and I want to appear before him the best way possible, out of respect.

That's my ear. And he didn't waste a moment when he was told, it's the Lord. Shall I, shall I not? Is it too deep, is it too shallow? He threw himself.

He wanted to be there first. Oh, Peter, he was zealous. Peter was fiery.

He wanted to be there first. Not because of jealousy, being proud. He must have loved his Lord.

Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these? Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these? Didma, Freel, Johan, Peter, Naomi, Este, do you love me more than these? Whatever the future has got in store for us, whatever we do, we can't afford trying to serve God and live for him without this love. We'll make a mess of it. You'll be better six feet, two meters in the ground, under the ground, than alive without this love.

So, the great thing is, not how many years you've suffered, how many years you've sweated, you love me, you agape me more than these, more than your blue-eyed child. You love me more than these. Can I stop here? Is it plain to you or not? Is it plain to you or not? Let's pray.

Lord, let your return not return to you void, but that your word would return with fruit. May we not have cavity and our coming here being in vain. May our lives never be the same again.

May it not have gone in the one ear and out the other, but may it penetrate deep, deep, deep, down to the deepest depths of our being. For your name's sake and for your sake, Lord, may we not have cavity and our coming here being in vain. Amen.

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