

Do You Love Me?

READING

John 21

Do you love Yeshua? Or are you just fond of him?

In John 21 we read the story of Yeshua meeting the disciples again at the Sea of Galilee, after he had been resurrected.

When they had finished eating, Yeshua said to Shimon Petros, “Shimon son of Yonah, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I’m fond of you.”

Yeshua said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again Yeshua said, “Shimon son of Yonah, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I’m fond of you.”

Yeshua said, “Take care of my sheep.”

The third time he said to him, “Shimon son of Yonah, are you fond of me?”

Petros was hurt because Yeshua asked him the third time, “Are you fond of me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I’m fond of you.”

Yeshua said, “Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

Yeshua said this to indicate the kind of death by which Petros would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

Now, it doesn’t jump out at you, but if you look very carefully in the NIV you can see it, but if you look at the original Greek, or the Little Watchman Translation, it stands out more clearly.

Greek has a few words for love. In particular αγαπεω (agapeo) which is usually used for God’s unconditional love for us. In the NIV they sometimes translated this as “true love” or “truly love”. The other word used here is φιλεω (phileo) which also means love, but the kind that we have between friends and relatives. Sometimes this is translated as “brotherly love”.

In the Little Watchman Translation I translate agapeo as “love” and phileo as “fond of”. That’s a little extreme, but it illustrates the point better, and it makes a clear differentiation between the two very different Greek words. For us English speakers there is a big difference between these two. If you don’t think so, then try telling your “significant other” that you don’t love them, but you are fond of them. Good luck with that! But let me also make this clear so we don’t get confused later, agapeo is not boy-girl love... that’s emotional love. Agapeo is unconditional love. It’s a choice, not a feeling.

So...

Yeshua asked Petros, “Do you love me?”

Petros replied, “Yes, I’m fond of you.”

Huh?? Now, to be fair, Petros is probably still getting over the whole denying Yeshua three times thing. So you can imagine him being a little reluctant to say, “Yes, I love you unconditionally.”, but can you imagine getting that response from someone if you asked them that question! I’m thinking myself, that at least it should be “No, I’m only fond of you”. But anyway, that’s not the point. The point is that Petros replied using a different word.

Yeshua asked him again, “Do you love me?”

Petros replied again, “Yes, I’m fond of you.”

You can almost feel him squirming, wishing for the moment to be over..

So, Yeshua asked him the third time, “Are you fond of me?”

Petros replied, “You know everything. Yes, I’m fond of you.”

Now wonder Petros was upset. Because Yeshua changed the question.

Yeshua made it very clear that he had heard the response, and that he had noticed the difference.

He didn’t ask the same question three times, but the third time he said “fond of”. Ouch.

But at least Petros was honest.

I wonder how differently it would have gone if Petros had answered the first time, “Yes, I love you”.

Can you imagine Yeshua replying, “No you don’t.”

The only way that conversation can go from there is downhill!

So, ... how about you?

Do you love Yeshua? Or are you just fond of him?