



# Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

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SERMON – 6<sup>TH</sup> EASTER

I PETER 3:13-22

MAY 14, 2023

“SAY IT WITH LOVE”

Since it's Mother's Day, I thought I'd start with a story about a love song. A Canadian artist by the name of Dan Hill wrote one of the most popular love songs of the 70's entitled *"Sometimes When We Touch"*. It was serendipitous that it became a pop hit, given that Mr. Hill wrote it for an entirely different purpose - to woo his girlfriend. He called her one night and sang the song to her over the phone, but to say the least, it didn't have the desired effect. You could say the song was a colossal failure in that regard. His girlfriend, according to one back story I read, hung up shortly after telling Dan his song was way too intense for her, and so was he! Said girlfriend soon thereafter moved in with a professional football player and took off for the states! Oh well!

The opening line of the song by the way was..." *You asked me if I love you, and I choke on my reply...*" File that line away for a moment – it helps us read our lesson from I Peter because it helps us read Peter. *"Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you – yet do it with gentleness and respect."* Ok ... if someone asks you if you love Jesus do you choke on your reply?

Before you answer that, recall it was asked of Peter on two separate occasions not once, not twice, but three times. The first was in the courtyard of the High Priest ... in the night in which Jesus was betrayed. *"You're one of his followers aren't you?"* was the opening for Peter to "make a defense." Instead he choked – three times saying, *"I don't know the man."* The second occasion was Peter's so-called "reclamation" by the lakeshore recorded in John 21, when the inquirer was the resurrected Lord and servant King, instead of a servant girl.

*"Peter, do you love me more than these..."* Those of you who know the story from John 21 might say Peter did better the second time. *"Yes Lord, you know that I love you."* Yet this exchange has perplexed scholars for a long time. The reason is two distinct Greek words for "love" are used in it. Jesus asks Peter twice if he loves him. The word for love used is "agape" which generally means devoted love, the love of God for a person and a person for God.

But when Peter responds, the text employs a different word – "phileo" – best translated as affectionate regard – as between friends. You might say once again Peter chokes on his reply. To *"Do you love me?"* Peter says, *"Well I'm fond of you."* Jesus is ready for an embrace – Peter offers a handshake! Or maybe Peter remembers his past failures, and hedges in his reply.

So, a third time Jesus asks Peter if he loves him and John teases us by saying Jesus now uses the word "phileo" – *"Peter...are you fond of me?"* and John says Peter is disappointed, as if he knows once again what's happened. Some say this indicates Jesus comes down to Peter's level, almost as though he knows what Peter is capable of and what he is not. But if it seems Peter "chokes on his reply" our Lord does a remarkable thing anyway – he entrusts Peter with the gift and task of leading His church. Jesus does not give up on Peter.

Less than a month later, on Pentecost, Peter was feeling it, preaching with a boldness he didn't think he had, and thousands repented and believed the gospel. Yet some time later, according to Acts 10 – Peter tries to beg off on going to a Roman Centurion's household with the gospel.

Does this help us understand Peter when he says, *"Always be ready to give a defense of the hope that lives in you."* I think so. I think it shows us God is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through the experience of sinners. I think it means Peter pleads as much as commands us – he knows what it's feels like to not be ready ... to choke on his reply when asked if he knows the Lord.

For us then, I believe it's important to concentrate on the word "hope". Hope is a disposition – it "hopes" for things it cannot see and therefore cannot prove. You can't buy groceries with hope. I'm not sure you can live well without it either. Hope is the expectation, but also the cherishing of something you desire. We tend to get hung up in this passage with the word "defense." Sometimes its translated as "reason" – and we can be led to believe we must be either defensive or reasonable when we talk about our faith. But what's reasonable about a Holy God showing mercy to unholy people?

Now I don't suppose a person wants to be "unreasonable" when they talk about something they hope for/ I'm a Minnesota Vikings fan as you recall/ I can hope all I want for a Super Bowl victory, but, lets be reasonable! Peter reasoned from the scriptures. He does so in this very same letter, and Paul, as is evident in our lesson today from Acts' did so often and well. I get it when people hear this passage and think it's time to come up with watertight arguments about Christianity to show whoever you are being questioned by that you have an intelligent, muscular faith. No one wants to "choke on their reply." I get it. I've done it ... it sucks!

But remember, you, like Peter and Paul and everyone else in this room, are saved. You have the hope of eternal life, not because of the strength of your faith, but because of the object of your faith. You trust Jesus will do what he's said he'd do – forgive you. That's "your hope" and that is what Peter wants us to *"always be ready"* with. *'Peter do you love me?'* was a vitally important question for him to confront. He eventually did. Do you love Jesus, not for what he's done for you but simply for who he is and is for you? That is a vitally important question – it is the most vital question you must answer in your life.

You can reason that Jesus is the Son of God, co-eternal with father, *through him all things were made, for us and our salvation he came down from heaven.* But all that matters is that you trust it. Maybe God hasn't given us a watertight argument for faith – but he has given us a watertight person - Jesus! When someone asks you for a reason for the hope that lives in you, say you love him because he loved you first. This is after all, a love story we're part of. AMEN