

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 20 April 2026

(i) Scripture.

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, 'Feed my lambs'.

He said to him 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, 'Tend my sheep'.

He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'

Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to Him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you'. Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep'.

John 21. 15-17 (*English Standard Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

The Greek words 'agapē' (ἀγάπη) and 'agapaō' (ἀγαπάω).

1. 'In the interchange between Jesus and Peter (John 21.15–17), the interplay of two different Greek words for "love" (ἀγαπάω and φιλέω) has convinced many commentators that there is something profoundly weighty about the distinction (though the distinction itself is variously explained).

'For various reasons, I remain unpersuaded. John loves to use synonyms, with very little distinction in meaning.

'In John 21, the terms vary for 'feed'/'tend'/'feed', and for 'lambs'/'sheep'/'sheep', just as they varied for "love".

'In John 3. 35, the Father "loves" the Son, and one of the two verbs (ἀγαπάω) is used; in John 5. 20, the Father "loves" the Son, and the other of the two verbs (φιλέω) is used—and there is no distinction in meaning whatsoever.

'Both verbs can have good or bad connotations; everything is determined by context. If we are to probe the significance of this exchange between Jesus and Peter, we shall have to depend on something other than the interchange of the two Greek verbs.

(D. A. Carson, 'For the Love of God', Volume 2, comment for 31 December.)

2. Speaking as someone else who remains 'unpersuaded', I add that, when the Gospel of John speaks five times of the disciple 'whom Jesus loved', the word 'ἀγαπάω' is used on four occasions (John 13. 23; 19. 26; 21. 7, 20) but the word 'φιλέω' is used on a fifth occasion (John 20. 2). I can imagine no distinction in meaning.

Perhaps more significantly, I note that the Greek word 'ἀγαπάω' is used in each of the following references:

(i) 'Amnon, David's son, loved (ἀγαπάω) her ... Amnon said, "I love (ἀγαπάω) Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister" ... being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her' (2 Sam. 13. 1, 4, 14—Greek Old Testament).

(ii) 'They loved (ἀγαπάω) the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God' (John 12. 43).

(iii) 'Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved (ἀγαπάω) the reward of unrighteousness' (2 Pet. 2. 15).

(iv) 'Do not love (ἀγαπάω) the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves (ἀγαπάω) the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2. 15).

'Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others' (Phil. 2. 4).

'There are two types of people in the world: those who come into a room and say, "Well, here I am!" And those who come into a room and say, "Ah, there you are".

'We need more, "there you are"s'.

(Attributed to F. L. Collins.)

'Preach the word'.

'We can never hope to preach a new gospel, but:

(i) 'we can always preach the old gospel in a new accent;

(ii) 'we can always drop upon it a tear that never was shed before;

(iii) 'we can always say it with the uncton of additional experience, or with the emphasis of the added confidence which comes of steadfast continuance and faithfulness'.

(J. Parker, 'Analysis of Service', in 'Apostolic Life', Volume III, 'The People's Bible: Discourses upon Holy Scripture', 1887, page 20.)

Two-way traffic.

(i) 'If you offer your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go, first be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift' (Matt. 5. 23-24).

(ii) 'Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive, that your Father in heaven may forgive you your trespasses' (Mark 11. 25).

'You remember that your brother has something against you' (Matt. 5. 23).

In the so-called Sermon on the Mount, 'Jesus gave two illustrations of anger, one involving temple worship (Matt. 5. 23-24) and the other legal action (Matt. 5. 25-26). Both deal with situations in which the hearer is the cause of another person's anger rather than the offended party ...

Jesus' disciples should be as sensitive to making other people hate them as they are about hating others'.

(Thomas Constable, 'Expository Notes', comment on Matt. 5. 23-24.)

When the clock strikes: seven references in the Gospel according to John.

(i) 'My hour has not yet come' (John 2. 4).

(ii) 'My time has not yet come' (John 7. 6).

(iii) 'His hour had not yet come' (John 7. 30).

(iv) 'His hour had not yet come' (John 8. 20).



(v) 'The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified' (John 12. 23).

(vi) 'Jesus, knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father' (John 13. 1).

(vii) 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you' (John 17. 1).

'For our sins'

(i) 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures' (1 Cor. 15. 3).

(ii) 'Who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father' (Gal. 1. 4).

(iii) 'He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world' (1 John 2. 2).

(iv) 'In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4. 10).

'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous' (1 John 2. 1).
'Intercession is something Christ is always doing (Rom. 8. 34; Heb. 7. 25), while advocacy is something He does as occasion calls for it ... Yes, we fail Christ ... But His advocacy on our behalf rises higher than our sins. His advocacy speaks louder than our failures. All is taken care of'.

(Adapted from D. Ortlund, 'Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers', 2020.)

Happy memories.

'God gave His children memory
That in life's garden there might be
June roses in December'.

(G. Studdert Kennedy, 'Roses in December', in 'Songs of Faith and Doubt', 1922.)

'I will remember their sin no more' (Jer. 31. 34).

'Some people take the verse where God says, 'I will remember their sin no more', to mean that God so blots out our sins that He doesn't remember that we ever did them. That is not true.

'When the Bible says "I will remember their sin (or, 'sins') no more" it's talking in the language of a law court. For a believer, God will never open the books and bring up the question of their sins and decide

what punishment they must get. That will never happen. God has forgiven them: He's wiped out the debt.

'But God hasn't forgotten the fact we were sinners, nor shall we forget the fact that we were sinners either ('I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man', 1 Tim. 1. 13)'.

(David Gooding, 'Answers', accessed at <https://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com/david-gooding-answers/recognize-family-friends-heaven?>)

Parallel events in the lives of the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul recorded in the Book of Acts.

(i) Luke's account of both of their ministries more or less opens with a record of a lengthy sermon to a Jewish audience—which sermon centres on the fulfilment of the Old Testament scriptures, in particular on the fulfilment of Psa. 16. 10 in the resurrection of Jesus: (a) that of Peter (Acts 2. 16-30) ... (b) that of Paul (Acts 13. 16-41).

(ii) Following the record of those sermons, in both cases, the first recorded miracle is that of the healing of a man lame from birth: (a) the one healed by command of Peter to 'rise up' (Acts 3. 1-7) ... (b) the other healed by the command of Paul to 'stand up' (Acts 14. 8-10).

(iii) Following their healing, both men leap and walk: (a) 'leaping up he stood and began to walk' (Acts 3. 8) ... (b) 'he sprang up and began walking' (Acts 14. 10).

(iv) Both apostles are reported to be especially 'filled with the Holy Spirit': (a) Peter (Acts 4. 8) ... (b) Paul (Acts 13. 9).

(v) Both apostles raise named individuals from the dead: (a) Peter raises 'Tabitha' (in Aramaic /'Dorcas' in Greek) (Acts 9. 36-42) ... (b) Paul raises 'Eutychus' (Acts 20. 9-12).

(vi) Both apostles encounter sharply rebuke named sorcerers who oppose them: (a) Peter castigates 'Simon' in Samaria (Acts 8. 18-24) ... (b) Paul castigates 'Elymas' in Paphos (Acts 13. 6-11).

(vii) Both apostles are imprisoned by the authorities and set free by divine intervention: (a) Peter in and out of prison in Jerusalem (Acts 5. 19-20; 12. 6-11) ... (b) Paul in and out of prison in Philippi (Acts 16. 24-34).

(viii) Both apostles cast out unclean spirits: (a) Peter at Jerusalem (Acts 5. 16) ... (b) Paul at Philippi (Acts 16. 18).

(ix) Extraordinary miracles of healing are performed in connection with both apostles and without their explicit consent: (a) by means of the shadow cast by Peter (Acts 5. 15) ... (b) by means of handkerchiefs and aprons touched by Paul (Acts 19. 11-12).

(x) Both apostles heal the bedridden: (a) At Lydda, Peter restores 'Aeneas' ('bedridden for eight years', Acts 9. 33-34) ... (b) On Malta, Paul restores 'the father of Publius' who 'lay sick with fever and dysentery' (Acts 28. 8).

(xi) Both apostles fall into a trance while they are praying: (a) Peter at Joppa ('Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray ... he fell into a trance', Acts 10. 9-10; cf. Acts 11. 5) ... (b) Paul at Jerusalem ('When I ... was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance', Acts 22. 17).

(xii) Both apostles have heavenly 'visions'—which are each referred to three times by Luke and which led to the two apostles preaching to the gentiles: (a) Peter (Acts 10. 9-17 {'the vision he had seen', v. 17}; 11. 4-10 {'in a trance I saw a vision', v. 5}; and 15. 7-11) ... (b) Paul (Acts 9. 3-6; 22. 6-11; 26. 13-19 {'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision', v. 19}).

(xiii) Both apostles are spoken to by angels: (a) Peter (Acts 5. 19; 12. 7-8) ... (b) Paul (Acts 27. 23-24).

(xiv) When they are arraigned before the Jewish Sanhedrin, both apostles benefit from the intervention of one or more Pharisees: (a) Peter (Acts 5. 34-39) ... (b) Paul (Acts 23. 9).

(xv) Both apostles appoint church leaders/workers: (a) Peter (Acts 6. 1-6) ... (b) Paul (Acts 14. 23).

(xvi) Both apostles impart the Holy Spirit through the laying on of their hands: (a) Peter (Acts 8. 17) ... (b) Paul (Acts 19. 6).

(xvii) Both apostles refuse the homage/worship of Gentiles: (a) Peter of that from Cornelius (Acts 10. 25-26) ... (b) Paul of that from the men of Lystra (Acts 14. 11-18; cf. 28. 6).

(xviii) Both apostles are imprisoned at a Jewish festival: (a) Peter at the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12. 3-4) ... (b) Paul at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 22. 24 with Acts 20. 16).

(xix) Both apostles form friendships with centurions: (a) Peter with Cornelius (Acts 10. 24-33) ... (b) Paul with Julius (Acts 27. 1, 43).

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Separately, consider the following comparison drawn between Peter and Paul by Clement of Rome in a letter which he wrote towards the end of the 1st century 'to the church of God which sojourns at Corinth':

'Through jealousy and envy the greatest and most just pillars of the Church were persecuted, and came even unto death. Let us place before our eyes the good Apostles.

'Peter, through unjust envy, endured not one or two but many labours, and at last, having delivered his testimony, departed unto the place of glory due to him.

'Through envy Paul, too, showed by example the prize that is given to patience: seven times was he cast into chains; he was banished; he was stoned; having become a herald, both in the East and in the West, he obtained the noble renown due to his faith; and having preached righteousness to the whole world, and having come to the extremity of the West, and having borne witness before rulers, he departed at length out of the world'.

(*'The First Epistle of Clement'*, Chapter 5, Lines 2-7.)

'Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He ...? For we saw His star"' (Matt. 2. 1-2).

'He that led Israel by a pillar of fire into the promised land (Neh. 9. 19), leads the wise men by a star to the promised seed (Gen. 3. 15)'.

(Joseph Hall, *'Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testaments'*, page 415.)

The Lord's seven 'looks' in the Gospel according to Mark.

(i) *'He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart' (Mark 3. 5).*

(ii) *'Looking around at those who sat around Him, He said, "Behold my mother and my brothers!"' (Mark 3. 34).*

(iii) *'He looked around to see who had done it' (Mark 5. 32).*

(iv) *'Looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke the loaves' (Mark 6. 41).*

(v) *'Looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha"' (Mark 7. 34).*

(vi) *'Looking around, Jesus says to His disciples, "How difficult it is for those having riches to enter the kingdom of God!"' (Mark 10. 23).*

(vii) *'Having looked around at everything, as it was already late, He went out to Bethany' (Mark 11. 11).*

'The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing' (1 Cor. 1. 18).

'To believe that the pre-existent Son of the one true God, the mediator at creation and the redeemer of the world, had appeared in very recent times in out-of-the-way Galilee as a member of the obscure people of the Jews, and even worse, had died the death of a common criminal on the cross, could only be regarded as a sign of madness.

'The gods of Greece and Rome could be distinguished from mortal men by the very fact that they were immortal—they had absolutely nothing in common with the cross as a sign of shame, with the "infamous stake" ... the "terrible cross" ('maxuma mala crux'*) of the slaves in Plautus, and thus of the One who, in the words of Celsus, was "bound in the most ignominious fashion" and "executed in a shameful way"'.
(Martin Hengel, *'Crucifixion in the Ancient World'*, pages 6-7.)*

(iii) Go on, smile.

The wedding gift.

David and Dianne Perkins had been invited to a wedding and needed to take a wedding gift. The task of obtaining a suitable wedding present fell to David.

'Do we really need', David asked himself, 'to spend out for a wedding which we don't even want to attend?'

And then the light went on!



'Aha!' David thought. 'In a drawer upstairs, Dianne and I still have a personalised silver tray that we were given by someone on our own wedding. We have never used it.'

'I'll just take that tray to a silversmith and get him to remove our monogram and to replace it with the names of the couple who are to be married. Voila, one cheap wedding present!'

So, David took the tray to a silversmith and asked him to remove the monogram and to substitute the new one.

The silversmith examined the tray carefully. He then shook his head and said,

'I'm sorry sir, but this can only be done so many times!'