

The Cross Road

The story is told of a young child who asked Jesus, “How much do you love me?” Jesus spread His arms wide, said, “This much,” and died!

Jesus’ hands, feet, and side were pierced. On the cross, Christ did everything necessary for the establishment of a blood covenant. He now waits upon us.

Peter had the opportunity to die with Christ. As Christ prophesied His own coming death on the cross, Peter insisted, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You (Matthew 26:35).” Yet when the time came, he chose instead to deny the One with whom he had just entered into blood covenant. He was willing to surrender much for Christ, but not all.

Three times Peter denied, three times Christ later asked Peter, “Do you love me (John 21:15-17)?” God’s love requires total surrender to our Messiah. Christ gave up all for us. From us, He expects nothing less. Jesus then commanded Peter that he was to give his life in love to shepherd, or pastor, others.

Just as our understanding of love and caring is inadequate and trite, for the same reason, when the apostles wrote of love to their generation they refused to use the contemporary Greek term and substituted the Hebrew term, *agabe*, instead. The early translators of the English Bible, attempting the same, translated “agape” often as charity instead of love. Our contemporary definition of love as “unconditional acceptance” falls as far short of God’s meaning as did the ancient Greek concept of *eros*, or erotic, fleshly love.

In the next two verses after Peter said that he did love His Lord, Jesus explained love: “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.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, ‘Follow me! (John 21:18-19 NIV)!’” Before the covenant, we did whatever we pleased. After the covenant, we have died to our desires as individuals and we seek what God, and to some degree others, desire. The imagery of Peter’s having to be clothed by another is the imagery of a newborn, or a person in a nursing home, who does not have the

ability to fulfill his own desires.

Physically, this scripture prophesies Peter's eventual death by crucifixion. As Christ's hands were stretched out, and He was led to where He did not want to go (on behalf of others), so did it happen to Peter. Peter previously had the opportunity to follow Christ at the cross, and failed. He would be given again the opportunity to follow Christ when the emperor Nero sentenced him to death by crucifixion for preaching the gospel, unless he would deny his Lord. In shame for his previous failure to follow, Peter cried that he was unworthy to die as His Lord. His request to be crucified in an upside down position was granted by the servants of Nero.

On the night of the covenant, Jesus gave a definition of love which also summarizes the cross: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13)." Christ did not say we need to lay down just our physical bodies. Peter had been willing to do that. When the guards came to take Jesus away, Peter picked up his sword and began swinging away against the innumerable larger force coming against them. He was willing to die in combat alongside his Captain. But surrendering meekly and walking with his captors as a lamb to the slaughter was too much for aggressive Peter. To give up his body in a courageous defense would have been heroic; to surrender meekly was merely pathetic! His body he could surrender, but his pride, *that* was his life!

Since Peter had not been willing to be led lamely away to be crucified next to Christ, a thief was crucified next to Him instead. To this thief who died in Peter's place, Christ said, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43)." Those words could have been to Peter!

An interesting question: if Peter had been willing to go to the cross with Jesus at that time, would Peter have been physically resurrected with Christ three days later? But the question is moot: Peter was cowering in shame behind a locked door.