

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 339

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 21:15-19

Topic: Jesus Restores Simon Peter

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John 21:15-19 ISV 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." Jesus told him, "Feed my lambs." (16) Then 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." Jesus told him, "Take care of my sheep." (17) He said to him a third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was deeply hurt that he had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" So he said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you!" Jesus told him, "Feed my sheep. (18) "Truly, truly I tell you, when you were young, you would fasten your belt and go wherever you liked. But when you get old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten your belt and take you where you don't want to go." (19) Now he said this to show by what kind of death he would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, "Keep following me."

There is a touch of the "Zen Master" about Jesus in this passage, walking along the shore with Peter and asking insightful questions that provoke Peter to be hurt and exasperated. It is clearly an Eastern "Master-Disciple" relationship. What is Jesus questioning? Peter's loyalty – the very thing that broke down on Good Friday when the cock crowed. And just as Peter denied Christ three times, here he has to reaffirm his love for Jesus three times. And as once Peter claimed that he would die for Christ, so he is told that that would be his fate in the end. In fact history has Peter executed alongside his wife - by being crucified upside down and exhorting her to remember the sufferings of the Lord and dying full of courage and of the hope of heaven.

Jesus had to probe deep into Simon Peter and deal with the matter that had separated their full communion. It had to be discussed and could not just be put to one side. So Jesus waits until after breakfast and takes Peter aside privately. I suppose that during the meal Peter was getting used to the idea that "the chat was coming". The meal gave time for Peter to prepare himself. Jesus gets right to the point "Simon son of Jonas (the translation son of John is probably incorrect, it is better rendered Jonas or Jonah) do you love (agapas) me? "

Peter replies with the more affectionate (but less grand) "Lord you know that I love (philo) you." Much is made by commentators of the difference between agape (charity, disinterested love) and phileo (friendship, loyalty, companionship, affectionate love). Three times Peter declares his loyalty with phileo and refuses to use the colder and more formal term of agape. Phileo is love for a limited inner circle of compatriots, while agape is the common human generosity of the saint. Peter wanted to be Jesus' real friend not just a distant worshiper.

Restoration is often a necessary part of dealing with saints who stray. Jesus gives us a useful pattern to follow:

1. Have a talk in private, after having had a meal together.
2. Raise the topic directly and plainly.
3. Do not rehash the incident or vent your own hurt. Just deal with the remaining issue/s that need to be worked through.
4. Aim at restoration not condemnation.
5. Do not do a superficial “brushing over” of the incident - keep going until you strike the core of the person.
6. Follow restoration with an expression of trust e.g. “feed my sheep”.

The commissioning of Peter was put in three slightly different ways – feed my lambs, shepherd/care for my sheep, and feed my sheep. A few things can be noted here:

1. The sheep are “My sheep” – they belong to Jesus.
2. The sheep are entrusted to Peter – caring for God’s people is a profound responsibility for which we will have to give an account.
3. The young disciples especially (the lambs) need feeding from the Word (v.15) as does the whole flock (v.17).
4. The older disciples the “sheep” need care and leadership.

It is my personal opinion that the ministry of the Word is often neglected while the emphasis is placed on management theories or programs or songfests and entertainment. We are called to feed the sheep, not to have them running in circles!

Feeding the sheep means giving them the right spiritual food – Scripture rightly expounded with Christ at the center of it all. I am astonished at the general lack of preaching on the person and work of Jesus Christ – for that is where the rich food is.

Does ministry lead us to glory and profit or to the cross? For Peter it was to the cross i.e. to shameful public execution. Ministry is a glorious calling but a rotten career path. If you expect a good wage and a nice car and professional esteem and a genteel retirement, then do not choose the ministry – least of all a missionary or apostolic calling.

“Now he said this to show by what kind of death he would glorify God.” The idea of martyrdom has fallen a long way out of favor in evangelical circles. But our death can glorify God if our faith is strong. Physical suffering and death is not terrifying if you are sure of Heaven and of eternal life. No sane person wants to be a martyr, not even Peter and Jesus knew that when He said “and take you where you don't want to go”. But suffering and martyrdom can be part of God's plan for us and if they are we need to accept them as such and use them to glorify God.

“After saying this, he told him, “Keep following me.” – the basic instruction for us all – keep following Jesus. Don't follow the world. Follow the Lord. We will look at this in greater depth tomorrow.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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