

FOLLOW ME; FOLLOW ME; FOLLOW ME

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Scripture: John 21: 18-25

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“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.” Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me!”

Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; the one who also had leaned back on His bosom at the supper and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?” so Peter seeing him said to Jesus, “Lord, and what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!” Therefore, this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?”

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his witness is true.

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

I don't know about you, but when I read these verses, they seem to be almost disjointed and a little disconnected. I agree that maybe verses 18-22, where Jesus is talking to Peter, could tag on to the previous section – the famous “Do you love me” conversation that Jesus had with Peter. But the rest of it seems a little disconnected. If we look at it as just one passage, then we need to be able to ask ourselves what can we glean from all of this, if albeit it is broken up into different divisions. That's the way I see it actually.

vv. 18-19 Jesus predicts where Peter is going to be. When he's young he goes wherever he wants to go; when he's old he's going to be led by people to places that he doesn't want to go. The holding out of hands, “You stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you,” really talks about crucifixion and the way that he will die. Then John adds that He was talking about his death and how he would glorify God. So glorifying God was part of this death. But at the end of it, Jesus says, “Follow Me.”

Then Peter notices that John is behind, and John goes to great pains to say that it was him, the one who was leaning on Jesus' breast, the one who asked the question, “Lord, who is it?” He puts all of this in there because he is writing this gospel account. Then he gets back to Peter and says, “Then Peter, therefore seeing him (i.e., John) said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about this man? What about him? You're telling me to follow you, what about John?’” And then Jesus says to him, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You just follow Me.” In other words, it's not any of your business.

John again interjects and he says that this saying went out among the brethren that the disciple would not die. That is because Jesus said this to the disciple, “If I want him to remain until I come,”

people said that he's never going to die. And John corrects that misunderstanding when he says, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?'"

Then he finishes in v 24 by giving a testimony of himself saying, "I am the witness, okay? I'm the one who has written this, and I'm a faithful, trustworthy source." Then he finally finishes by saying that there are many other things that Jesus did. And then this huge profound statement – that if he wrote in detail all the things that Jesus did, the world itself couldn't contain the books that could be written.

So, we see these four divisions in this passage, and maybe not in full continuity all the way through, but I want us to look at this together. What would be good lenses to us, for us to just see what God wants to speak to us through this passage.

I'd like to pull from Paul's teaching to Timothy, and from John himself, and see whether what they said can help us understand this passage better especially in terms of its application to us.

Timothy 3:16 says *"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. it corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right."*

Three things we learn from this verse:

1. Scripture is inspired by God.
2. It can teach us truth and help us to do what is right.
3. It can make us realize and correct what is wrong.

John 20:31 *"But these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name."*

John, I believe, is taking it a little further. He's saying, "On the one hand, you have to believe. I'm writing all these things so that you may believe that these things are true – that Jesus is the anointed One, the Messiah, the Son of God. But belief in itself is not enough; you have to believe in such a way that you put that into your everyday life." And then he says, "You will have life in His name." So you live life through the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. So, not only intellectually understand it, but also practically allow it to pan out in your everyday life.

How to apply these principles to our own lives?

- 1. Remember that Scripture is God-breathed.** It's God's Word for you and me today. God is saying to us, this Word that you are reading today, in the service, is for you. What can we get from that understanding?

Isaiah 55:11 says that God's word will not return back void. Or as the NLT puts it: It is the same with My word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.

So this word from John is a word that God has sent for you and for me; it will not return to Him empty. It will produce fruit, and it will accomplish all God intended for it to accomplish in your life and in mine.

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the message about Christ in all its richness fill your lives."

So, we accept this word and say, "Lord, what are You saying to me today from this passage?"

I don't know about you, but you do. You know what's going on with you. You know that maybe you need to be reminded of God's omniscience, that He is an all-knowing God. He knows everything about you, that He is aware of what is going on in your life, that He's got your future in His very capable hands. He also knows how thin you are spread, or how lonely you are, or how you've reached the end of the rope and you can't take anymore, that you're fearful, frightened, nearing breaking point. God knows all of that. maybe people around you don't know because of the façade that you and I are so good at putting up. But God knows what's going on in your life. Maybe, God's word today is to remind you that because He knows all things, He will see you through. He will give you wisdom, strength, grace, hope, confidence, whatever it is that you need to get you through. He will not let go of you. Remember, His word doesn't return back void or empty. It accomplishes what it has been sent to do, to remind you of His omniscience and that He is in charge and eminently trustworthy. God's omniscience is something – there is a principle that we have.

2. We need to follow Him even though the path may be difficult.

Peter knew the path was going to get difficult, and yet, for those 30-odd years after Jesus went, he followed Jesus faithfully. And I wonder whether you and I have balked because of some difficulty, some discouragement that has come. we've gotten off and we're not following Him anymore. We are 'Christian', but we are not actively following behind Jesus because things are just too difficult.

3. We should follow Him without thinking about the what-abouts.

Peter said, "What about this man? You're asking me to follow You, but what about him?" I wonder whether we have what-abouts in our lives. What about my job? What about my family? What about responsibility? What about my loans? What about this? What about that? And I wonder whether Jesus is saying, "That's not your business; that's mine. When you begin to follow Me, that begins to be My business. I'll take care of it." Maybe that's held you for a long time from following Him. Peter didn't wait after that. he followed. I wonder whether today Jesus is saying to you, "Stop thinking about those things. I'll handle it. You follow me."

4. To be able to correct error when we get the chance.

To point out a wrong or a mistake, just as John did. And I'm not talking about just looking for mistakes. I know that there are many times that you get a call when you made a mistake. Otherwise, no one bothers. But if there's an error or a mistake, then somebody calls, "Hey, by the way, you did this." No, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about in the relationships that you have, the people who trust you, respect you, are learning from you, who look up to you. Maybe you are a role model for them. Are you able to go beyond just getting love from them, and being able to say, "That's a line that you shouldn't cross? Those are boundaries that you don't go beyond." Are you willing to risk losing the love so that you can give truth into their lives and correct errors?

5. To be a trustworthy witness of Jesus.

Look at what John was able to say: "I am a witness and you can believe the things that I am writing to you. This is the disciple who bears witness of these things and wrote these things and we know that his witness is true." Saying that about himself – my witness is true. What about our witness, beloved? Our witness to people around us – do we live a life of integrity and honesty, fairness so that when you and I say something about the faith, people will believe? When we share our beliefs or talk about God, do people take us seriously? Do we allow the glorious message to be backed up by a trustworthy messenger?

6. To know that at best, we can only tell a part of the story.

John's way of saying how inadequate he was in presenting all that Jesus had done. Other writers over the years, have put it like this; you've heard the songs, songs that talk about if the ocean were full of ink, there still wouldn't be enough ink to write about what God has done.

Leila Morris said, "Oh, it's wonderful, it's marvelous and wonderful what Jesus has done for this soul of mine; the half has never been told.

As we follow Jesus, that's what happens – our lives become testimonies of God's faithfulness, of His love, of His care, everything. There are reams and reams that we can write about how God has worked in our lives. Do we have that? Or are we clinging on to one incident many years ago that happened in our lives?

I believe that's what John is trying to tell us here, that there was an initial calling of Peter way back in Galilee. Jesus called fishermen and said, "Come follow Me. I will make you fishers of men." But there was a second calling, that in spite of difficulties, he needs to follow. A third 'Follow Me' that reminded him not to worry about other things; just to be single-minded in following after Jesus. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

Beloved, we have the tendency to take back the reins when things get difficult. When things get difficult, we say, "Lord, it's difficult to follow You now. I'll just fix these things and then come," not realizing that in following Him, Jesus fixes it. Jesus gives us wisdom. Often we look at our budgets and think we are not going to make it to the end of the month, and we wonder how to manage it. And we take the reins away from Him. Then we try and make our own budgets, and the first thing that we say is, "I'll take the tithe out, or the offering." Beloved, that's the worst thing that you and I can do, to withhold from God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, the wealth in every mine. He can give you all that you need. He can stretch your resources. But you and I need to give Him the first priority – not only finances, but our giftings as well. Sometimes when we get a job or we are doing well in our careers, God gets pushed out because our career path needs so much attention. And yet, it's God who gave you that job. Will He give you something that will take Him away from you? He doesn't want that. He'll continue to bless you, but you and I must continue to put Him first.

Follow Me; follow Me; follow Me – is His word for you and me today.

Abba, help us to look beyond our situations and circumstances and our difficulties. Help us to look beyond the what-ifs of our lives. Help us to focus just on You, to follow You, to trust You, to bring truth into situations, and to glorify You with our lives, and to be able to speak about the countless things that You are doing for us. Abba, we love You. Lord Jesus, thank You so much for coming to Calvary for each one of us. Holy Spirit, we give You full reign in our hearts. Lead us in paths of righteousness as we follow the Master. Amen