

# Follow Me

## John 21:20-25

B.I: For every believer God has a unique assignment to impact the world and bring Him maximum glory.

LTS: Psalm 85

Tomorrow afternoon Pastor Brent and I intend to head out on a trip to central Asia that will have us preaching and teaching in three major countries of the former Soviet Union. I've been on these trips before and every time I go I have the same kind of experience. It's always a long – often exhausting – journey that ends up bearing much fruit for the glory of God and our own personal joy. Along the way as we seek to meet needs and administer the comfort and instruction of the Scriptures, we meet people who have suffered more than we, who have persevered better than we, and who love Christ more than we. It is always a humbling and refreshing experience despite the difficult demands.

At the same time as I prepare for that journey we as a church find ourselves completing a different journey. More than 3 ½ years ago we set out on the long road that led us through the Gospel of John. From the very beginning we saw that the truths we would encounter were greater than we had imagined. We were introduced to the reality that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God who created everything that has come into being. We were amazed to read that this “Word” became flesh – a real human being – so that He could represent us before the Father so that we could be saved.

Along the way we met many people. Some who desired to know Christ as we know Him, and others whose love for Him exceeds our own. On the other hand, there were many who would never put their faith in Jesus, and some who hated Him so much that they demanded and succeeded in bringing about His unjust condemnation and execution through the horrors of the cross. But all along the way we were reminded repeatedly that His death was no more accidental than His birth. Jesus came to earth on a mission. He came to seek and to save the lost. He came to reveal the grace of God, to show us the Father, to call us to repentance, and to die in our place. Then, when His mission was complete He rose again from the dead to prove once and for all that He is indeed the promised Christ, the Son of God, and that whoever believes in Him will have life – ETERNAL LIFE – in His name.

I confess that this has been a longer journey than even I thought it would be. As I read through S. Lewis Johnson's final sermon on the Gospel of John yesterday he admitted that it took him nearly 100 sermons to complete. And for us, perhaps because of the weakness of this preacher, we reach the end of our journey today at 121 messages. And I don't know about you but I confess that as I prepare to step away from the Gospel of John I do so almost with a sense of sadness because, frankly, I don't want it to end. This has been a rich study, hasn't it? And I hope you have been blessed, encouraged, convicted, and instructed as I have along the way. I can't help but think that we are a

better church because of these three years of studying the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

However, having said all of that, we are not quite finished. So turn in your Bibles to John 21 and we will look at this final passage together.

As you know by now, this passage is primarily about the restoration of Peter to his apostolic ministry. It is not the first time we have seen hints that Jesus would restore Peter after his three denials. For example, we saw a hint of this when the angel at the empty tomb told the women (Mk. 16), "Go tell His disciples and Peter" that Jesus would see them in Galilee. We further know that the resurrected Christ appeared to Peter privately on Resurrection day. We might call these evidences of Peter's private restoration, but here in John 21 we are witnessing Peter's public restoration.

There are some interesting parallels that we can observe that encourage us to see this as Peter's restoration. For example, Jesus provided a great catch of fish before calling Peter to be His disciple (Luke 5), and here in chap. 21 Jesus provides a great catch of fish again before restoring Peter. Furthermore, Peter denied the Lord three times before a charcoal fire (Jn. 18:18). Likewise here Jesus has him confess devotion to Him three times around a charcoal fire. It seems evident that it was John's purpose that we would make these connections and realize that Jesus was reinstating Peter to his office and ministry as an apostle.

The other observation that leads us to believe Jesus is restoring Peter comes from how Jesus responds to each of Peter's answers to the questions, "Do you love me?" Each time Jesus responds with "feed my sheep," or "tend my lambs." The essence of apostolic ministry is to feed Christ's sheep. That is, the apostle's primary ministry was the ministry of the Word. That's why in the book of Acts when the first serious conflict arose that might split the fledgling church the twelve apostles brought the congregation together and said (Acts. 6:2-4),

"It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

<sup>3</sup>"Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men ... whom we may put in charge of this task. <sup>4</sup>"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Likewise, in our day the primary ministry of the elders in every congregation is the ministry of the Word of God. We are charged with the responsibility to feed Christ's sheep. Pastors/Elders are merely under-shepherds who, in service to the Great Shepherd, take care of His sheep by the ministry of the word of God.

Here at Calvary Bible Church that means we Preach the Word, Teach the Word, Read the Word, Sing the Word, counsel the Word, and Pray the Word. Why, because this is how God's people are nourished. This is how God's children are fed and enabled to grow up strong, healthy, and unified. Remember what Moses said and Jesus quoted, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every WORD that proceeds from the mouth of God."

So we believe Jesus is publically restoring Peter to his office and ministry of the Word because three times he commands him "Feed my sheep," and because he concludes by

saying “Follow Me,” or more precisely “keep on following me.” And we will hear Jesus say that again in our passage for this morning as well.

That brings us to this last set of verses in the Gospel of John. And there are two things we should see here.

I. Every Disciple’s Calling is Unique:

II. Jesus is Worthy of Your Faith:

### **I. Every Disciple’s Calling is Unique: (20-23)**

1. You will remember that breakfast (18-19) Jesus reveals to Peter by what kind of death he was to glorify God. In other words, Jesus revealed to Peter (and to the others) that He would die as Jesus did; namely, by crucifixion. That is, his final act of glorifying God on earth would be to die as a martyr for Christ.
2. After saying this Jesus concludes with one final directive: “Follow me,” or “Keep on following me.” At this point Jesus begins walking away – perhaps to disappear just as suddenly as He had appeared. But after learning God’s will for the end of His life, Peter thought of a question and went after Jesus to ask it.

Read 20-21

3. To this Jesus responded – (Read 22)
4. If we were to render Jesus’ final statement in modern English it might read, “My plan for John none of your business! You just follow me!” You see, God had a specific plan for Peter’s life, but He had a different plan for John’s life. Peter is called to a life of pastoral ministry and martyrdom. John was called to a long life of strategic witness through pastoring and writing books. Both callings are equally important, but they were unique to each man.
5. And so it is with us, beloved. Our lives are not merely about living our three score and ten. We were not put here merely to eat drink and be merry until we die. No! Each of us is here for a purpose. We have a calling to fulfill. There are things God want you specifically to do. There are people who need to be spoken to. There is evil that must be curtailed. There are children (perhaps in your home), and friends, family members, and coworkers who need to hear the gospel. We are all left on earth to show the world what Christ is like. That’s what it means to be a witness. But the way you will be called upon to do that – the circumstances and opportunities – are going to be different than others.
6. Some of you will be called into some kind of public ministry. Others will be called to serve in more private ways. Some will glorify God powerfully through their God-ordained suffering, and others by their position of influence. Your calling will be different than my calling, but yours will be just as significant in God’s eyes as mine.
7. I think Jesus is telling Peter to be content with his own calling and leave that of others to Him. He knows what he is doing and can govern it better than us.

8. You might ask, “How do I know my calling?” Well, God certainly isn’t going to write in the sky for you. He will lead you into His will for your life day by day by the same means as he leads all of us. The prescription is this: “Follow me.” In other words, just focus on the simplicity of being faithful in the next decision no matter what. If you believe it would please the Lord for you to speak, then speak. If you believe it would honor the Lord to give, then give. Don’t make excuses, just do what you believe God would have you do in the next moment. Maybe you need to confront. Perhaps you have an opportunity to encourage, or help someone even to your own hurt. Maybe you believe the Lord would be pleased with you pursuing further education, or early retirement to free you up to serve the Lord. Just seek to be faithful in the next decision and the Lord will lead you as He wills
9. How do you know what faithfulness will look like in the next decision? Well, is there a command to obey, a biblical pattern to follow, a sin to flee or warn about? Is there a sacrifice to be made, a gift to be given, and strategy to plan. Let the Bible be your guide and ask for biblical counsel when you’re confused. And then rest in the reality that the sovereign Savior is leading you to exactly where He wants you to be. Every disciple’s calling us unique.
10. Next, we find a kind of parenthetical note in verse 23 (read 23)
11. Apparently, some of the brothers who followed John had heard about this discussion between Jesus and Peter and concluded that Jesus was actually saying that John would live until the return of Christ. John is seizing the opportunity to correct that mistaken idea here. That was not at all Jesus’ point. However, it is significant that Jesus mentions His return here, because that has always been the church’s great expectation and hope. One day Jesus will return and make all things new.

## **II. Jesus is worthy of your faith:**

Read 24-25

1. These final words are designed to solidify our confidence in the message of John Gospel. It seems as if John is saying, “I wrote this Gospel and I testify that everything I said is true.” This is very similar to what John said in 19:35, “He who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth – that you also may believe.”
2. On the other hand, we should be careful to note the change in pronouns here. Notice the “we” (24) and the “I” (25). The “I” is apparently the apostle John. The “We” may very well be the elders at Ephesus (where John served) adding their brief endorsement to John’s testimony. “We know that his testimony is true.” In any case, the point is that this Gospel is trustworthy in its witness and therefore Jesus is worthy of your faith.
3. What is the witness of this Gospel? It is that Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh. He is God who became a man in order to save men and women, boys and girls from the just penalty of their sin. He was sent by the Father to heal the sick and raise the dead. He confounded the so-called “wisdom” of the religious hypocrites of His day so that God’s

simple message of salvation by grace could be heard and received. He demonstrated that all the prophecies in the O.T. law and the prophets about the Messiah are fulfilled in Him. He described His own death before it ever happened and promised that He would rise again in three days. And it all happened exactly as He said.

4. And all along the way he invited all men to receive His salvation.

- “Follow Me” (1:43; 8:12; 10:27; 21:19, 22)
- “Come to Me” (5:40; 6:36; 7:37)
- “Believe Me” (6:35; 7:38; 11:25; 14:1; 14:12)
- “Abide in Me” (6:56; 15:4-7; )
- “Love Me” (8:42; 14:15; 14:21, 23, 24, 28; 16:27; 21:15-17)
- “Know Me” (10:14; 14:7)
- “Serve Me” (12:26)
- “Receive Me” (13:20)

5. John 1:11-12, John says, “He came unto His own and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

6. In Chap. 3 Jesus declared, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; <sup>15</sup> so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

7. To the woman at the well (4:14) Jesus said, “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

8. In 5:24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

9. In 6:40 “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

10. In 6:68 “Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.’”

11. In 11:25–26 “Jesus said to [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

12. In 14:6 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

13. In 17:3 “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

14. Then John makes his purpose clear when he writes in (20:30-31) “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;<sup>31</sup> but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

15. This is what the Gospel of John is all about. The only question that remains is... do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. I plead with you this morning to not allow this day to end without running to the cross and finding in Jesus Christ reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life in Jesus.

16. Well, this has been a rich study hasn't it?

- Martin Luther once said, “Should a tyrant succeed in destroying the Holy Scriptures and only a single copy of the Epistle to the Romans and the Gospel according to John escape him, Christianity would be saved.”<sup>1</sup>
- William Hendriksen wrote: “The Gospel of John is the most amazing book that was ever written.” When one comes to study it he hears from on high, “Put off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”