

Peter, Do You Love Me?

Scripture: John 21:15–25

Code: 43-116

For this morning, we come we come to the 21st chapter of John, and this morning we're going to finish our study of this incredibly important gospel. Somebody asked me if I'm always kind of glad when you come to the end of a book and have the satisfaction that it's completed, and the truth is I have the very opposite reaction. I hate to let it go, because it's likely that I'll never be back again to do this; and this is such an incredibly powerful life-transforming experience, especially for me, because of the intensity that I apply to it in order to bring a message to you on the Lord's Day. So it's with a measure of sadness that we come to the end of the gospel of John, but it's going to be, I trust, a wonderfully helpful consummation as we look at the final section. That final section of chapter 21 looks like a lot of verses, and maybe it could be stretched out a little bit. But it is really faithful to the intent of John not to get bogged down here and wander off into all the world and preach the gospel everywhere, but to stick with the emphasis here. This section is really driven right at Peter. Peter, of course, has already been high-profile in the first half of chapter 21. Again, Peter had acted disobediently; and because he was a leader, he led the other apostles who were with him into disobedience.

You remember I told you, they were supposed to be in a mountain waiting for the Lord, but Peter decided that he was going to abandon his call to ministry, if you will, and go back to fishing. There were reasons for that. He had denied the Lord on three separate occasions. I think he felt inadequate. I think he felt guilty. I think he felt weak. He also was a man who didn't have a lot of patience. He had not yet, along with the apostles, received the Holy Spirit. They were doubtful of their own power, their own ability, to sustain a ministry he knew that he had failed so many times.

The Lord had rebuked him so many times; the others were unsure about the future even though they had seen the risen Christ for the third time in chapter 21 when He met them for breakfast on the shore of the lake in Galilee. So we understand that Peter was really vacillating in his commitment to ministry. If the gospel ended there we wouldn't really know whether Peter had an official recommissioning, so we're grateful for verses 15 and following, because this is the restoration, the recalling of Peter, the reassignment of the ministry that God had given him through Christ at the very beginning of the ministry of our Lord.

Back in Matthew 4:19 Jesus met these fishermen, including Peter; told them to drop their nets, leave it all behind and He would make them fishers of men. You remember they all dropped everything, followed Him. This is three years-plus later, and Peter has led his fishermen friends back to fishing in the first part of the chapter. That's not the Lord's plan for them. Peter is the leader; he needs to be restored, and behind him will come the others. God has very significant plans for this denying, impatient, impulsive leader by the name of Peter. And as we look at this final section we're going to see what is essentially a call to faithfulness for any believer, any disciple of Christ, anyone who is going to serve the Lord. This is what a committed Christian looks like. This is a characteristic of committed Christians. To see what our Lord elicits out of Peter is what He wants out of all of us. This is a wonderful model.

Let me begin in verse 15: “So 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.’ And He said to him, ‘Tend My lambs’ – or – ‘feed My lambs.’ He said to him again 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, ‘Shepherd My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because he said him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend’ – or feed – ‘My sheep. 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” – or chest – “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 the disciple would not die; yet Jesus didn’t 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 testimony 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.” Just a fascinating portion of Scripture directed at Peter.

Peter is beloved by all of us because he is like us. He has all the failures that we are so familiar with in our own lives. He overestimates himself and underestimates temptation. He thinks he’s more committed than he is. He thinks he loves the Lord more than he does. He thinks he can face any trial triumphantly; finds out he can’t. By the time we get to this point, even though he has seen the risen Christ, he is really a broken man.

The disciples have not yet received the Holy Spirit, so they have not yet been infused with power, and they are very familiar with their own impotence. It’s very easy for them, as we come to the epilogue in the gospel of John, to just kind of drift back to life the way it used to be, to go back to fishing, which this particular group had been engaged in, with the exception of Thomas. But the Lord is going to call him back, and with him the rest of them, back into significant ministry. They will subsequently be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and they will turn the world upside-down. But it requires a certain commitment for them to be that useful, so here you have a call to follow Christ. It has three components. It is a call to love Christ; it is a call to sacrifice for Christ; it is a call to follow Christ no matter what. That is universally the case.

For every believer, for every follower of Jesus Christ, there is the necessity of a call to love, a call to sacrifice, and a call to obey. That is the stuff of discipleship. So this is a very straightforward, somewhat simple – not simplistic, but simple in the sense that it’s very clear, “Look at what it means to be a disciple.” What comes out of those three things that are very easily articulated – love, sacrifice, and obedience – is still the fact that following Christ is not easy. To love that way is not easy, to sacrifice that way is not easy, and to obey that way is not easy. Salvation is not cheap, it is not easy, it costs everything, everything. We are told by our Lord Himself in His gospel calls that sinners are to submit completely to the Lord Jesus Christ, to find their lives by losing them, to fulfill

their lives by emptying them, to live their lives by dying to self.

Salvation is not cheap, it is not easy. Our Lord repeatedly said, "It might require you to hate your father, your mother, your sister, your brother, and your own life. It might require you to turn from everything you possess, all your desires, all your ambitions." "If you want to follow Me," – Jesus said – "you must deny yourself, take up your cross," – which means it may mean death – "and follow Me." You need to count the cost, and the cost could be your life. The cost will be your life, and maybe your death. This is a very, very extreme call to follow a man.

Why would people do this? Jesus was actually calling for people to become His slave, to abandon their own ambition, desire, control; become slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is extreme. What would motivate that? Why would someone do that? What is the compelling desire that is going to cause me or you or anybody else to sacrifice my life for Christ, to spend my life obeying Him? What's the motive? Well, that's where we begin.

The motive is love. That is the only power that can motivate this kind of devotion. I think we understand that even on a human level that people who love greatly, sacrifice greatly. People who love greatly give up things. Love is a powerful, powerful emotion, powerful motivation.

Even earthly love is so powerful it can draw the best out of people, and it can also draw the worst. It is love that makes people sacrifice everything to live with one person the rest of their life. It is love that is so powerful it can destroy a family. It can destroy a marriage; it does all the time. It can destroy a life. It can lead to alcoholism, drugs, suicide, murder.

Love is a powerful emotion on a human level. It is so powerful that people sacrifice their own lives for it on the positive side, giving up their life for the one they love, giving up their life, if need be, for the children. Some have such great love for causes that are even beyond personal causes, that they will give their lives for their nation, for their neighbors.

In John 15:13, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his *philn*, the ones He loves." People die for love. It is a powerful, powerful motivation. And as far as Christians are concerned, according to 2 Corinthians 5:14, it is the love that we have for the Lord that controls us, that's what Paul said. It is that love that controls us. Some of the translations of 2 Corinthians 5:14 say: constrains us, motivates us, drives us. Really you follow your love, you follow your love, the things you love; you follow those things in life, whatever they be, even objects that you love, experiences that you love, as well as people that you love.

Love is a powerful, powerful motivator, more powerful than any other. And when you move it into the spiritual dimension and the divine world, love is what causes us to serve the Lord in an extreme act of dedication. In fact, we go to the Old Testament, what do we hear our responsibility is? It is this, reiterated in Matthew 22:37 by our Lord Himself: "You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." That in itself sums up the law. You can have the law of God.

All His laws in the Old Testament directed toward how we respond to Him. You can condense them into the first half of the Decalogue, which relates to how we treat God, or you can condense them once more into one statement: "You love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." That is how you are to live, you are to live a life of love. The Bible never calls for a life of

legalism, a life of law, a life of dread, a life of fear; it always calls for us to love God.

And then the second part of that great command like it is, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” That fulfills the second half of the Decalogue and all the other laws that God gave that deal with human relationships. Love is the driving power in life. It is the driving power in the kingdom as well.

Back in Deuteronomy, when our Lord was reiterating His requirements for His people as they were on the brink of going into the Promised Land, chapter 6, verse 4, He says, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons, talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and on the front of your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” What are you writing? “The Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.” That’s what you teach your children. That is the summation of all that should be said about our relationship to God.

Listen to the 10th chapter of Deuteronomy, verse 12: “Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul.” Do you see the totality of that commitment? Every faculty, every aspect of your being is to be loving God. And then as a result, “If you love God with all your heart and all your soul, you will keep the Lord’s commandments and statutes which I am commanding you today for good.”

Again, in chapter 11, “You shall” – verse 1 – “therefore love the Lord your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.” That’s Old Testament. It’s about loving God. That’s what God called the world to do, to love Him, to love Him.

Our Lord makes it clear in the 14th chapter of John. As you remember, on the night before His crucifixion in the upper room, verse 15, John 14, He says to the disciples and to all of us, “If you love Me, you’ll keep My commandments.” Verse 21, “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and disclose Myself to him.” Verse 23, “If anyone loves Me, he’ll keep My word. My Father will love him; We will come to him and Our abode with him.” Verse 28, “If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father.”

It’s all about love. From the beginning, from the Mosaic revelation to the very New Testament and all through the New Testament, and the summation of all that the apostles write, we are called to love God with all our faculties. It’s about loving Him.

John makes obviously a major point of this when he writes his epistles. His epistles are about loving God in the same way, and John extends them from not only loving God, but loving brothers. He does that in chapter 2, chapter 3, chapter 4, chapter 5 of 1 John. So when we talk about what characterizes believers, dedicated believers, it begins by saying they are driven by compelling love for Christ, compelling love for Christ.

Love is the power of obedience. Love is the power of duty. Love is the power of service. Love is the

power of sacrifice. Love is the power of worship. Love is the power of fellowship. Love is everything. So you see that in the opening verses, verses 15 to 17, and our Lord's dialogue with the apostle Peter. Here is a man who needs a total restoration.

Now somebody might say, "You know, he's going to have to have six weeks of therapy to get him back to where he needs to be. There's got to be a process here. There's got to be some kind of path. There's got to be some kind of course he needs to run. There have to be things he needs to learn. Sanctification is a very complicated thing to get him back on track. We've got to have him deal with a lot of his past, and plow through and figure things out, and assess things, and find a way forward."

No. The Lord asks him one question three times: "Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" because you will follow what you love. You will serve what you love. You will sacrifice for what you love, who you love. That's the question.

So for us to understand dedication commitment in the way that our Lord explains it here in the illustration with Peter, we start by understanding that a committed Christian lives a life compelled by love for Christ. This is very practical. It's a wonderful way to end this glorious gospel of John. It almost seems, I suppose, like we've come down off this incredible high of the resurrection, post resurrection appearances, and now we're down with the stumbling and bumbling people in the final chapter. But you have to understand that the glory of Christ is going to be placed in the hands of these stumbling, bumbling people; that this treasure, as Paul says, is in earthen vessels. And so we need to learn at the very end of this the kind of people that God is depending on to proclaim the glory of this gospel.

Now look, Peter overestimated himself a lot. But even in the upper room on Thursday night before the crucifixion, Jesus was talking about the fact that He was going to be leaving, verse 33: "Little children," – John 13 – "I'm with you a little while longer. You'll seek Me. As I said to the Jews, I also say to you, 'Where I'm going, you can't come.' A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you love one another. By this all men will know that you're My disciples, if you have love for one another." That is not only the essence of our relationship with God, it's the essence of our relationship with each other.

"Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, where are You going?' Jesus answered, 'Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.' Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.' Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.'" And he did.

Three separate occasions, and in each of the three occasions, there were multiple denials. All of them happened that one night at the trial of Jesus in the house of the high priest. Peter had already seen Christ twice, and a third time on the shore of Galilee, so he knew He was alive. But he still had serious doubts about himself, and our Lord had to go to the core of the issue. He had been told to go to Galilee and wait for the Lord. Instead, he went up there for a little while and then went back to his old career, and took all his friends with him.

"Let's go back to fishing." That's what they did before it all began. "We know how to do that; let's go back and do that." That wasn't God's plan for them. That wasn't the Lord's will. So Peter needed to be restored, and we need to know what happens to Peter at the end of the story.

This is a public restoration, by the way, because he's not alone here. Back in verse 2 you have a list of all of the other disciples who were with him: Thomas, Nathanael, James and John, Philip and Andrew most likely – the crew, for the most part, that were the fishermen, with the addition of Thomas. And our Lord has prepared breakfast for them after the wonderful, miraculous catch of fish, and it's now time to set the standard for discipleship and He's going to start with Peter. They've all been disobedient; Peter's going to be the example.

Verse 15: "When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter," – by the way, John always refers to him as Simon Peter, which kind of gives us the whole picture before and after. I think there may be one exception to that in John's gospel. But he chooses to call him Simon Peter. "But Jesus says to him, 'Simon, son of John.'"

Now that must have gotten his attention. That was his name before he met the Lord, and the Lord had given him another name. "You used to be Simon, now you're Peter." Peter was the Lord's name for him. But Peter had fallen so far that the Lord is using his old name, because he's acting like his old self. This is like when you did something wrong and your mother called you by your entire name.

This must have been a shock. Peter didn't necessarily want to be pointed out, he would like to have blended into the group. But he is pointed out, the Lord calls him out, and three times asked him if he loves Him, one for each occasion of denial. For each time that he denied Him, he gets an opportunity to be restored. And here is the restoration, it's as simple as this: "Simon, son of John," – or Jonas – "do you love Me?" That's the question. That's always the question to ask a disobedient believer, because what is being manifest in any act of disobedience is love. And when you act disobediently, you're declaring love for something other than Christ, and Peter had done that.

So He says, "Do you love Me more than these?" These what, these men? No, because they had all done the same thing. They were all guilty of a loveless disobedience. He means nets, boats, fish. "Do you love Me more than these things that go with your former life? Are you prepared to give this up, to abandon all your successes, your chosen career? Are you willing to give it all up? Do you love Me enough to do that?"

And the word He uses is *agapaó*. That's that high love – the noblest, purest, best; the love of the will. We talk about agape love; that's a noun form of it. It is love in its fullest sense, love in its deepest sense, love in its greatest sense, love, I guess you could say, in its purest form – divine love.

"Do you really love Me, Peter, at the highest level?" That is the critical question. And that is the key to commitment. It was John Calvin who said, "No man will steadily persevere in the discharge of his ministry unless the love of Christ shall reign in his heart."

"Do you love Me enough to live for Me? Do you love Me enough to walk away from this? Are you constrained by loving Me? Do you have a love for Me" – in the words of Paul in Ephesians 6:24 – "that is incorruptible love? Do you really love Me in the fullest sense?"

So Peter replies, "He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.'" But he changed the word. Jesus used the word *agapaó*, Peter used the word *phileó*, he dropped down a notch. *Phileó* is a kind of brotherly love, kind of warm affection, a friendship love.

Look, Peter couldn't say, "Yes, You know that I love You at the highest level of love." That just wouldn't fly. I mean he had denied Him, and now He had disobeyed Him, and He had enough sense not to be an absolute hypocrite and say, "Of course, I love You at the highest level." So he says, "Lord, I have great affection for You." He dared not claim *agapaó*, but he did claim *phileó*. But even with that, he has to lean on omniscience: "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

Now some people think omniscience is frightening; I think it's a blessing. You say, "Well, that means the Lord knows everything you're thinking, the Lord knows all about you." Absolutely. What a blessing that is, because even when we don't demonstrate it, He knows we love Him.

I'm happy to allow Him to know the things that I wish He wouldn't know if He can also know the things that I desperately want Him to know, that I love Him. And he had to appeal to the omniscience of the Lord. In a broken and a contrite spirit he refuses to acknowledge the love at the level our Lord put it. But he says, "I have a great affection for You. It's not what it should be, but it's real."

This is amazing. He said to him, "Tend" – or – "feed" – *boskó* is the verb – "pasture My lambs, pasture My lambs." Amazing. With a less than perfect love, with a less than ideal love, with a less than noble love, with a less than elevated love, the Lord accepts him and says, "Pasture My lambs. Feed My lambs."

And I just want to call to your attention that personal pronoun is very important, because whoever we shepherd doesn't belong to us. This is a calling that Peter reminds all of us about in 1 Peter 5 when he writes and he says, "We are all under-shepherds and Christ is the Chief Shepherd."

If you're in ministry, if you're caring for any other believers in any way, you are shepherding His sheep, not yours. No congregation belongs to a pastor or an elder. No Sunday School class belongs to a teacher. No believers in a family belong, in a spiritual sense, to parents. They're His. It's a stewardship that in some ways is really frightening. That's why in Matthew the Lord tells us to be careful how we treat each other, because not only do they belong to Christ, but Christ is in them. So many people don't understand pastoral ministry as caring for His sheep.

"Peter, pasture My lambs. The most vulnerable, the most weak, the most prone to wander, the most delicate – I turn them over to you. Care for them." That's what pastoral ministry is. It's not about the world, it's not about how you handle a culture, it's how you handle His sheep. "If you love Me, then give your life to shepherding My lambs – the most vulnerable, the most dangerous, the weakest."

You say, "Well that's wonderful that the Lord would settle for that." It is, but He's not done. Verse 16: "He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?'" Same word *agapaó*. "He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' 'Okay,' He said to Him, 'Shepherd My sheep, not just the little ones, but all the rest.' In other words, 'No more fishing; shepherd My sheep. This is your calling.'"

And then in verse 17, "He said to him a third time, 'Simon, son of John,' – again, painfully repeated three times – 'do you love Me?' – and with that word, He dropped down to Peter's word – 'Do you really *phileó* Me?' – in other words, He's questioning even that – 'Do you really have strong affection for Me? Do you really?'" Peter's deeds didn't even support that.

Jesus probes deep into Peter. This is corrective surgery. It cuts deep, it's painful, but it can be healed. "He says," – says John – "Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time." He's not grieved because He said it three times; there were three denials. He's grieved, because the third time He says, "Do you *phileó* Me?" and even questions that love. "And, again, he says, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep, tend My sheep, pasture My sheep. No more fishing. No more fishing. Your job is My little lambs, My sheep.'"

Back in chapter 10 He talked about how He loved the sheep, how He gave His life for the sheep, how the sheep knew Him and He knew them. And now He's handing them over to Peter. "I'm entrusting you with them, and I need to know that you love Me more than you love this, so that you're going to be faithful to give your life for them." So three times Peter had the opportunity to tell the Lord he loved Him. You might have thought that the Lord would have discarded Peter at this point since Peter really couldn't even defend, by his behavior, that lower level of love. But the Lord accepted him and said, "Pasture My sheep."

We are truly clay pots. The Lord has to use those of us who have an inferior love. First Thessalonians 4 talks about how we're taught of God to love in verse 9. And then verse 10 it says, "But you need to excel even more." We're told that our love should abound.

But this is where all Christian commitment starts: "Do you love Christ more than" – fill in the blank, whatever it is. "Do you love Him more? Then serve Him." I can tell what you love by what you serve, what you do, what the priorities of your life are. A committed Christian is compelled, driven by love for Christ, and that shows up in his or her life, a life given to His flock.

Secondly – and this is equally important and builds on the first – a committed lives a life compelled by love for Christ, and secondly, characterized by sacrifice for Christ. This is costly love. I already quoted Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross" – it could mean you're going to die.

And that's exactly what Peter hears in verse 18: "Truly, truly, I say to you," – that's been repeated many times in the gospel of John: truly, truly, a formula for something that is absolutely true – "I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished. You put on your own belt, you lived your life the way you wanted to. You had freedom, you called the shots, you did whatever you wanted to do. 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."

He's saying to Peter, "In the future, Peter, you're going to be taken prisoner. You're going to be bound and hauled off to a place you don't want to go. Then" – He says – "you're going to stretch out your hands" – that is a euphemism for crucifixion. That's how people were crucified. He's telling Peter, "When you get old, Peter, you're going to be crucified. You're going to be taken prisoner and you're going to be crucified."

How do I know that? Verse 19 says it: "Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God." Peter finds out here he's going to be a martyr. He's going to be a crucified martyr. And you remember the story that tradition gives us, that when it came time for him to be crucified, he didn't feel he was worthy to be crucified as the Lord was, so he asked to be crucified upside-down.

“So, Peter, welcome back to the ministry. Go feed My sheep, go feed My lambs, and know this, that sometime in the future when you’re old, you’re going to be arrested, you’re going to be crucified.”

You might stop and say, “Well that is really bad news. Why would You tell him that? Why would you tell Him that? Better not to know, right, let it be a surprise.” No, it’s important to tell him that. He needed to know what? He needed to know that the next time he got in a life and death situation he would not deny his Lord. He needed to know that. He needed to know that when they took him and captured him, and tied him up, and stretched out his hands, and nailed him to a cross, he would glorify God.

I think he lived the rest of his life with a newfound confidence that overcame his self-doubt, because he had been such a failure at the trial of Christ. I think this put power into his life. I think this put hope into his heart. I think this added confidence to him and boldness. I think he may have otherwise feared that, “If I ever get into that situation again, what am I going to do?” and that would have sucked all of his confidence out. This is a great gift to this man: “You’re going to be arrested, crucified. You’re going to die, but in it, you’re going to glorify God.” Good news.

This is the ultimate sacrifice, and that’s how believers live. This is the extreme requirement for a committed life. Peter had said, Luke 22, “I’m ready to go with you to prison and death.” Didn’t work out that way first time; it would work out that way the last time. In the end, he will die for his Lord. This is a beautiful life-changing promise. Peter has to be ecstatic, thrilled. His heart has to be soaring. His hopes are flying. His boldness is being elevated as he heads toward a triumphant encounter with those who will kill him for his faithfulness to Christ. That’s what dedication is.

The third thing: a life that is truly dedicated to the Lord is compelled by love for Christ, characterized by sacrifice for Christ, and content with following Christ. The end of verse 19: “When Jesus had spoken the words about Peter’s death, He said this to him, ‘Follow Me! Follow Me!’” So important: “Follow Me!” Simple enough.

In a wonderful gesture, I think the Lord turned and started walking away, and Peter’s going to follow Him, at least for two steps, because in verse 20 it says, “Peter turning around.” What? This guy is incorrigible. “What are you turning around for?”

Well, he saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, you know, the one who leaned on Jesus at the supper, that’s John. He sees John, you know, John, the one who asked the question, “Lord, who’s the one at the table who’s going to betray You?” And verse 21, “Peter seeing John said to Jesus, ‘Lord, Lord, what about him? So I’m going to be crucified. What about him?’” Peter is a project. “What about him?”

I love the answer. “Jesus says to him” – in verse 22, it’s really hyperbole and sarcasm – ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me! Look, if I decide he’s going to live till the second coming, it’s none of your business. Follow Me!’”

I mean this is the kind of focus that our Lord wants: “Follow Me! Don’t compare yourself with somebody else. Don’t ask what God has for somebody else, you just follow Me wherever that leads” – and for him, it’s going to lead to death. “What about John; it’s irrelevant. If I want him to live till the second coming, what is that to you?”

That would be interesting, wouldn't it, if he were still here. Well, that's what some people thought, verse 23: "Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die." That's gossip for you; they never get it right. It's ridiculous, "John's going to live till the second coming."

The Lord has to straighten that out. Jesus didn't say to him that he wouldn't die, He just said, "If I want him to remain to come, what is that to you?" He had to correct a rumor, because if people actually believed Jesus said he wasn't going to die and he died, then Jesus didn't know, and they got it wrong. We've got to protect His integrity. "Peter, please, just follow Me. Don't worry about John. Don't worry about anybody else." Like Paul, we're not comparing ourselves with others, "Just follow Me." First Timothy 4:16, "Take heed to yourself." You've got plenty to work on right there.

Peter would be faithful, he would be focused. And, oh, by the way, John didn't live till the second coming, he died on the Isle of Patmos at the end of the first century in exile. But he also was Peter's companion, right? From the Day of Pentecost on to the first part of the book of Acts, it was Peter and John together.

So the Lord wasn't saying, "You're not going to have anything to do with John." The Lord was saying to him, "You follow My plan for you, not My plan for him." Peter was crucified upside-down; John lived much longer than Peter. God had a different plan; Christ had a different plan for John.

Peter is restored. And, oh, by the way, John, who is being referred to here, adds his own little final note in verse 24: "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true." There is John saying, "The one that he was talking about, that's me, and I'm the one who wrote all of this and it's the truth." The apostle authenticates his own gospel. The apostle authenticates his own gospel: "It's the truth." What a touching personal end.

And, again, why does it end this way? You know, we've been to the heights. We've been through the cross, through the resurrection. The glory of Christ has been demonstrated, verse 31, that culminating statement: "These things have been written that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing might have life in His name," – this great gospel reality.

And in the final chapter, we just come back down to earth and we meet these two guys. That is such a fitting ending, because the glory of the gospel eventually ends up with us, right, ends up with us and whether or not we're going to love Christ, sacrifice for Him, and be content to follow Him.

And then a final word. There's just one other question to ask: "Why didn't John say more about Jesus?" Well, he says, "There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself wouldn't contain the books that would be written."

Now that may seem like hyperbole to you, but we live in a fascinating technological world. Just your life alone and all the words you've ever said, ever written, have ever been sent to you, written about you; all the interaction you've ever had in this world; I read by the time you're done with your life could fill 320 libraries; and that just you, and who cares, right?

And you understand that there are so many bits of data in the world that they're literally uncountable. It's amazing how one person with one mouth and one pen can generate the volume of experiences

that could be written about, conversations that could be recorded, letters that could be repeated, copied. Oh, by the way, it's all copied, it's in the cloud; not God's cloud, it's in Google's cloud. But it's also in God's cloud. And you would be amazed to know that even though you probably have a maximum of, oh, maybe 20,000 words in your vocabulary, that stretches into an almost infinite number of bits just to represent your one life.

John didn't know all about that, but he did know that if everything Jesus ever did was written out in full, and everything He ever said was recorded, the world wouldn't be able to contain it; it would have to be up in the cloud. Someday we'll have access to that. When we get into God's cloud and go to heaven, I think we'll know the full story.

Father, we thank You again this morning for a wonderful opportunity to have our lives examined by Your Word, because that's what it does, it shines a light on us. It discloses us. It is the revealer of the thoughts and intents of the heart. We thank You for the searchlight of Your precious Word. We thank You for the joy that it brings, the comfort, the encouragement, the counsel, the wisdom, the knowledge, the conviction, the correction. And we would all want to be like You wished Peter to be, motivated by love for You over love for anything and everything else, not loving the world or the things that are in the world, because then the Love of the Father's not in us. But loving You, we want to be willing to sacrifice for You in life, and even in death if need be. And just in that simple way, we want to follow You, not asking about somebody else or what you have for them, but what You have for us.

Lord, we want to be used by You with all of our frailty. We feel like Peter. We want to say we love You. We can't climb a mountain of that highest love and say we've reached the peak. It's a lesser love that we claim, and that might even be questionable. But You know our hearts, You know we love You, and we want to serve You. We want to shepherd Your sheep and tend Your lambs. So, Lord, would You count us faithful, know our hearts, and know that we do love You. We are willing to sacrifice for You. We do desire to follow; and in so doing, may You find us useful to Your glory. This is our prayer.

Thank You for all that this wonderful gospel has meant to us and will continue to mean. And as the messages go out around the world in years to come, may they always accomplish Your purpose. And may it be that the testimony that John has written, as he said, will be seen as true, as true. And may the truth enlighten many, many souls to salvation, for Your glory. Amen.

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