

TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

Following Christ in Life

John 21:20-25

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Following Jesus, that's the idea, that's what we talked about last week and that's what we are going to talk about again today. But in a way, that is really going to search our hearts I believe, and be constructive in your spiritual life.

We have been looking this month at the life of Peter and particularly as we see it reflected in the 21st chapter of the gospel of John--talking about God's grace, talking about following Christ and what that means for us.

Last week, we looked at the Lord's prophesy of Peter's martyrdom, that Peter would die for the faith. I invite you to turn to John 21. I just want to reset the context very briefly. Very briefly, there was an inordinate amount of response to last week's message which was encouraging to me. When we talk about death and the people you love, it becomes pretty quick to connect to real life and the things that we are most concerned about. John 21:18, Jesus said to Peter:

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk where ever you wished. But when you grow older, 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 Peter would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, follow me.

Now what we said last time, we talked about the idea of facing death and how do you glorify God as you contemplate death, either as an immediate threat to your health and well-being or how do you face it contemplating the longer term picture of life because the Bible says it is appointed for all of us to die and then to face judgment. And so we said that we have to calculate that in to the way that we approach life. We look at what the ultimate destination is and then we come back and reason forth from there as to how we should approach life. You need to make sure that your sins are forgiven, that when you die, you are prepared to meet God because you put your faith in Christ. If you are Christian, you need to live in light of eternal realities because of the reality of impending death.

We said, how do you glorify God in death? When you are facing it more eminently, when it is more closely there, it is not complicated. Ultimately nothing in the Christian life is beyond the realm of what we would say here. How do you glorify God in death? You trust the grace of God in Christ for the deliverance of your soul from sin and death and therefore, you can step from this life in to the next with trusting confidence that Jesus will fulfill His promise to bring you in to His presence—you trust Him with your very soul.

And then we said that you trust Him entirely for those that you leave behind and all that you leave behind. If you can trust Him with the greater thing, the eternal welfare of your soul, then it is obvious that you can and you should trust Him for those loved ones and those things that you leave behind. We said that those principles, those attitudes are simply the outworking of the supremacy of God and His pre-eminent place in our affections—that's what we looked at last time.

Now when Jesus told Peter that he would be crucified, meaning that Peter himself would be crucified one day and that he would glorify God in that, He turned to Peter and gave him the simple command. I have told you what is going to happen, and look at the end of verse 19:

When He had spoken this, He said to him, follow me.

In light of what I have said, now Peter, now that you know the end, now today and continuing on, you follow me. Before martyrdom would come later in Peter's life, Peter's duty was to follow Christ faithfully until the time came for that event—to love Christ, to obey Christ, to submit to Christ, to serve Christ, to sacrifice all in submission to His will.

And what we said was this: Today, for you, you follow Christ not in the sense of impending martyrdom, of approaching impending martyrdom, but you follow Christ not by trying to do some supernatural stuff or something that would be talked about years after you are gone. No, you follow Christ by loving Him and following Him in His word in the simple details of life that He has actually given to you. You live the life that Christ has given to you today; you don't think about how you live life if you had some greater platform or greater opportunity or anything like that. If God has given you humble circumstances, you follow Christ and you glorify God in those humble circumstances. You don't say, "When it changes, then I'll be a great Christian."—it doesn't work that way. You must be faithful with the little things that God has given you before you worry about whether greater things were entrusted to you—that's just simple basic biblical teaching. And so you follow Him in the life He has actually given to you not the life that you might wish that you had. You follow Him right here, right now without postponing obedience or saying it is not important. The Bible says that every detail is important because all can be lived to the glory of God—that's the idea.

Now as we turn to our passage today, to finish the gospel of John, Peter's life for this last time in this series is again going to be instructive for us and for you. It is going to expose a serious temptation that each one of us to one degree or another faces that could draw you away from following Christ. This is a temptation common to man, common to even to Christians to fall in to the trap that Peter started to stumble in to in the passage that we are going to see. This temptation is a threat to your sanctification, it is a threat to you following Christ faithfully, it is a threat to your contentment. And so we want to expose this temptation and see how to respond to it again as we look at the life of Peter and see a mirror reflecting our own hearts back to us.

So John 21:20-23 is where we are going to spend most of our time this morning. Look at verse 20 as I read the text today. Jesus had just said to Peter, follow me, verse 20:

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 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, the 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 passage is going to clarify your thinking about the Christian life. If you respond to this passage, it is going to purify your motives in living the Christian life. If you respond to this passage, you are going to find your heart greater satisfied in Christ with what Jesus teaches Peter in such simple language.

I am going to structure the message around two primary points:

1. Maintain the Right Focus

You have to maintain the right focus. What we are going to see is we look at this passage as if Peter's focus quickly got off of following Christ into things that were none of his business. And so Jesus brings his focus back to the primary concern, the only concern for a Christian and in that Jesus set him straight and will set us straight by His grace and His loving care as the great shepherd of our souls. So you have to maintain the right focus and we will unpack what that means as we look at the passage.

After verse 19, after Jesus had said you are going to die, now follow me, after that discussion, and after that event, it appears that Jesus and Peter started to walk away together along the beach, walking away from the other disciples who had gathered together at that morning breakfast. Peter, based on the passage in verse 20: "Peter, turning around saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them." As Jesus and Peter were walking away, it seems that he sensed that someone was behind them. And so he turned and looked back and saw the apostle John, identified here as the disciple whom Jesus loved—that's the way that John refers to himself in this gospel which he wrote. He calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. And he was walking after Jesus and Peter a

short way behind them as Peter and Jesus started to walk away. You would expect John to not want Jesus to leave without him, not only that Jesus loved him, he loved Jesus and so he does not want Jesus to say anything or do anything that he is not a part of. And so drawn by his own love for Christ, he follows after them as Jesus and Peter start to walk away.

Now I want you to turn to John 13 in just a moment. But notice that in verse 20 it says: “Peter saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them...” And then John gives a more specific description of who is being addressed here so that no one could miss it. He says: “This is the one who also had leaned back on Christ’s bosom at the supper and said, Lord, who is the one who betrays you?”

Now I want to take you to that passage where that occurred just briefly in John 13. I want you to see the context that is being alluded to here in John 21, what happened earlier. In John 13:21, Jesus is with the disciples in the upper room. He had just said: “He who receives me receives Him who sent me.” Now look at verse 21:

When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in Spirit and testified and said: “Truly, truly I say to you that one of you will betray me.” The disciples began looking at one another at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. There was reclining on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples whom Jesus loved. (That’s a reference to the apostle John who wrote this gospel.) Simon Peter gestured to John and said to him: “Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking?” He, leaning back thus on Jesus’ bosom said to Him: “Lord, who is it?”

And then Jesus went on and made it plain that it would be Judas Iscariot who would be the one who would betray Him. Couple of things about that. First of all, to appreciate the intimacy of the relationship that John had with Jesus, so much so that his head was on Jesus’ chest around this supper. In addition to that, something that is a little easier to overlook is to pay attention to the fact that Peter was close enough to John that he said, John, find out who He is talking about. Peter and John had a connection that is reflected in what happened there at the Last Supper.

Beyond that, Peter and John had a relationship as we look at the gospels that in multiple times we see them together at crucial points. Not only that Peter spoke to John on the night of the Last Supper, you recall from earlier in the gospel, they ran to the empty tomb together. They were fishing together earlier in John 21. Here they are again, together with Jesus. John and Peter, their lives had been intertwined around following Christ during His earthly ministry and then after the resurrection, their lives were totally intertwined around following Christ in their mutual love for Him.

I say all of that to help you see this. When Peter says: “Lord, and what about this man?” I want you to see that it was entirely natural for Peter to ask that question. Peter had just heard that he was going to be martyred. Jesus had given him a direct and specific prophesy about what was going to happen to him and whatever happened to Peter would

have an overflow effect of some kind on John. And so when Peter sees John close by, it is natural, it is an expression of natural affection for Peter to turn to Jesus and say, what about him? The question in the original language is very abrupt, it says, “but this one, what?” What’s going to happen to John? Since you are in the mood to make the future known like you have just done with me, let’s find out what’s going to happen to John.

Now at one level, it seems like that question is innocent enough. There is natural affection there. Jesus had just made a prophesy. It is a natural kind of question and seems innocent enough, but Jesus’ response to Peter tells us that something important was at stake here. Look at verse 22 again:

Jesus said to him: “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.”

The sense is, Peter, what I do with John is none of your business. You have no reason, you have no right, you have no prerogative to be prying in to these issues with me.

Now personally, I don’t think that we should be, that you and I, should be too hard on Peter here and impute wrong motives to him like jealousy or things like that that some commentators do. Peter in this context had just been greatly humbled by the Lord. He had been restored by the Lord. The Lord had just commissioned him in a three-fold way to take care of His sheep. And so I believe that the guilt of Peter’s question is more along the lines of misguided curiosity rather than something like boastful arrogance or petty jealousy. But regardless of whatever it was that motivated Peter’s question, Jesus’ response indicates that Peter’s heart was going in the wrong direction. He had obviously taken a step away from following Christ when Christ had just commanded him to follow Him—to follow Christ that is.

Now why is that such a major concern? Beloved, I want you to understand that the risk and the mistake and even the sin that Peter committed in asking that question is a temptation for every one of you, and you need to understand why this issue was so important. Why it was that Jesus responded so firmly in response to what looks like an innocent reasonable question, why such a firm response against that—why the rebuke?

Well, wrapped up in seed form in Peter’s question was a failure to recognize something very fundamental, it goes to the very heart of following Christ. Whatever this rebuke was about, it was preceded by Peter, follow me in verse 19. Peter asks this question and Jesus in verse 22 says that’s none of your business, you follow me. What is the principle at stake here is somehow something that is very fundamental to truly following Christ—we need to understand this.

To start to unpack it, here is the way I believe we need to think about it. What Jesus is expressing here, what Jesus is manifesting here is that Jesus alone is absolutely sovereign over His disciples. He is master over them as a master is over a slave, so Jesus is over His slaves—so Jesus is over His disciples. Think with me a little bit. Jesus is the one

who created them, Jesus is the one who called them, Jesus is the one who laid down His life and shed His own blood to save their souls, He purchased them with His own blood. Jesus is the one who will ultimately judge them, Jesus is the one who has reserved a place in heaven for them. It is all about Christ and what He has done for His disciples, He is absolutely sovereign over His own. And during this earthly life, Jesus Christ is guiding their lives, His disciples lives according to His own purposes, for His own reasons to achieve what He Himself desires.

So, what you and I have to get straight in our minds (this is so very important) is that what Jesus Christ does with His disciples, how He orchestrates their lives, how He blesses them, how He chastises them, when He calls them home to heaven, everything that Jesus does with His disciples is His sovereign prerogative not to be questioned by any one on earth. Even though Christ loves us, He has chosen us, He has brought us in to His family, we love Him, there are limits beyond which we should not go. We should not question the way Jesus deals with His own—that belongs to Him, that is a prerogative of His secret will that we are not allowed to pry in to.

So flowing from that, what Jesus is saying here is Peter, you must be content with my calling on your life and you leave to me what I do with other disciples, for example John—that is not your business to pry in to. Jesus had revealed His will for Peter, to Peter, that did not obligate Jesus to reveal His will for John. He can reveal what He wishes, He can withhold what He wishes—that’s the idea. What is at stake here is Christ’s sovereign prerogative and what we do in response to it.

Now to work out some application for you and I here today. You as a Christian must obey Christ in your own life without being preoccupied with what He is doing in the lives of others. Christ has the absolute prerogative, the sovereign right to work in the lives of other disciples differently than the way He works in your life. Here is what that means. This is very practical and important. The Lord might give you prosperity, He might give you poverty. He might give you joy; He might give you sorrow. He might give you a wonderfully blessed family, you may experience the sorrows of brokenness. Jesus may give you sickness or health. He might grant you long life, He may grant what from our perspective is a short life and choose an early death. He may grant many external blessings to you, He may withhold those things in sovereign denial for somebody else.

Or you can flip it all around. You might be the recipient of the difficulties and the trials that seem unending while others around you go about in prosperity and in seeming ease. What you have to have straight in your mind is that your responsibility, your focus absolutely must be on what Jesus Christ actually gives to you in your life’s circumstances and follow Him in the reality of your actual circumstances rather than looking around to what He does in the lives of others and say, “Why doesn’t He deal with me like He did with Jim? Why does Sally get this and I’m sitting here suffering?” Those are simple questions, but it is wrong to reason and act that way and to think that way because what Jesus has given to you is more than enough to occupy your full attention and affection of your heart to follow Him in the midst of those circumstances rather than speculating on what His purposes might be or why He did this thing and not the other thing—you do not

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have the right to ask those questions. Peter started to ask those questions and Jesus firmly rebuked him.

What happens with other Christians does not in any way affect your duty to follow Christ. If He has given great ministry to someone else and given you what seems to be an obscure place, that's all right, you just follow Christ where He has placed you because it is the Lord's prerogative, His sovereign prerogative to give blessings and to bring trials and to bring chastisement as He sees fit. And because He is sovereign, because He has His own purposes for everything that He does (get this) He may do things that are diametrically opposed with one disciple as opposed to another.

Turn to the book of Hebrews, I want you to see this briefly. Diametrically different things in the lives of disciples who are equally faithful. Hebrews chapter 11, we won't park here for very long. Hebrews chapter 11, the chapter of faith, the hall of faith as it were, the writer of Hebrews has talked about many Old testament heroes in faith, we will pick it up in verse 33, even in the middle of the sentence, he said:

What more shall I say about these men who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, (now watch this) escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong... (Verse 36, others in whom the Lord worked differently) Others experienced mocking and scourging, yes also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, (look at that phrase that comes next) they were put to death with the sword...

Faithful disciples in verse 34 escaped the edge of the sword. In verse 37, faithful disciples yielded their neck to the edge of the sword. One is faithful and escapes, one is faithful and dies—different results, equally faithful disciples. And it is not for the one who escaped to pass judgment or ask questions about the one who died. You simply follow Christ in the midst of the circumstances that He has actually given to you and you let Him determine the results of your faithfulness—this is fundamental.

Kent Hughes who is one of my favorite writers, flowing from his past ministry of college church in Wheaton, said this, listen to this carefully, he says: "Each of our lives is a sovereign creation of God. We are not to be involved in unprofitable musings speculations about the relative providence of our lives, how one brother has it easier than another or how one ministry has hardship and another has not or why one believer becomes famous and another remains obscure. We are each simply to follow Christ."

Beloved, when you accept that, when you embrace that deep in your heart, you recognize the lordship of Christ, you recognize your responsibility to follow Him as though the horse with blinders on so that the horse is not distracted by the things that are going around on him, but he simply sees the road ahead, we are as it were, to have those blinders on that restrict our peripheral vision so that we are looking straight ahead and following Christ with what He has laid before us—that's the idea. If and when you

accept that, it will go a very long way toward eliminating jealousy when others have prominence and prosperity that was not given to you, it will eliminate jealousy when you see others having opportunity that goes beyond yours, when people get promoted ahead of you and get opportunities with less experience and all of that stuff that tends to preoccupy our earthly minds during the week. If God chooses in His sovereign prerogative to give that to them, beloved, that has nothing to do with you in following Christ, it has nothing to do with you at all. You are still in the midst of your actual circumstances and your day by day life where you have more than enough responsibilities before Christ to love Him and to be loyal to Him and to obey Him to keep your mind fully occupied without getting in to this other distraction. If God gives that to them, in the words of Jesus, “What is that to you?” You follow Christ.

Conversely, embracing this principle I believe ultimately eliminates that sense of condescension and pride that can sometimes creep up in to our hearts when we see other people struggling in trials or in their sorrows, long-term sorrows. If God has spared you from that kind of sorrow, how does that make you better than them to look down on the situation that they are in? That has nothing to do with you beyond motivating you to pray for them and saying, “God, you have been so good to me, won’t you please have mercy on them as well.” No, don’t get wrapped up in all of that, you follow Christ. And that’s why I say that you have to maintain the right focus. Assess your circumstances and ask yourself how can I follow Christ in these life circumstances that He has actually given to me—deal with reality not with what you would like it to be.

If you are in the midst of great blessing in your life, a time and season of ease, then you follow Christ with gratitude, with the grateful heart. If you are in the midst of sorrow, patience. If you are in the midst of deep trials, not knowing the outcome, trust. If you find yourself here this morning in sin, follow Christ by manifesting the fruit of repentance, turn away from that sin now and follow Him. If you are in your youth and life is all in front of you, take advantage of your youth to seek Christ and to seek His wisdom. Follow Christ where He has placed you. I don’t know how many times I can say this simple point without making it sound very repetitive. But here it is in the scriptures, Peter starting to look off, asking about others, asking about this or that that has nothing to do with him in the final analysis, Jesus says, none of your business, you follow me.

Let’s come back to our text in verse 22. John 21:22:

Jesus said to him: “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you, you follow me.”

Now John goes on in verse 23 to explain how the people that were there at the time received that saying from Christ. Verse 23:

Therefore, the same 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...”

And so John here is explaining exactly what Jesus meant in this rebuke to Peter in terms of how it applied to the apostle John. Jesus was not predicting as some thought at that time that John would actually, physically live until the second coming of Christ—that wasn't the point of this at all. Jesus was simply speaking hypothetically to Peter to illustrate that Jesus' dealings with John were of no concern to Peter. Peter, let's say hypothetically that I want John to live for 2000 years, what does that have to do with you following me? It has nothing to do with Peter's own responsibility and therefore, in that hypothetical situation, it is clear that what happens to John does not affect Peter's duty to follow Christ all the way to martyrdom.

Now the apostle John here is clarifying this point because it was important in the context, because he did not want believers who had this mistaken understanding that he would live until Christ returned, he did not want them to be shocked when the time came for him to actually die. He did not want them to be shattered in their faith or shaken in their faith based on a misunderstanding of what Jesus truly said.

As it turns out, John did live to an old age and in a way that was withheld from Peter, lived for decades beyond Peter—probably some 30 years or so, in that general ballpark. And here is what I want you to see. Peter goes to martyrdom, John lives 30 years beyond that, writes the gospel of John, writes three letters of John and writes the Revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of your English Bibles. Step back from those facts, those details and see the unfathomable, unsearchable wisdom of God in the way that He dispenses His providence to His disciples. John's long life enabled him to write things that are still recorded for us today in a way that would not have happened if he had met an untimely death like Peter. Peter's life was sacrificed to the wickedness of Nero as it were and accomplished certain things in his life. God accomplished completely different things in John's life, both of them fulfilling the purpose of God in totally different ways.

We look at that today, we look at John, we look at Peter and we say, "Wow, in retrospect, I can see that God had purposes in Peter's life and in John's life that we never could have guessed at that time. Isn't God wise and wonderful and this is such a testimony to His great omniscient and His sovereignty over all things and His intentions to bless His people throughout all the ages?" We look at that and say, "Man, this is great."

What I want you to do beloved is to understand that God is equally sovereign in every detail of every life in this room and He has orchestrated each of your lives according to His own purposes and His own designs to fulfill His own purposes. You would not want to short circuit God's purposes by trading your circumstances for someone else's. God did not create you to live their life, He created you to live your life, to follow Christ in the life that He has given to you. And so God has His reasons for what He does even when we don't understand, even when it seems like more grace is over here than it is in my little corner of the world—we don't think that way beloved. When we don't understand, we maintain our focus, we follow Christ and we trust God—this simplifies a whole lot of stuff.

Now with that said, I realize that what Jesus calls us to do here is very searching and there is a lot at stake; maybe what I want to say is everything is at stake here. With what happens in your life, this is the only life you have got to live and everything is at stake in terms of what happens in trusting God and following Christ in this. And we trust Him and say, “I’m not going to try to rearrange things because I think I can do it better than God. I’m not going to stray and I’m not going to do it my own way in disobedience to Christ. I’m going to stay right where I’m at even though it’s really hard.”

And when we understand those implications, it is a fair observation to say, everything is at stake here. What is my assurance if this comes out okay? Why can I trust Christ enough to follow Him as it were?

Well, we are able to do that because of the spiritual riches He has given to us. He has given us more than we need to trust Him. He has given us more than we need to follow Him and obey Him. It is not just the fear of incurring His displeasure, but it is also the positive dimension that He has given us so much and so many reasons to trust Him that we would be foolish to approach life in any other way.

And so for the final few moments that we have here today, let’s consider the second point. First point was, we maintain the right focus, secondly:

2. We Build on the Right Foundation

We keep the right focus, we remember the foundation that Christ has laid for us to be able to live this way, to live with the singular focus on following Him and trusting Him and obeying Him. Why can we do that? Why can we entrust our eternal souls to Him? Why would we sacrifice our earthly lives to obedience to Him instead of pursuing the passing pleasures of sin? The final two verses of the gospel of John really wrap all of this up. It takes the whole gospel and ties a bow around all of this and makes it the most obvious, the most reasonable thing that you could do in light of what it said in these two final verses.

What is the right foundation? It is the authority of scripture. Look at verse 24 with me. There are two aspects to this right foundation, first one is the authority of the Word or the authority of scripture. John has written this magnificent gospel, chapter 11 in our current Bibles through chapter 21:23, and now in verse 24, we see him setting the final seal of approval on everything that is contained in those pages. He says:

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things (get this) and we know that his testimony is true.

The emphasis in the original language is on that word “true”—it’s true, we do this because it’s true, that’s why we follow Christ, that’s why we trust Him when things go wrong, that’s why we’re willing to sacrifice everything for His glory—it’s because it’s true. Why would you follow falsehood in light of having the truth? John says “This is

the disciple” referring to himself it is as though he says, I am the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things.

Now I agree with those commentators, where you see when it says “we know that his testimony is true” who is the “we” there. I agree with the many commentators who say that this is simply a rhetorical device, using the first person plural “we”. It is a rhetorical device that John uses to refer to himself with some measure of modesty. He has been modest throughout this gospel by not using his own name, calling himself the disciple whom Jesus loved, deflecting attention from himself as it were.

Many other commentators call this the editorial “we” we believe this, even though John is saying it in the first person singular. So instead of saying I know this is true, he deflects attention from himself by using the plural form.

The greater point is this, and we take this for granted here, but it is good to come back to it time and again. John’s gospel. The gospel of John is true. It conforms with the actual nature of reality--this is what truly is, this is the fact that actually exist in what has been expressed in this gospel.

Now remember beloved, and we talked about this some time ago in our series on 1 John. John was an apostle; he was personally commissioned by Christ with unique derivative authority that came directly from Christ Himself. When he spoke, he spoke on commission from Christ and that is the guarantee of the accuracy of what he said, that in the fact that the Spirit of God inspired him and moved him in such a way that he was brought to remember what Jesus said and reflect the meaning of it accurately. In John 14:26, it says:

The helper, the Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

In John 16:13, Jesus, speaking to His disciples said:

The Spirit of truth, when he comes, will guide you in to all the truth, for he will not speak of his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak and he will disclose to you what is to come.

Jesus had uniquely authorized John to speak on His behalf and He had sent the Holy Spirit who in a unique way to the apostles, guided them and preserved them in the truth of everything that they wrote so that there is full accuracy and a full inspiration of God that undergirds and permeates everything that is said in the gospel of John. And so John’s gospel is true, it is self-attesting. And “these things” he is testifying to “these things” he is simply referring to the whole of the gospel. The point is that this gospel is true. Christ is God incarnate. Christ alone can give eternal life. Christ died, Christ is resurrected, Christ is alive after being dead.

And so when this concluding command comes not only to Peter, but by extension to every one who believes in Christ to “follow me.” We do so knowing that we are standing on the foundation of the authority of the true word of God and we are lining our lives with the actual truth as God has defined it and as God has determined it to be. And so, whatever those changing nature of circumstances might be as we follow Christ, trials come and go, joys come and go, children born and raised and die, we still follow Christ because our confidence in Christ and our following in Christ is not anchored in what we get out of it circumstantially, but it is anchored in the fact that this word is true. And come what may, we trust this word because it comes directly from Christ and we love and trust the one who shed His blood on the cross to save our souls and nothing will deter us in to disloyalty to Him because His testimony is true, it is right, it is trustworthy and we build our lives on it no matter how the disappointments may come.

And so John intends for his readers, including you, to take what he said, believe in Christ and entrust your souls entirely to Him because you can build on this foundation, expressed in the holy word of God.

Now secondly and quickly, as you build on the right foundation, the authority of the Word, also, we have been all around this, but it needs to be stated explicitly because John himself states it explicitly. We are building on the authority of the Word, but we are also building on the greatness of Jesus Christ. We are building on the greatness of Jesus Christ. We are building on the unsearchable greatness of the incarnate eternal Son of God. Look at verse 25 with me, he concludes his gospel by saying this:

There were 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.

When John opened this gospel in John 1:1, he said:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The foundation of the gospel of John is the deity of Christ. Flowing from that as if to prove his point, he records various miracles and profound teaching that came from the lips of Christ. And at the conclusion of chapter 20, Thomas, the one who had doubted, sees the resurrected Christ, sees the wound in His hands and in His side and he says “My Lord and my God.” That is the confession that John intends all readers of his gospel to come to— “My Lord and my God.” And in what John had written just in the gospel of John, we find enough to consume a lifetime of our study and attention. If it were the only book in the Bible, we have more than enough to consume our thinking and attention for all of our lives as our finite minds pursue the depths of the infinite God. And yet with that said beloved, even what is written in the gospel of John, he says very specifically, it is only a sample. You have only seen a fraction of the story of the gospel of John. If the truth were told, if all of the works of Christ and His purposes were unfolded, it would be

an infinite library of material because you would be expanding the mind and the person of an infinite God—that's the idea.

There is no way (get this, get this beloved) plunge your mind in to the ocean depth of the greatness of Christ here, there is no way that we would ever fully tell the story of Jesus Christ in this world. He is too great, He has done too much, His character is too perfect for us to ever exhaust the subject. And what we see here is that the gospel writers chose just somethings among many to say. They were not trying to write an exhaustive biography of Christ, they were directed by the Holy Spirit to write that which was sufficient for you to believe and have eternal life, having eternal life to follow Christ until He brings you home to glory.

This great Christ who is revealed in this great word is the foundation upon which you build to live a life of following Him—that's the idea. There is authority that undergirds, authority from God Himself that undergirds the call to follow Christ. And when we follow Him, we can trust Him because of His intrinsic greatness and the greatness of His word.

If you know that you are a sinner, the salvation revealed in the scriptures is for you—it's for you today, it's for you. You can come to Christ and believe in Him and give yourself to Him for the forgiveness of your sins.

For those of you that are Christians, like me, like you, it comes down to this. Most of the apostles willingly accepted violent death as the outcome of following Christ. Throughout the centuries there has been a river of blood through which the gospel has been delivered to us. They prized Him above all else. God probably won't call you to martyrdom, but the question still remains. Will you follow Christ and accept what the Lord has assigned to your life without complaints and without comparing your lot to the lot of others? That is the heart of true discipleship to Christ that loves Him and follows Him in the life He has actually given to you and says, "Because I am following you, I am content, I need nothing else. If I have Christ, I have all. And if there are other things that are added along side that in this earthly life, then I am just a man doubly blessed." That's the heart of true discipleship, that's what it means to follow Christ.

Let us pray.

Lord, that heart discipleship and that trust is something of which you are pre-eminently worthy. And so Lord, whatever you give to us, we will follow you with trusting, acceptance and obedience. No matter what you might give to others, we are content in you, grateful to be on a path that leads us in to your presence in heaven. Hallelujah. We are a people most richly blessed, no matter what, Lord, for that we give you all of the glory and commend ourselves to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.