

“Follow Me” (John 21:15–25)

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Introduction

We conclude John’s Gospel with a simple truth—a real disciple *follows* Jesus. In this third appearance of the risen Christ, Jesus met the disciples in Galilee on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias with a message for Peter: “*Follow me*” (v. 19).

John used the fishing expedition initiated by Peter to focus on its *symbolism*. Jesus’ post-resurrection relationship with the disciples would change dramatically. No longer would He be *physically* present. Rather, He would continue to be their companion, but unseen. He would be present with those who loved Him and obeyed Him, showing Himself in His Word as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. He would also grant them peace (in the subjective sense) to live without fear or anxiety (John 14:21–27).

Jesus provided a breakfast for the disciples as they came to shore. This was eaten in silence as the disciples desired assurance that this man was really Jesus, though they *knew* that He was (v. 12) “*After breakfast,*” Jesus singled out Peter, focusing on him as the second appearance had focused on Thomas. Peter, obviously being the leader of group, was singled out by the merciful Savior to reaffirm his call and commitment to Christ and to impress upon him the qualification for obedience to the commitment.

I. The Condition to Follow Jesus

1. Peter had relied too much on himself in his relationship to Jesus. Although he resolutely affirmed loyalty to his Lord (Luke 22:33), his own sinful nature caused him to fail again and again. Jesus wanted him to understand that his standing needed to rest on the Lord’s gracious work in him, not on his fleshly resolve and determination. Peter must learn to *follow* Jesus with unquestioning obedience. Jesus previously established this standard for His sheep (John 10:27; Matthew 4:19).
2. Following Jesus requires that one love and obey Him implicitly. The threefold nature of the Lord’s questioning was for *emphasis*. Also, one must not make too much of Peter’s use of *phileo* love rather than *agape* love.
3. Jesus always used Peter’s given name, *Simon*, to address him in his failures. Jesus changed his name to *Peter* (John 1:42). Merely professing one’s love for Christ proves nothing. Fulfilling “*the royal law*”—“*loving your neighbor as yourself*” (James 2:8) must support the confession (v. 9).
4. What was behind Jesus’ pressing Peter with this question? Peter’s grief at the third questioning had nothing to do with the quality of his love but *why* Jesus persisted in asking him. Jesus gently reminded Peter that he was set apart to a holy purpose as it related to others—His sheep and the fold—the church He was building (Matthew 16:17, 19).

II. The Cost to Follow Jesus

1. Peter’s life was no longer his to live as he wished (v.18). Love for Jesus would be evidenced by Peter’s sacrificial service to others, Christ’s sheep. “Do you love me, Simon? Feed my sheep” (Hebrews 6:10). Jesus continued by showing Peter the cost of following Him (v. 18; John 12:25, 26). Where Peter failed in his own power, he would succeed in the power of God, but he would also die a martyr’s death in that service (v. 19). Peter’s death, both spiritually and physically, would glorify God.
2. Peter was nosy. He also tended to be involved in incidents where he said and did the wrong thing. Peter directed his curiosity toward John (v. 20)? The Lord responded with a sharp rebuke, “*You follow me!*” (v. 22).

3. Verse 22 has been used to teach that Jesus returned in John's lifetime. However, John, by the Spirit, was careful to set the record straight should any wish to twist Jesus' words against the truth (v. 23).
4. Jesus is to be the sole focal point of life (vv. 24, 25). The subject of Jesus is so infinitely vast that John's Gospel was insufficient to explain fully. However, it was sufficient for anyone placing his trust in Jesus for eternal life.

The Lessons

1. Do you love Jesus? If so, how are you serving His sheep? Peter's usefulness to Christ and His kingdom was perfectly planned in exquisite detail from beginning to end. We must understand this truth for our own lives as well.
2. A warning must also be noted. The church of Ephesus that John served in his later years was judged unworthy because the love they manifested at the beginning had waned. Her restoration to God's favor required that she return to the first works (Revelation 2:4, 5). Is such a return required of us?
3. Jesus does not need to explain all He is doing to us. The Lord will use each of us, His disciples, as best suits the purpose of God for the glory of God. We ought to expect that our lives, as with Peter and John, could very well end in a martyr's sacrifice.
4. The sin of curiosity and the virtue of concern are addressed in Luke 13:23, 24. Does the Lord want us to *do* something, or are we just wanting to *know* something (Galatians 6:1-5; 2 Corinthians 10:12; 1 Timothy 4:16)? We must mind our own business, or we may discover that we have failed to keep our own life while engaging in others' business.