

# TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

## **Following Christ in Death**

John 21:18-19

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Today's message as I look out on you, between some who are in your teens and others in your—well, let's not go there. Today's message is not one that I expect to necessarily be immediately practical and applicable to your life later this afternoon. But what this message is more like, it is more like making an investment in something that you expect to pay rewards later on. It is like a farmer planting seed, knowing that he is going to reap the harvest, and that more importantly that you are going to reap the harvest later on. This is an investment in the future, this is an investment in one of the most important times of your life—today's message is like that. We are investing in the future so that at the most critical time in life, your faith in Christ could rise to the occasion and triumph in the crowning glory of your Christian life—that's what we are looking to accomplish today. We are making preparations for the end of life as we come to our message this morning.

What we have done this month in September is we have been spending the better part of this month looking at some selected times from the life of the apostle Peter to illustrate the nature of God's grace in general and to draw some personal application from it to our lives—how we should respond to the grace of God. And I am not going to spend time reviewing all of that—I've got too much to say today. But simply to say that last week, we looked at a very familiar passage where Jesus restored Peter after his denials and re-commissioned him to apostolic ministry. We are in John chapter 21 if you haven't turned there already, I invite you to turn there.

Last week, we looked at these three verses, beginning in verse 15 and Jesus is talking with Peter in front of other disciples. In verse 15, the apostle John writes this:

*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." He said to him: "Tend my lambs." Jesus 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." And Jesus said to him the third time: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because He said to 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 my sheep.”*

What we said last time was that Jesus in those three verses was restoring Peter to his apostolic ministry. Peter had denied Him three times prior to the crucifixion and so Jesus questions him three times in order to overturn the effect of those denials, to re-establish in a public way Peter’s love for Christ and as He does that, He sends him off to ministry which we read about in the first 12 chapters of the Book of Acts. Christ restores him, Christ commissions him to ministry. We saw that God will forgive the grossest sin against His Son, God will restore us after we have sinned like that, God will still use us even after we have sinned greatly when we come to Him with a broken and contrite heart. Confessing is the central motivation of our lives— “Lord, I love you, I want to follow you and I will do what you say.”

And we said last time that that restoration is an illustration, it shows us, it is a true story, we are using that true story to illustrate that Christianity is about grace, it could not be any other way, it is not about us doing good and earning God’s favor. We have all blown that a long, long time ago, we were born into sin, there was no way that you could live a life righteous enough to please God and to earn His favor. If we are going to have God’s favor on our lives, it is going to be Him, blessing us despite our sin and He does that through the Lord Jesus Christ when we trust Christ, when we honor Christ, God pours out grace on our lives. That’s what we see happening in the life of the apostle Peter in those three verses.

Now kind of shifting gears and moving in to what we are going to talk about this morning. Now that Jesus has restored Peter and commissioned him to ministry, in these next two verses, the Lord is going to give Peter a prophetic preview of what lies ahead for him in the rest of his life. The rest of Peter’s earthly life and more particularly the culmination of Peter’s life, Jesus lays out before him as He sends him off to ministry. Look at verses 18-19, which will be our text this morning. Jesus, continuing to speak to Peter, says:

*“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 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 said this, Jesus said to Peter: “Follow me.”*

What I want to do this morning is explain what these verses meant for Peter at the time and then draw out some most important applications for us today. I am going to structure this message around three main points to help your note taking as we go today. Jesus had said these words to Peter, and the first thing that I want you to see, the first point for today is to see that Jesus had laid forth before Peter:

## 1. The Determination of Death

Stated differently, Jesus is telling Peter in these verses that God had appointed the time and the manner of his ultimate death which would come after Peter had fulfilled the commission that Jesus had given to him. Look at verse 18 with me again, He says:

*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 old, you will stretch out your hand and someone else will gird you and take you where you do not wish to go.*

Peter is in the middle point of his life. Jesus speaks back to that time when Peter was younger and as we know from the nature of youth, you have a lot of freedom in your younger days. You are not restrained by different kinds of obligations. You are free to get up and go where you want. Jesus is looking back and reminding Peter of that time, saying Peter, when you were younger, you could do what you wished.

Now He is talking to him at a mid point. Peter, many commentators believe is in something of middle age here and He is talking to him at that point, but He is looking forward to the end of Peter's life when He says, when you grow old, you will be taken to death against your wishes is what He is saying here. Peter's past freedom in life was going to give way at the end of his life with someone imposing death upon him. So his past uninhibited conduct is in short contrast with the prediction that immediately follows from Jesus' lips.

The moment would arrive when Peter would raise his arms up for martyrdom. He would give his life as a sacrifice for the testimony that he bore for Christ. Notice that Jesus says in verse 18: "You will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you." In ancient literature and in the ancient language, stretching out your hands was a reference to crucifixion. This stretching took place when a condemned prisoner would be tied to the cross beam, not the entire cross, but tied simply to the horizontal cross beam would be placed on his neck and his back and his arms would be tied to that cross beam and then he would be led away to the place where he would be executed. They would hoist them up on the cross and they would be crucified with their arms attached to that horizontal cross beam—that's at the point that he would be led away to death.

You look at that and just stepping back from what Jesus is saying, Jesus is telling Peter, I know exactly what is going to happen to you, I am going to tell you what is going to happen to you. Peter, now that I have commissioned you to shepherd my sheep, to tend my flock, I want you to know the outcome of this—the outcome is going to be in death for you by crucifixion.

That you would think might not be a very motivating statement to make as you go off, instead of saying like a football coach, "Go get them now." Jesus is telling Peter, "I want

you to know what the outcome is before it happens.” And you look at that and you see God’s sovereign hand, His sovereign determination, His perfect control over everything that flow out of Peter’s life so that at the appointed time, Peter would die in the manner that God had ordained for him—that’s what these words meant for Peter. The outcome of his apostolic service would be martyrdom at the hands of Nero in the middle sixties as history bears it out.

Now here is what I want to call to your attention—what does that mean for us today? This was obviously a prediction about Peter, but I want you to think at a significant level about what is going on here, my friends. We are in a more similar position to Peter than you might think at first glance. It is not that the Lord has appointed martyrdom for us—certainly not by the method of crucifixion. But beloved, you do not have to have a prophesy that personally applies to you to understand that that waits for you as well. Hebrews 9:27 says:

*It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.*

Unless the Lord returns sometime soon, you and I both are going to face that final moment of life where our soul is separated from our body and we enter in to eternity—that’s the outcome for all of us in this room. We are all marching on a path that ultimately and in earthly sense leads to death.

Now that may sound kind of morbid, but it is not, it is simply dealing with reality and the scriptures bid us to deal with this reality. We looked at Psalm 90 earlier this month and in Psalm 90:12 it says:

*So teach us to number our days so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.*

The Bible calls us to contemplate the final destination of life so that we would shape the life that leads up to that accordingly. If you think about it, when ever you travel, whether you are travelling on a local basis or whether you are making a long journey, before you step out to leave your home, most of you have in mind where you are going to go. Say, “I’m going to go to the grocery store or I’m going to go to New York,” and everything that you do is calculated to get you to that point. You determine those segments of your life by what the final destination is that you want to reach.

Well beloved, if you take the totality of what the Scripture teaches us, we cannot live life rightly until we have calculated in the final destination of what life is going to be. We are going to die, every one of us is going to die and the only way that we can live life rightly is to calculate that in to our thinking now.

I realize that a lot of people don’t like to talk about this. Even when I talk to Christians when the subject of death comes up, people get a little defensive and bristle against it. But beloved, we are here today to look at how we can prepare ourselves for that eventuality and live in triumph over that eventuality and to live gloriously and to hit the

tape running as it were when we come to the end of life. Unless the Lord returns first, you are going to face death. And beloved, as your pastor, I want you to be ready for that time—that's what this is about. And even though it may not come for many, many years, what I am trusting is that the Lord will take this seed that we are planting now and use it to help you when that time comes and for some of you it may come a whole lot sooner than that. Proverbs 27:1 says:

*Don't boast about tomorrow because you don't know what the day will bring forth.*

And so we take these things seriously, we look around us, we see yes, this is the nature of life, we see people dying all of the time, we look at the Scripture and we see that death is God's judgment on sin—death entered the world as a result of sin. And so we have to deal with this rather than run from it and pretend that it does not exist, we want to calculate it in to the way that we approach life.

Now here is the question--what is it then? How should we think about the eventual reality of death? We have looked at the determination of death--death is appointed for us as a consequence of sin. The next point I want to talk to you about is:

## **2. Your Duty in Death**

I just can't tell you enough, you have got to think about this as something glorious, not something to be afraid of, not something to turn away from. This is glory, because in the scriptures we see the one and only way to conquer death and when we know these and understand them, the fear of death is eliminated. We no longer to fear it because we understand what it takes to conquer it—that's the point. It is not discussing death for death sake, it is to win over death—that's what we are after.

So point #2 is your duty in death, let me state it plainly, your duty in death beloved when death comes your way, whether it is in the terminal illness, may be it is a sudden accident and you don't have too much time, some people die in their sleep and they don't even have to face this, but your duty in death is no different than your duty in any other aspect of life. Your duty in death is the same as any other aspect of life because, first sub point:

### **A. The duty explained**

Your duty in death is to glorify God, that is the one and only surpassing priority when death comes knocking at your door. Look at John 21:19. Jesus, having told Peter that crucifixion would come his way, in verse 19 the apostle John gives a commentary on the words of Jesus, he said:

*Now this He said signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God.*

Jesus was telling Peter in advance how he would glorify God at the end of his life. And what Peter's death would do, the way in which Peter's death would glorify God is that he

would show forth the surpassing pre-eminent worth of Jesus Christ by trusting Him and obeying Him all the way to death, that even martyrdom would no longer cause Peter to retract his confession of love for Christ.

You can threaten some one with death and you see what their priority is. When Peter faced martyrdom, he confessed Christ all the way to the end and showed by his death that Christ was more glorious than life on earth. Faithfulness to Christ was a greater priority than preserving earthly life—that’s the idea, that is the way in which Peter glorified God in his death. And so Jesus told him this in advance to prepare him for martyrdom.

If you think about it, Peter lived the next 30 years of his life with that prophesy echoing in the back of his mind—death is going to come, it is going to be violent, it is not going to be in the manner that your flesh would choose.

And yet beloved, when you look at those 12 chapters of Acts, you see him being faithful, you see him being bold, you see him being strong, you see him doing miraculous things on behalf of Christ. The threat of death, the reality of death, was not going to hinder him and did not hinder him from living a fully fruitful life to the glory of God. He was faithful in his service to Christ, knowing that death was coming. The reality of that death did not diminish his ability to serve Christ at all.

What I am saying to you here in the 21st century is that the reality of death does not hinder your ability to enjoy God and to glorify Him and to serve Him one bit and you have to get that in your mind and embrace that in your heart and say, “I am not going to fear the grave, instead, I am going to glorify God as that day comes closer one day at a time. I am committed in my heart and I am going to trust God and glorify Him even though I know that this earthly life ends in death—I am not afraid of that, I won’t shy away from that, I won’t ignore it, but I also won’t be enslaved by it.”—that’s the idea.

For Peter, church history, church tradition, not infallibly, but church tradition indicates in multiple places that Peter asked his executioners to crucify him upside down because he felt unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord. I love that. Even in the moment of his crucifixion, he was thinking about the glory and the worth of Christ, his comparative unworthiness and he would not put himself on the level of Christ even at the cross—it is remarkable.

What I want you to see beloved is this, Peter glorified God with trusting obedience in his death. Peter fulfilled his duty all the way to the end until the Lord brought about that time which He had predicted decades earlier. And when the time came, Peter rose to the occasion, he rose to the challenge, and he glorified God until he drew his last breath and then as it were, drew his next breath in heaven. That’s the way I want to go out—how about you? I want to honor God right up to my last breath—don’t you?

How do you do that? What does it mean to do that? What about us? How do we do that? What I am about to say is challenging. It is challenging because of the nature of who Jesus Christ is and what He said.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, calls all of us to follow Him and He says: “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” He said take up your cross and He says: “He who saves his life shall lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake shall find it.” This is so powerfully ennobling to what your life means and what the purpose of your life is that it totally transforms the way you view the end of life. That’s why I can say with confidence that it is not morbid, but with confidence that it is gracious and ennobling to say that you need to calculate the reality of death in to the way that you approach life.

Now first of all, if you are not a Christian, you are not ready for death at all. You are not ready for death if you are not a Christian because death will usher you in to an eternal punishment in hell as the just penalty for your sins. That’s what death holds in store for every one who does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you need to face that reality.

My non-Christian friend, you must face that reality as the dominant priority. The only thing that matters is for you to be reconciled with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, short of that, the prospect of death is unthinkable. And yet in the gospel we see that God will declare you righteous, not on the basis of your works, but He will declare you righteous and forgive all of your sins if you will repent and put your faith in Christ alone for salvation and deliver your life over to Him so that He can deliver you from sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says:

*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Your sin makes you unworthy of God’s presence, He says if you will trust my Son, I will give you His righteousness to your account and you will be fit for heaven, by trusting Christ, by turning from your sinful life and putting your faith in Him. If you are not a Christian, that is the only thing that matters for you right now and until you draw your dying breath, that is the only thing that matters.

But for those of you that are Christians, that share a like precious faith with your speaker this morning, I want to speak pastorally to you. As I said, the Bible teaches us to contemplate the brevity of life— “Teach us to number our days...” Lord, help us to count them so that we know how short they are and that we might present to you a heart of wisdom, that we might live wisely in light of what our meditation leads us to understand—that’s the idea.

Now over the years, it has been my privilege to be along side a number of Christians of various degrees of closeness to death. I have seen many Christians approach death with nobility, with this kind of trusting acceptance that I want to talk about more today. I have also seen others who found it more difficult, didn’t know what to say on their death bed, didn’t know what to ask for when I said how can I pray for you, it was as if they were stunned that this event had come and they didn’t know how to respond—there is a whole lot that goes in to that.

But the point for today for those of you that hear this message is that I don't want you to end up in that spot. I don't want you to be facing death and not knowing where to turn, not knowing how to respond, bewildered and baffled and scared—that should never be the lot of any Christian facing death, and that's why we are going to talk about this today. I would like to think that most of you would respond in a noble way and a trusting way, but I can't take that for granted and that's why we are going to talk about it.

Here is the thing for you, fellow Christian. The Bible is absolutely clear that you are called to give over your entire life to the glory of God. When you follow Christ, you have signed up to give every breath, every energy over to the glory of God and embraced in that all encompassing statement like 1 Corinthians 10:31 says: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." In that all encompassing, all embracing statement is included the entire matter of how you deal with the reality of death and the very process of dying itself. When the specter of death comes, either through a sudden event that only gives you moments to respond or through a long sickness, terminal illness that goes on for months, or the mere creeping advance of old age, you must glorify God—that is not just your duty, that is your privilege, that is what ennobles that entire time.

Speaking of a sudden event, I couldn't help but remember as I was thinking about this, a seminary class mate of mine who went out with his two-year-old son in the back seat with a ministry partner of his, when out to just go to the store to get some donuts—3, 4, 5 blocks away, and it was just an ordinary thing as they were just talking ministry. And as they pulled out to make a left hand turn, a drunk driver T-bones them like 70 or 80 miles an hour and in an instant, my friend had his dying pastoral companion in his arms and his son in the back seat. And he was ready, he glorified God in that moment, he survived for a few minutes and the paramedics came. And he did exactly what I am talking about today. He looked in the back seat and he said, "You go with the firemen; I'm going to go see Jesus." He was ready. In some manner or another, God had prepared him for that moment and his testimony was one of trusting Christ as his life ebbed out from him.

I believe that God gives us grace for that hour so we can in advance embrace the opportunity to trust Him even in death. The way that you approach death and the way that you approach the process of dying (think with me here, listen to me) becomes the climax and the crown of a lifetime of worship to the Lord Jesus Christ that you have given throughout your life. It is not the end in defeat, it can be the climax and the crown of the lifetime of worship to Him that says even all that I know passes away from me, I am going to trust and honor Christ even now.

What does that trust look like? I want to be very practical here. Let me suggest a phrase. You face death, you face the process of dying with faithful courage as long as the Lord gives you conscious thought.

I realize that comas come and all of that, we are talking about what you are conscious of at the time. Faithful courage, trusting acceptance, you commit yourself to the grace of God so fully and so unreservedly, you commit yourself to the love of Jesus Christ (hear

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me now) and you trust His faithfulness and His compassion to fulfill His promise to deliver you safely in to His presence—that’s what we are talking about, that’s how you glorify God.

But at the event that scares everyone else, you are looking at it and in your heart you are faithful and you are trusting Christ and you say, “Even in this extreme hour, I trust Him unconditionally. I know that He will be faithful to me. I know that I have not believed in vain, and therefore, this matter of death holds no fear for me and I will trust Him in this hour just as much as I trusted Him in the full health of youth.” That’s the idea.

The circumstances that have changed in your health and in your life have not changed Christ, have they? They have not changed His promise; they have not changed the purposes that God established for your life before the foundation of the world. And therefore beloved, your trust in Him does not change even though the outward circumstances do.

Now I am most eager for you to understand what I am talking about here. So I want to illustrate it for you at some length. I said, your duty in death. And what we were just talking about was the duty explained. We will have to go back up to after I read John 21:19. We were explaining the duty and the duty is to glorify God in death as you face death. That’s the first sub point.

Now the second sub point is:

### **B. The duty exemplified**

I am going to give you an example from real life to help you see what we mean and what we are talking about here. When the great pastor, Martyn Lloyd-Jones was facing death at the age of 81 after a long illness, there are some things about his biography that just expose exactly what I am talking about and I just want to make you familiar with a couple of these things from his biography by Ian Murray.

When he was facing death at the age of 81, he wrote the following words to a minister friend of his. He knew he was sick. He had not been able to preach for quite a while. Death was coming and he knew it and here is what he said. This is exemplifying, this is illustrating what I mean by to glorify God in your death. These are the words that were on his heart that he wrote to a friend and I quote: “In the end, nothing matters but the fact that we are in God’s hands. We and our works are nothing. It is His choosing us before the foundation of the world that matters and He will never leave us nor forsake us. More and more do I see that what we need is a simple child-like faith, just to believe His word and surrender ourselves to Him utterly.”

That’s a man, knowing that death was on his doorstep. That was a man, vindicating the 40 or 50, however many years it was of faithful preaching of the word of God that he

meant every word that he said. He rose to the occasion and showed that it was not academic knowledge to him. He glorified God in his heart and in what he expressed to those around him.

So how is the duty exemplified? First of all, it is trusting the Lord's faithfulness to be good to us in the end, to be good to us as we are dying, we are trusting Him and we are certain of His faithfulness even though we don't know what that step in to the river so to speak, is exactly going to be like. We are just so thoroughly confident that we know, even though I don't know, it is going to be more glorious than anything I could imagine. I will just trust Him; I will hold His hand as He leads me across the divide—that's the idea.

But that's not all that there is, that's not the only challenge that there is to death. We trust Him for even more than the way He deals with us. Listen to me. When it comes to approaching death, we also trust Christ for those whom we love that we are going to leave behind. We trust Him even when they depend on us for their earthly needs. They love us, we have our ties of affection, we don't know what is going to happen to them, but we trust Christ for what follows on earth after we go to heaven and we trust Him just as unreservedly and completely for what we leave behind as what we are about to step in to personally--we trust the Lord even for them.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones' biographer wrote this about Martyn Lloyd-Jones. And by the way, he knew this from personal experience, he was with the doctor on multiple occasions during this time. So he is writing from things that he knew by first-hand experience. He said this about the way that Martyn Lloyd-Jones approached death, and I quote: "As with every Christian husband, father and grandfather, he had not found it easy to contemplate leaving a much loved family. But he now had assurance that all would be well for them. He said: 'When this illness came, I tended to worry as to what would happen to them. I have been delivered from it completely. I know that God can care for them very much better than I can and that no longer troubles me at all.'"

How do you glorify God in death? What does that look like? You commit yourself to the grace of God in Christ for the final deliverance of your own soul. But beloved, you go beyond that, you glorify God in all of it, all of the relationships and responsibilities that He has given to you. And as you contemplate those things, you say, "I'm going to hand those over to God as well with equal trusting acceptance and assurance that God will deal with them well and according to His righteousness just like He has me after this very point."—that's the idea. That gives you a sense beloved of how deeply it goes, the responsibility goes to trust God and to glorify Him in everything and it also gives you an idea of how greatly worthy He is of our trust with those things.

You trust Him for your soul and you commit those you leave behind entirely to His care. Even if they don't know Christ at the time, you trust God for what He will do and you approach the end of life without the worry even about that, not because it is not important, but because God is worthy of your trust, Christ is worthy of your trust, the one

who shed His blood on the cross for your sins is worthy of your trust beloved—unqualified, unconditional surrender that says, “My heart is at peace because I know you and I trust you and you are in total control.” And that enables you to approach death and think about death with the sense of absolute serenity and when you come to that point, these are the things that you most have to trust God for as we think about them now, we think through these issues now, it strengthens our ability to trust the Good Shepherd when we go through that valley of the shadow of death. And as you trust Him that way, you will glorify Him.

Let me say one other thing about that. By saying God, I trust you for who I am leaving behind, understand this, you don’t love these people any less. You don’t love them less by entrusting them to the one who saved your soul, you love them just as much, this does not diminish the love that we have for our earthly relationships. And beloved, you don’t love them any less by preferring Christ in heaven to them on earth. If you do, your thinking is mixed up and you need to get that straightened out. It is going to be better for us to be in Christ no matter what happens in earth after we are gone. And the true Christian, the one who truly loves Christ and sees His pre-eminent worth, is ready, willing and able to let this life go for the sake of entering in to eternal glory with the one who was crucified for us. That is because Christ is so pre-eminently worthy, not to diminish the ones that we love. Jesus Himself said this in Matthew 10:37:

*He who loves father or son or daughter or mother more than me is not worthy of me.*

We are simply talking about an application of that principle beloved. And so, we enjoy each day here on earth as an expression of God’s will for us and a gift to us. But when the time comes and He calls us to leave it behind and He calls us to the eternal purpose that He has established for us before the foundation of the world, we trustingly lay these things down so that we are set to enter in to the eternal reward that He has prepared for us. These are all simply outworkings of the supremacy of God, the supremacy of Christ in all things and the priority that He rightly claims on our true affections. That’s why as Christians, we are not meant to fear death, we don’t have to fear death, you are meant to overcome it and you can.

### **C. The duty empowered**

How do we do that? Understand that everything that I am talking about and have been talking about this morning, it is not the force of your sheer will power, it is not grinding up the courage to do this and say, “Okay, I’m ready!” There is much more to it than that. Look back to verse 19, verse 18 in general. I ask you this question: Who is talking to Peter, who is talking to him, who is saying these things to him? Jesus Christ, right? Not just any Jesus Christ, the Resurrected Jesus Christ. Jesus told him these things and said these things after he had already been dead Himself, now He was resurrected and He is standing before Peter as the ultimate victor over the grave. The one who called Peter to glorify God in his death was the one who had Himself conquered death and as His child,

as His disciple, as the one that belongs to Him, understand that His resurrection guaranties your triumph over death as well—the Bible is filled with this.

I will just give you a couple of examples. 1 Thessalonians 4:14:

*If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.*

2 Corinthians 4:14:

*He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus.*

2 Corinthians 5:8:

*We are of good courage I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.*

1 Corinthians 15:53:

*For this perishable must put on the imperishable and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.*

Victory, victory, victory, victory. When you stand before the grave of a beloved one and you contemplate your own death, it does not look like victory. But because the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who is leading us through this, death is simply the passage way in to victory—total, absolute, unconditional victory, resurrection, eternal life. And there is nothing on this earth that is better than that, that even compares to that, that is even worthy to be compared to the weight of eternal glory that will be revealed to us on that day. Christ rose from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:57:

*Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

And so we trust Him completely to fulfill this promise that He says, “God, I trust you even though this is a step in to the unknown in some ways, I trust that you are going to give me the victory that your word talks about for those who love Christ. And therefore, not only am I not afraid, I am triumphant, I am strong, I am courageous because of my confidence in Christ.”

That is your birthright if you are a Christian, that is your birthright to approach death with that level of confidence and not be beaten down by it because Christ will not abandon you, He will fulfill the promise. And that reality, rooted and empowered in the resurrection of the faithful Lord Jesus Christ, that reality lets you focus on glorifying God when the hour of death comes to you rather than worrying about what is going to happen to me and what is going to happen to these and you can just focus on absolutely trusting

Following Christ in Death

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Christ, knowing that He will fulfill all that pertains to you in utter perfection, with no detail overlooked, with not a hint of unrighteousness. And when you take that step from this life in to eternal life, the Bible says: “He who believes in Him, will not be disappointed.” You are not going to be disappointed and so why not just enjoy the first fruits, the taste of it now and live in light of the reality that will certainly be yours.

What do we do in the meantime? How do we maintain focus? Third point and this is going to be a very short one. We talked about your duty for death:

### **3. Your Duty for Life**

We looked forward, we spent all of the time looking forward to that inevitable moment that will come for all of us. But here in John 21, Jesus lays forth in simple language what we do between now and then. Look at verse 19 with me again:

*It signified by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, Jesus said to him: “Follow me.”*

“Follow me,” follow Christ. What is your duty for this life? Follow Him. While martyrdom would be the end for Peter, his duty was to go on continually following Christ, to love Him, to obey Him, to submit to Him, to be loyal to Him, to sacrifice all even his life in submission to His sovereign will.

Get this, this is glorious. You say, “What does that mean for me today? I’m not an apostle, I’m not going to preach the gospel and have 3000 souls be saved in one day most likely.” Get this, you don’t have to do big things that men will remember after you are gone in order to be faithful to Christ as you lead up to the day of your death—it’s so much simpler than that.

You simply follow Christ where He has put you today. You don’t have to go out and change big things, you don’t have to go out and revolutionize life and all of that. It is about faithfulness on a day by day basis, it is where God’s providence has put you today, in the relationships you have today, the opportunities that are before you today—that is where you follow Him.

You follow Christ as He revealed Himself in His word in the ordinary details of life in light of the reality of eventual death—it is not complicated. You can be faithful. You can follow Him right now. And Jesus says after speaking about the whole specter of death to Peter, He says follow me today.

The magnificence of being a Christian! Simple obedience to Christ in daily life for the Christian gives way to an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison at death. How could we not trust Him? How could we not glorify Him even in death? “Follow me” Jesus says.

“Yes Lord, we will follow you straight in to heaven.”

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the glory of Jesus Christ and we thank you for the glory of the gospel and we thank you for the promises that belong to us as believers in Christ. Father, take each one in this room, apply these things deeply to their hearts and help them and bless them so that they would glorify you by following Christ in life and with trusting acceptance, follow Him even in death.

Father, may our lives shine this kind of testimony not for our sake because Father, our names can all be forgotten and will all be forgotten in time. Father, we ask this for the sake of your glory that in the short life that you give us here on earth, that we might manifest the excellences of the one who saved us from sin and delivered us unto a path that will culminate in heaven.

For His sake our Lord we pray.

Amen.