

“DON’T WORRY ABOUT YOUR BROTHER—FOLLOW CHRIST”

John 21:20-25

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INTRODUCTION

God makes His will for us clear in Scripture; either we don’t read it so as to *understand* it, or we don’t *respond* to it with an open mind and heart.

The Gospel of John is very clear on many points. How well have you done at listening to its teaching, understanding it, and obeying it? The Lord wants us to trust Him, obey Him, be holy like Him, and witness about Him. There are many other details as well.

There can be many reasons why believers fail to follow the Lord, but one is that they are too concerned about what another believer (or believers) is or is not doing.

So it was with Peter in our passage. Jesus had made His requirement for Peter clear; He had even told him what his future held in store. But suddenly Peter became distracted by what was happening or might happen with another believer.

Now, the Bible makes it clear that we are to care for and minister to our brothers in Christ; we are our brother’s keeper! *But I would suggest to you that sometimes “being our brother’s keeper” is really a distortion of the truth and becomes an excuse for us not following the Lord.*

Let the Lord deal with your brother; let Him as sovereign guide his life. The title for this message becomes our proposition:

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I. MINISTRY CONFUSION (20-23)

A. Distraction (20)

The Lord had given a clear command: **“Follow Me.”**(v. 19)

Evidently this moral command also had a literal dimension, for Peter and Jesus were moving away from the other disciples, and someone else was following them.

The one following them is:

- “The disciple whom Jesus loved”
- The one who “had leaned back on His breast at the supper”
- The one who had asked Jesus, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?”

Distraction over what other believers are doing can often lead to:

B. Curiosity—“Lord, this man, what?” (21)

- Peter and John were close friends.
- They are often seen together in this Gospel, and even more so in the book of Acts.
- Peter surely hoped that his predicted future ministry and martyrdom might be shared with John.
- Once again, as at the scene in Kadesh Barnea, Peter had become “emboldened” by Jesus restoration of Him and about the prophecy of his martyrdom. There he

had been emboldened by Jesus' prophecy concerning Peter's place in the Church. As Peter at Kadesh Barnea took it upon himself to question Jesus' going to death and received a strong rebuke, so here Peter questions Jesus about John's place in all of this—and Jesus gives him a much milder rebuke.

C. Rebuke (22)

- Jesus refuses to *satisfy Peter's curiosity*—He simply says that if He wants John “to remain until I come, what [is that] to you?”
- Otherwise, Jesus shows that it is none of Peter's business! Jesus is more concerned that Peter gets the command to “follow Him.”
- Be **obedient**. And feed His sheep! **Don't be so interested in God's “secret counsel” that you fail “to pay attention to God's revealed will”**
- The “coming” to which Jesus refers is His Second Advent.
- Thus Jesus reminds the impulsive Peter, though he is a leader among the apostles, that he is not in control of everything—he has a higher authority!
- Jesus then repeats His command of v. 19: “Follow Me.”
Be continually following Me. *There is work to be done; souls to reach! Don't ask so many questions and get to work!* [Also note that “him” is emphatic in the sentence: “If **him** I wish to remain . . . what to **you; you** follow me.”
- ILLUS.—Person shot by a “feathered, poisoned arrow”—not time to ask “Of what wood is this arrow made?” “Of what bird did these feathers come?” Who is the person who shot it? **Take action!**

Unfortunately, this rebuke led to misunderstanding:

D. Misunderstanding (23)

- From this saying to Peter a false idea had arisen that Jesus had told John that he would not die; Jesus would return before John's death.
- This is the only place where they are formally called “brethren” as a group of Jesus' followers who are a Christian family.
- John wants to make clear concerning himself that the interpretation of Jesus' words had been misunderstood; Jesus had not really said that he would not die—only that **it was Jesus' choice, and not Peter's, and that Peter ought not concern himself about it.**
- The disciples, like Peter, misplaced Jesus' emphasis also—“Follow Me” was the key. “Turn your mind from your curiosity to your calling.”
- Some have concluded **wrongly** that these words indicate that John was already dead. The text gives **no encouragement to such an idea**. If John were already dead, who would be arguing that he would not die, and why would this correction need to be written? John was still alive but was likely very old. Therefore this misunderstanding needed correction.

Whereas there was ministry confusion on the part of Peter, the Scriptures give certainty, and John went to great effort to show that we can be confident in them.

II. SCRIPTURAL CERTAINTY (24-25)

A. The Identity of the Author of the Fourth Gospel—John the Apostle.

John speaks of himself here; someone else did not write these words about him.

- V. 23 would be a strange conclusion to a Gospel!
- John began his first epistle by using the plural throughout chapter one—there is not doubt as to his authorship there.
- He includes his brethren as fellow witnesses in v. 24, but goes back to his use of the first person in v. 25. *“The aged Apostle in bringing his work a second time (xx. 30, 31) to a conclusion may have included that inmost circle of disciples (to whom he had frequently told his narrative by word of mouth) among those who were able to guarantee his accuracy. With a glance of affectionate confidence round the group of devoted hearers, he adds their testimony to his own, and gives them a share in bearing witness to the truth of the gospel.”* (Plummer)
- “This” can be rendered “he” and refers to the same person as the “him” of vv. 22-23. It can’t refer to Jesus—He is not a disciple. Nor can it refer to Peter—he died in 64 AD. Besides, vv. 18-19 somewhat allude to this death. Nor can “this” refer to some new personality not heretofore mentioned in the gospel!
- He is the author just spoken of in v. 23—the “beloved disciple.”
- The present tense “is” and the present participle “is bearing witness” likely show that **John is still living**.
- “And he wrote these things” indicates that John is the actual author.
- Like 19:35 (*“And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.”*) John once again testifies as to his knowledge and assurance of the facts and details which he presents.
- v. 25 shows that the “these things” of v. 24 cover the entire book, for “*there are many other things which Jesus did*” that were not written in this book! That includes even the content of chapter 21.
- Note that this Gospel is a “**testimony**.” It is an official proclamation of an eye-witness who was also an apostle.
- V. 24 is a **testimonial** about this testimony—this “testimony” is true.
- The emphasis is on the word **TRUE**, which comes first in the clause.
- Today we must continue our witness both officially and unofficially in our lives.

B. The Limitation of the Material in the Fourth Gospel (25)

Again, John reminds us that he has merely made a selection of the material at his disposal (cf. 20:30-31). This statement is a hyperbole, yet, very important. Much has been recorded in this gospel. But much more could have been recorded. All that was written was written in order to strengthen faith (20:30-31).

If all were to be written he supposes that the world itself could not contain the written books. Note the many attempts to use the “fragments that have come down to us” to write the Life of Christ; the limits seem inexhaustible. We have a very “fragmentary account of about a tenth portion of the Lord’s life on earth” (Plum. 357).

Compare these words that were penciled on the wall of a room in an asylum:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

CONCLUSION

Thus, there is much more about Jesus than we know. Our knowledge is limited.

- **Though we have learned much, we are pitifully ignorant!**
- We ought to be grateful for what we have, yet very humble about our limitations!

However, there are things that we know, and the Lord has given us instructions.
We must “follow Him.”

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