

Valley Bible Church - Sermon Transcript

Faithful Unto Death
John 21:18-19

In life if we have unreasonable expectations, we will invariably set ourselves up for disappointment.

And certainly this was true for myself. When I got married I had certain expectations. I expected Lynn, my new wife, to be faithful to me, and she was. I expected her when I came home from work to be there to greet me, and she did. I expected her to keep our apartment clean and to provide meals, and certainly all this was done and done wonderfully. But, I also expected her to be my number one fan.

Unfortunately in this area, largely because of my own immaturities, I didn't give her much to work with, so rather than becoming my number one fan, she became in my eyes at times, my severest critic. Was I disappointed? Sure, of course I was disappointed! How could I not be?

But the problem was mine. I was expecting my wife to treat me as her hero when I was not acting very heroic.

In life if we have unreasonable expectations we will invariably set ourselves up for disappointment. This is true in respect to family, friends, spouses, children, employers, employees, neighbors, jobs, career, school etc.

This is also true in respect to discipleship. I have known people who have made professions of faith in Christ who believe, because they have made a profession of faith, that their lives will somehow become easier. This is not the truth.

Yes, if we, after making a genuine profession of faith in Christ seek to walk in a manner pleasing to Him our lives will become better, amazingly better, gloriously better, but listen to me carefully, we should not expect our lives to become easier.

If there was any doubt about this all we have to do is to return to our study of the Gospel of John and more specifically to our study of **John 21:15-25** and to the question that we began to answer last week which was this: What

are the three truths Christ outlined for Peter in John 21:15-25 that every faithful disciple of Christ needs to understand?

And what was the first of those truths that we considered last week? It was this: We need to understand that our love for Christ should lead us to serve Christ's flock (John 21:15-17).

Let me read for you **John 21:15-17**. And what does it say? It says 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.” (16) He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” (17) He 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” and he said to Him, “Lord, you know all things: You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My Sheep.”**”

So what was happening in these verses? I believe that Jesus was giving to Peter an opportunity to demonstrate his newfound humility not only before Him but more importantly before his fellow disciples, a humility that he had sorely lacked in the upper room the night before Christ was crucified. And did Peter seize the opportunity? Yes, I believe he did.

Peter, in **John 21:15-17**, once again declared His love for Christ as he had in effect done when he was with Christ and the other disciples in the upper room the night before Christ's crucifixion, but this time, when Peter declared his love for Christ, he was very careful not to exalt himself over the other fellow disciples and he was also very careful by his choice of words not to appear overly confident in himself either.

But just because Peter was expressing his love for Christ in **John 21:15-17** differently than he had in **Matthew 26:31-33**, in other words with a new found humility, I don't believe that Peter loved Christ any less, in fact I would have to believe that He loved Christ even more.

And how did Christ respond to Peter's repeated declaration of love? Christ responded in the same way each time. He commanded Peter, in light of his

profession of love for Him to serve His flock. In other words, in light of Peter's declaration of love, service was not an option it was the expectation. And we need to understand this as well. If we are a follower of Christ and profess love for Christ, then Christ expects us to serve His flock in accordance with our giftedness: if we are a teacher then teach, if an administrator then administrate, if an encourager then encourage, if a helper then help. Serving Christ's flock according to your giftedness is not an option. And to support this thought I read for you **Romans 12:4-6**, which I believe made this very clear.

So what was the first truth that Christ outlined for Peter in **John 21:15-25** that we as disciples of Christ need to understand? The first truth that He outlined and that we as disciples of Christ need to understand is this: We need to understand that our love for Christ should lead us to serve Christ and even more specifically should lead us to serve Christ's flock (John 21:15-17). So what was the second truth?

The second truth that Christ outlined for Peter in **John 21:15-25** and that we as disciples of Christ need to understand is this: We need to understand that serving Christ, though leading to a better life, will not lead to an easier life (John 21:18-19).

I am continually amazed at how many professing disciples of Christ think that serving Christ's flock as an expression of their love for Him should somehow be cakewalk. Such an idea is absolutely absurd. It is totally unreasonable.

What did Christ tell those who wanted to follow Him in **Luke 9:23-24**? This is what He told them, **"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. (24) For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."** Following Christ and seeking to carry on His work as an expression of our love for Him will not be a cakewalk. It will not be easy and there will be a price to it if we are in fact willing to pay it.

And I believe Christ will make this point very clear to Peter as He continues His conversation with Him in **John 21:18-19**.

So now let me read for you these two verses and what do they say? They say this, **"Truly, truly, I say to you (in light of your declaration of love for**

Me and in light of my commandment to you to serve me, I need to prepare you for what is coming. And what was that according to Christ? It was this...) “... when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.” (19) Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God...”

Christ, in John 21:18-19, is telling Peter that his service to Him and to His flock would ultimately result in him being crucified. This is what Christ in essence was telling Peter. Or in other words, don't think your service to me and my flock will make your life easier. It won't! This is what Christ in essence was telling Peter and this is what Christ is telling us. Loving Christ and serving Christ will make our lives better, but it certainly will not make our lives easier. Now let us go back to these verses and look at them more carefully.

So how does **John 21:18** begin? It begins with these words, **“Truly, truly (In other words pay close attention to what I am about to say. It is very important) “when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished...”** So what was Jesus emphasizing by using these particular words?

When Christ told Peter in **John 21:18**, that when he was younger he walked wherever he wished, Christ was emphasizing the freedom that Peter enjoyed as a young man. But Christ did not stop there. He continued to tell Peter what he should expect as an old man. So now let us go back to **John 21:18** and continue to read the verse.

And this is what it says, **“Truly, truly when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you and bring you where you do not wish to go.”** Was Peter free as a young man to go wherever he wished? Yes! Would he continue to enjoy that same freedom as an old man? No!

As a young man Peter was free to go wherever he wished, but Christ in John 21:18, made it very clear to Peter that his freedom as an old man would be taken from him.

So how exactly would Peter's freedom as an old man be taken from Him? The description of how Peter's freedom would be taken from him is outlined for us in John 21:18.

In other words, Peter's freedom would be taken from him as an old man when he stretched out his hands and then was girded by another and finally taken to a place he didn't want to go.

The description of how Peter's freedom would be taken from him as outlined in John 21:18 is a description of how Peter's earthly life would come to an end (John 21:19). How do we know this?

Let me now read for you **John 21:19**, and this is what it says, **“Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he (Peter) would glorify God.”** Therefore based on what John tells us in this verse we can categorically and dogmatically say that the description of how Peter's freedom would be taken from him as outlined in **John 21:18** is a description of how Peter's life would in fact come to an end. And how did Peter's life come to an end.

Though John does not specifically tell us the manner of Peter's death in John 21:19, the description as outlined for us in John 21:18 clearly points to crucifixion.

And why would I say this? Early Christian authors referencing crucifixion often used the phrase **“stretching out of the hands”** to refer to it. Justin used this phrase in this way. Irenaeus used this phrase in this way and Cyprian used this phrase in this way.

Therefore it would appear when Christ was describing for Peter the manner of his death in **John 21:18**, it might have gone something like this: Peter when you were young you would gird yourself or in another words you would tie your belt around your waist and go wherever you wished, but when you grow old this will change, you will stretch out your hands or in other words you will be forced to stretch out your hands in order to do what? You will be forced to stretch out your hands in order to balance a wooden cross-beam on your shoulders that will later be used to crucify you. Then someone other than yourself will gird you or in other words will tie a rope around you so that they might do what? So that they might take you to a

place where you do not want to go, which of course would be the place of crucifixion.

Jesus, in **John 21:18-19**, has in effect told Peter that his love for Him and his service to Him would not lead him to an easier life but rather to a harder life that would in fact culminate in death by crucifixion.

So how long did Peter carry with him this expectation of death by crucifixion? Peter's expectation of death by crucifixion based on Christ's prophetic statement to him in **John 21:18-19**, was carried with him for 30 years. Or in other words it was carried with him until the year **64 AD** when Peter, according to the writings of Eusebius was crucified, not in the upright position as Christ had been crucified but rather according to Eusebius per his own request, upside down, believing that he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as His Lord.

So let me ask you a question, "Did Peter's decision to become a disciple of Christ and to serve Christ's flock, as an expression of His love, make His life easier? I would think that we would have to conclude that Peter's decision to love Christ and to serve Christ's did not make his life easier at all but harder based simply on **John 21:18-19**.

But someone here this morning might still be asking, "But what about us? Can't we expect something better for ourselves in terms of how our lives might unfold? And the answer of course is, "No!"

Christ, not only made it clear to Peter, but to all of His disciples, that loving Him, and serving Him, would not make their lives easier (Matthew 10:24-26).

Each time Christ asked Peter, "Do you love Me? And Peter responded that he did, Christ commanded Him to serve His flock. And nothing has changed for us. If we are here this morning and are professing a love for Christ, then Christ expects us to do the same thing that He expected Peter to do. He expects us to serve His flock. And that service will not make our lives easier it will make it harder.

Consider our service to Christ's flock in terms of those individual sheep that have already come to Him for salvation. The standard that Christ has set for

us is very high. And what is that standard? It is this: Just as Christ the good shepherd laid down His life for His sheep, so should we.

Let us now consider our service to Christ's flock in terms of those individual sheep who have not already come, or in other words those still lost but chosen. Again the standard is very high. And what is that standard? It is this: Just as Christ the good shepherd laid down His life for His sheep, so should we.

When we come to Christ and embrace Him as our Lord and Savior it truly is a wonderful day. We are at the moment set free from the penalty of sin from its power and also we are set free in Christ. Hallelujah! Praise God!

We are no longer fearful of death, nor are we fearful of life, for our savior is with us and will never forsake us.

And beyond all this we have the hope of one day being with Christ in glory forever enjoying fellowship with Him in the glory of heaven.

Does our life get better when we come to Christ? Absolutely! But let me again share with you that it will not get easier. Following in the footsteps of Jesus and by His grace seeking to fulfill our mission both in terms of seeking to reach the lost of this world and at the same time seeking to serve God's flock in the manner that would be pleasing to Christ will cost us just as it cost Peter.

If we do not understand that when serving this fellowship gets difficult, we could easily become discouraged and quit. It is truly amazing how many professing believers seem to think when serving the flock or reaching out with the gospel of Christ and it becomes difficult, that they can quit, thinking that this was not what they signed up for.

May God give us the grace to understand that serving Christ, though leading to a better life, will not lead to an easier life.