

**Follow Me
John 21:19-25**

The Apostle Peter in **1 Peter 5:8-9** exhorted his Christian brothers and sisters to, “**Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**” So why should we be sober in spirit? Why should we be on the alert? Peter tells us that we need to have a sober spirit and be on the alert because we have a very powerful adversary. Do we believe this? I would certainly hope so. Why? I would hope so because it is the truth.

When we got up this morning and began to prepare ourselves for the day, our adversary was prowling about. When we arrived here at church and entered into this building, our adversary was still prowling about and he will continue to prowl about even after we have left this building, and why is this?

He has been prowling about, and is prowling about, and will continue to prowl about for one reason and that is to devour us, or in other words to undermine our faith, so that the Holy Spirit who lives within us and who seeks to fill us might be quenched thus robbing us of the joy our salvation and diminishing our usefulness in the advancement of Christ’s kingdom. And, of course, if we do not maintain a sober spirit and if we do not remain on the alert we are in effect dead meat and will provide for Satan his next snack.

In light of this reality it is very important for us to make sure that we keep our focus on following Christ and to not allow anyone or anything to distract us from doing that very thing, lest we put ourselves in a position to become Satan’s next victim. But this is much easier said than done since we are so easily distracted and often times distracted even by what we might think to be a rather harmless or innocuous thing.

And I believe that this point will be made perfectly clear to us this morning as we 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 two weeks ago? 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**. “**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 Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, you know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend My Sheep.’”**

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 and so should we. How could we not if we in fact love Christ?

If we are a follower of Christ and are professing a love for Christ, then Christ will expect us, as He expected Peter, to serve His flock, not necessarily in the same way as Peter, but certainly in a manner consistent with our calling and our giftedness.

I believe I made this clear two weeks ago as we read **Romans 12:4-6**, which says this very thing. So if we are a teacher, let us teach. If we are administrator, let us administrate. If we are an encourager, let us encourage. If we are a helper, then let us help. If we have certain skills and abilities let us use them to serve Christ's flock. But don't say that you love Christ and then go on to do nothing in terms of serving Christ's most precious possession, which is His flock.

So, what was the first truth that Christ outlined for Peter in **John 21:15-25** and 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's flock. 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).

And Christ, I believe, made this point very clear to Peter as He continued His conversation with him in **John 21:18-19**. So now let me read for you these two verses.

“**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 My flock, 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.**” And what kind of death was that? It was death by crucifixion based on Christ's description of it in **John 21:18**.

So me ask you this question: In light of Christ's prophetic statement concerning the manner of Peter's death, should Peter have expected his life to get easier or more difficult as he served Christ's flock? And of course the answer is pretty obvious. Peter should have expected that his life would become more difficult. And this is what we should expect as well in respect to our service to Christ's flock based on the teachings of the New Testament.

So, what was the first truth that Christ outlined for Peter in **John 21:15-25** and 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'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's flock, though leading to a better life, will not lead to an easier life (John 21:18-19).

We are now ready to consider the third and last truth that Christ outlined for Peter in John 21:15-25 that every faithful disciple of Christ needs to understand.

So, what is this final truth that Christ outlined for Peter during His conversation with him in John 21:15-25? We need to understand not only the importance of following Christ but also how easy it is for us to become distracted (John 21:19-25).

My hope for this message, which will be the last message in our study of the Gospel of John, is that we will leave here this morning determined to follow Jesus and not to be distracted by anyone or anything knowing that if we fail Satan is always looking for an opportunity to devour us thus robbing us of the joy of our salvation and diminishing our usefulness in the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

So after Christ had prophetically spelled out for Peter exactly how he as an old man would die, in **John 21:18-19**, what did Christ do next? He commanded Peter to **“follow Him.”**

And if there is any doubt about this all we have to do is to read the latter part of **John 21:19** and see if this is not so. **“And when He had spoken this** [or in other words, after Jesus had prophetically spelled out for Peter exactly how he, as an old man, would die], **He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’”**

When Jesus commanded Peter to follow Him in John 21:19 He did not mean it literally but rather metaphorically (John 21:21). In other words, He was saying to Peter, in light of the fact that I have commanded you to serve my flock as an expression of love for me and in light of the fact that your service to my flock will not lead to an easier life but to a more difficult life, I am now commanding you to stay focused on just one thing and that is on following Me. Or in other words, stay focused on saying what I would say, on doing what I would do, and on responding as I would respond. Jesus in effect was saying to him, “Peter your life is not going to get easier but harder so stay focused; stay focused on following Me!”

When Christ commanded Peter to follow Him He was not asking him to walk with Him along the shoreline but rather to be so focused on Him so that Peter's life would be an extension of His own life.

I believe this is the very best way to understand what Christ meant when He told Peter to **“follow Him”** in **verse 19** for the very simple reason that this is clearly what He meant in **verse 21** when he gave to Peter the same command.

However, I don't believe that this is how Peter necessarily understood Christ's initial command. In fact, I believe that Peter understood His initial command to follow Him in **verse 19** more literally than metaphorically, which led Peter, when Christ began to separate himself from the other disciples, to follow after Him. Though this is not stated I believe this is implied by what we now read in **John 21:20**.

So now let me read for you the very beginning of this particular verse and see if this is not so? **“Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them.”** Following whom? Following Peter and Christ.

Clearly Christ, after having given the command to Peter to follow Him, had begun to separate Himself from the other disciples and Peter believing that Christ's command was more literal than metaphorical apparently felt compelled to follow after Christ thus separating himself along with Christ from the other disciples.

But they were not alone. Another disciple followed them and how was this disciple identified? The disciple who followed them was identified as **“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”** This, as we have already talked about many times before, is universally accepted to be a reference to the Apostle John. The one who in fact recorded for us the very words we are now examining.

But John does not simply identify himself as **“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”** John goes on to give additional information about himself and his special relationship with Christ. So, what is this additional information? Let us continue to read **John 21:20** but this time I will read for you the entire verse. **“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 who betrays you?’”** This particular incident and circumstances surrounding are recorded for us in **John 13:21-30**. So why did the Apostle John provide this information about himself and his very special relationship with Christ?

John, identifying himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved and taking the time to give a detailed illustration of how close he was to Christ, helps us to understand the motivation for Peter's question in John 21:21.

So now let me read for you **John 21:21**. **“So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, ‘Lord, and what about this man?’”** What about this man who is so very special to you. I'm going to be crucified, but what about him? Is he also going to be crucified? What is your plan for his life? Will it be easier than mine? Will it be harder than mine? Will it be about the same? What is going to happen to this disciple who is so very special to you?

I don't believe that this was particularly sinister question. I believe it was a question Peter asked Christ out of idle curiosity when he saw John following them and was once again reminded of the very special relationship he enjoyed with Christ. But even though it was not a sinister question it was certainly not a very good question. In fact, it was bad question. How do we know this?

Let me now read for you **John 21:22**. **“Jesus said to him, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?’”** Jesus in responding to Peter's question in John 21:22, in effect, told Peter that His future plan for John was none of his business.

If what Christ had planned for John was none of Peter's business than what was Peter's business? Peter's business was to remain focused on one thing and only one thing and that was following Christ so that his life would become an extension of Christ's life.

But Peter had failed to maintain the kind of focus Christ was asking from him. Peter, rather than focusing on what Christ would have him to say, to do, or to accomplish, became more concerned about Christ's plan for another man rather than for himself. This forced Christ to do what?

It forced Christ to repeat His command in **John 21:22**. So let me once again read for you **John 21:22** but this time I will read the entire verse. **“Jesus said to him, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!’”** The same challenge is before us. We can easily become distracted and be distracted by something that on the surface might appear so very innocent as was the case here with Peter.

Therefore in light of this reality we need to once again commit ourselves to one singular focus and that is on following Christ in such a way that we become an extension of His life.

And where will this lead us if we do not allow ourselves to be distracted even by the most innocuous things?

If we focus on following Christ and are careful not to be distracted we will, as an expression of our love for Christ, find ourselves serving His flock.
This is a given.

If we presently do not have the heart to willingly serve Christ's flock as best as best as we can, by utilizing the gifts and the abilities that He has entrusted to us, something is terribly wrong.

Therefore if you are here today and consider yourself a follower of Christ and you do not have this desire to serve Christ's flock then the question that you must ask yourself is why? And I would think that the possibility that you have someone or something to distract you is very high. Bummer!

Fortunately for Peter he apparently listened to the words of Christ and took them to heart and fortunately from that day forward, except for a few glitches, continued to keep his focus where it needed to be and it took him exactly where Christ told him it would take him.

Christ's exchange with Peter is over. And now the Apostle John will conclude his epistle. He begins his conclusion with a correction of a misinterpretation of the words Jesus spoke to Peter in **John 21:22**. And we find that correction in **John 21:23**. So let me read this verse for you. **"Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that the 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?'"** Was this important for John to correct? Certainly! John knew that he would die. He needed to make sure that everyone else knew this as well unless when he died people would say that the words of Christ had failed.

John then finishes with a declaration of the truthfulness of all that he has presented in his Gospel concerning Christ is true. Let me now read for you **John 21:24-25**. **"This is the disciple [the one Peter had been concerned**

about and who Jesus had spoken about to Peter in John 21:21-23] **who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his [or in other words, my testimony, the writer of this gospel] is true.**” John then goes on to add, **“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose then even the world itself world not contain the books that would be written.”**

Choosing to believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God is not a silly thing to believe. It is a very reasonable thing to believe. It is based on solid evidence, which John in his Gospel has so wonderfully presented us. And what can we expect in this life if we choose embrace Him as our Lord and Savior and commit ourselves by His grace to follow Him? Though we can expect our lives to become better, we can also expect that our lives will not become easier.

Therefore it might become very easy for us in the midst of the difficulties of following Christ to lose our focus and to allow even the most innocuous thing to distract us. We must be careful not to let this happen lest Satan, who is continually prowling about seeking someone to devour, will swoop in upon us robbing us of the joy of our salvation and diminishing our effectiveness in the advancement of Christ’s kingdom.

And how can we tell if something like this might have happened? I believe if we no longer have a conscious desire to serve Christ’s flock according to the gifts and abilities Christ has entrusted to us we have very likely fallen victim to Satan and have been devoured by him.

If this describes you then it is important for your sake, and your church’s sake, for the sake of Christ’s kingdom and most importantly for the sake of Christ, to repent and once again to wholeheartedly commit your to follow Christ.

May God give us the grace to follow Christ in such a way that we will be an extension of His life in this world.