



John 21:18–23

18 Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!' 20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This

was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, ‘Lord, who is going to betray you?’) 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’ 22 Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’ 23 Because of this, the rumour spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?’

Reflection

In yesterday’s moving passage we saw the healing and restoration of the Apostle Peter. Sitting around that fire by the sea of

Galilee Jesus had sensed Peter's heavy heart and the distance that had developed between them. The indelible shame of Peter's three denials remained, even after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Peter had been forgiven, but he was not healed. So Jesus, like an expert surgeon, opens up Peter's wound one final time so that he can heal it forever. Three times Peter had denied Jesus. Three times by the Sea of Galilee the resurrected Jesus looks into Peter's eyes and asks him,

‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’

Jesus' words hurt Peter deeply, but they also bring healing. Peter pours out his heart to Jesus, no doubt tears flowing unbidden down his cheeks as his shame is

overwhelmed by love, and the forgiveness that was already his becomes real,

‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’

Peter loved Jesus with all his heart, and by verbalizing it, he not only received restoration but stated for all believers the highest priority of life – loving God. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Our lives, our service, our good deeds mean nothing without true love for God.

This is true in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:5, part of the Shema, the oldest fixed daily prayer in Judaism, recited morning and night since ancient times,

5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

And Jesus re-affirms it in the New Testament. When asked about the greatest commandment of all,

37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’

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know that I love you.’

This is way John, the apostle of love, who can’t stop writing about love in his letters, wants to end his gospel. But our love of God has implications, and it comes at a cost, as we’ll see in today’s passage. Reading from John 21:18–23,

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So far in John chapter 21 we’ve seen a three-fold restoration but also a threefold commission. ‘Do you love me?’ ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you’, then ‘Feed my

sheep.' Our love of God has implications, it is proved genuine by the way we respond. Peter's love of Jesus will be proved genuine by the way he responds to Jesus' commission to him. Because our love is proved genuine by our obedience. As Jesus said, in John 14,

15 'If you love me, keep my commands.

21 Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.

But our love of God not only has implications, it also comes at a cost. In Peter's case, the greatest cost.

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younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!'

Here Jesus prophesies about Peter's death. More than thirty years later Peter would be martyred for his faith. While the historical record is scant some ancient sources suggest that Peter was crucified upside down in the late sixties, not counting himself worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. The cost of Peter's love and obedience would ultimately be his life as he takes up his own cross and follows

his Lord.

Peter, noticing John nearby and perhaps uncomfortable about his own future, asks Jesus to make a prophecy about John's future. No doubt Peter and John were fast friends; Peter's question is part concern, part comparison. But Jesus shuts him down. John's fate is none of Peter's business; each of us has enough to concentrate on in our own walks with the Lord.

‘Lord, what about him?’ 22 Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’

At this point, John, the narrator, adds his comments by way of explanation. It's likely that at the time of writing Peter, along with

all the other disciples, had been martyred and that John was very old. Perhaps John is just clarifying what Jesus said to quell any rumours that were circulating about his own mortality and to stave off disappointment at his death,

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Think & Pray

The more I meditate over this closing chapter of John's gospel the more I love it. Here's three avenues for you to pur-

sue today as you reflect back over John's words for yourself.

Firstly, sometimes we need to hurt to heal. Instead of ignoring the elephant in the room, or putting a band-aid over the problem, Jesus opens up the wound in his relationship with Peter in order to heal it forever. Perhaps a similar grievance lies dormant in your life. Who is it that you need to reconcile with? Whose forgiveness do you need to ask for?

Secondly, were you struck by Jesus' sharp reply to Peter when he asked about John's fate? 'What is that to you?' Jesus replied, 'You must follow me.' It's as if Jesus is saying, 'Don't concern yourself with what I choose to do with the lives of my other servants. You just keep following me.' Jesus

is teaching us not to compare ourselves with each other. Each of our lives is a sovereign creation of our God. Our worth and effectiveness, God's favour in our lives, is not to be determined by comparison with others. We are simply to follow Jesus. It's easy to look to the lives of other Christians and long after their successes or blessings but our sovereign God has a good and perfect plan for each and every one of us, so instead of constantly comparing, and opening ourselves up to envy or dissatisfaction, we're simply call to trust God and follow Jesus.

Finally, our love of God has implications. Firstly obedience. And very often suffering. So much so, when considering the history of the church beginning in the book of Acts and extending to modern times,

that if our lives are characterized by ease, if we have no problems because of our Christianity, then it's likely that something is wrong. A statement like this might bring you comfort in persecution this week; or discomfort in your ease. Either way, plenty to think through.

And when you've spent some time meditating over today's passage, close in prayer. Perhaps pray over what you know of the life of Peter, praying that you might imitate him, as he went on to imitate Christ.