

FOLLOWING JESUS: (part four of a four-part study)

This concluding segment will involve an important interaction between Jesus and Peter, the first part of which is recorded in John 21:18-19, where we read this –

“Truly, truly, I say to you, 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.’ Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me!’”

The larger context of this passage includes Christ’s post-resurrection appearance to the disciples, with the primary intent of bringing about Peter’s restoration from his failure of faith in denying Jesus just prior to the crucifixion (21:15-17). With Peter’s restoration in place and his renewed commitment at its highest possible level, our Savior provides him with some sobering insight into how his earthly life would end. Peter would die as a martyr, with non-Biblical accounts stating it was by means of crucifixion, just as his Lord died. Peter’s response is rather surprising in light of his restoration. Jesus commands him at the end of v19, “Follow Me!” Instead of saying, “Yes, Lord, I will follow you wherever You lead, no matter what;” Peter asks a question, recorded for us in John 21:20-21 –

“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?’ So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, ‘Lord, and what about this man?’”

In hearing how his life would end, Peter’s concern turns to John, and what Christ had planned for him! Was there a rivalry between these two men, prompting this envious question? Perhaps. But our Savior’s answer in v22 immediately puts Peter’s focus back to where it should be. Jesus says, **“If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!”** In other words, Jesus tells Peter that His plan and purpose for John was none of his business. It would be difficult enough for Peter to fulfill God’s plan and purpose for his own life, without the distraction of being preoccupied with what Christ was accomplishing in the lives of others.

The application for us? The temptation in becoming envious of other Christians whom God has blessed and used in certain ways can be very strong. That is when we need to ingest a sobering dose of John 21:18-22, as well as Matthew 10:37-39 and Hebrews 12:1-3, to get our eyes fixed back to where they belong: on Christ! Then and only then, will we be able to follow Jesus fully, wherever He might lead, fulfilling His plan and purpose for each of our individual lives.