

The Cost of Following Jesus

As we begin this article, I want to remind us of a portion of what we learned previously.

We all have priorities in our lives for the day to day, week to week, things that we do. And yet as Christians, more important than the priority of our tasks should be the priority of our motivation for the things that we do. The *priority motivation* for the tasks of many in our culture includes things such as improved productivity and improved profits. Producing more and improving profits may not be wrong in and of themselves, but the first priority for Christians—whether in the home, the church or in business—is, bringing glory to God. If our productivity or profits get in the way of our devotion to and *love for Christ*, then that's always going to be the wrong motivation.

In addition to love for and thankfulness to Christ as our priority motivation for all that we say and do, we learned that we're all called to service—both formally and informally—motivated by love for Jesus Christ. Peter was restored to the service of Christ—particularly in the office of a Shepherd and an Apostle—in order that he would be able to continue to rightly lead others after Jesus had ascended back to the Father. As we near the end of John's gospel, let's see what else Jesus is teaching his disciples and us.

—Suffering as a Disciple

In my previous article we saw that Peter is given the command to shepherd the sheep that Christ died for. Even though we don't have a record of all the ways in which Peter obeyed Jesus' command, I want to call your attention to something that Peter wrote to a group of Christians who were facing suffering and persecution somewhere between 30-35 years after Jesus commanded him to shepherd his sheep. "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker of the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:1-3) We hear in Peter's words his faithful commitment to obey Jesus' command to shepherd the sheep and to teach others to do the same, no matter the cost.

Look with me now at John 21:18-19: "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will *stretch out your hands* and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." Jesus is saying, in effect, "Peter, when you were a young man, you lived a pretty independent life and went where you wanted to go and did the things that you chose to do. But, according to God's perfect plan, your service to me is going to come at a cost." What we're seeing is a prophecy given by Jesus as to how Peter will finish his life here on earth. Notice now John's commentary on verse 18 at the beginning of verse 19: "(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)"

The key to understanding the type of death that Peter is going to die is in the phrase translated, "stretch out your hands." Notice that John's commentary (vs. 19) assumes that his initial readers will be familiar with that phrase and will know what he means. It's been supported by many ancient writings of the early church Father's (e.g., Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Cyprian) and others, that Jesus is prophesying that Peter is going to die a martyr's death by crucifixion. Notice now the end of verse 19: "And after saying this he said, to him, 'Follow me.'"

It's this phrase that's an important key to this last section of John's gospel. You may remember that at the beginning of John's gospel Jesus says this same thing to Philip (1:43). In addition to this, if you look in the gospel of Matthew, when Jesus calls Peter and Andrew into service he says to them, "Follow me." The word translated "follow," as used in the gospels and when spoken by Jesus, carries the primary meaning of "follow me as my disciple." All Christians are called into the service of Christ in one form or another. "Follow me" is both a command and a lifestyle. Even though there will be times of joy as well as suffering and, for some, death, there's never a time when we're exempt from following Jesus Christ, our Savior.

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