

Keeping a Proper Focus no Matter What Comes

In my previous article from John 21, we were reminded that Christians will face some degree of suffering as we seek to honor Christ in this broken world that we all inhabit. We also looked at the fact that disciples of Jesus are to “take up our cross daily” and follow him. This is just to say, a voluntary acceptance of doing whatever Jesus asks of us in the principles and precepts of God’s holy word *no matter the cost!* In this article I want us to look at what it means for Jesus’ followers to:

—Stay Focused

Notice that in verse 20 “Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved *following them....*” We’re clearly told that it’s John who’s following them because he’s identified as, “the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, ‘Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?’” (John 13:23-25) When Peter sees that John is following them, he says to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” (John 21:21) Scholars suggest that Peter is being unnecessarily curious about whether he’s the *only one* of the disciples who’s going to have to die a martyr’s death. In other words, Peter wondered what *John’s* future was going to be: “What about John? Is he going to suffer too or is he going to get off easy?” Jesus rebukes Peter’s unhealthy curiosity by responding, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” Jesus is saying in effect, “Peter, stay focused on what I’m saying to *you*, don’t get sidetracked with an unhealthy concentration on John’s future.”

In C.S. Lewis’ classic tale, *The Horse and His Boy*, we’re allowed to view, as it were, a picture of God’s sovereign watch-care over his people in the story of a young boy. In this portion of the story, the boy Shasta is talking to someone/something with a “Large Voice” that’s invisible and walking along beside him. He’s telling this Voice events of his past life and the difficulties that he’d faced. And yet, somehow, he was guided and protected from harm in each situation. The Voice, who the reader knows to be Aslan the lion—the Christ figure in Lewis’ classic tale—responds. “I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight to receive you.” As Shasta momentarily ponders all that the Voice has told him he says, “Then it was you who wounded Aravis?” “It was I.” “But what for?” “Child” said the Voice, “I am telling your story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own.” As Shasta learned, we must stay focused. We can trust all that Christ Jesus is doing in our lives even when we face difficult times.

There’s a lesson—or even a number of lessons—that we can learn from Jesus’ words to Peter. It can become so easy to look at others’ blessings, others’ gifts, others’ lives, others’ places of service and compare ourselves to them. We can find ourselves thinking, “Why is my life so difficult and their life seems to always go so smoothly? Why was I not given his gifts?” Each of our lives and our service to Christ is going to be somewhat different. We should never envy

another person—either their gifts or their opportunities for service. Jesus is saying in effect, “Peter, *stay focused*. Don’t get caught up in unhealthy speculation and curiosity that can lead to discouragement and doubt. Keep your focus on what I’m calling *you* to do.”

Christian, as you read this article are you facing uncertainty in your life? Maybe you’re facing difficulty and suffering; maybe you’ve experienced suffering for a long time now. It can be easy to get side-tracked and lose a biblical focus in our thinking. God’s people can be absolutely certain that we’re loved in Christ and that—no matter what comes or how difficult it gets—God is at work for our good and his glory. This is one lesson that Peter still needed to learn and, I dare say, that we need to either learn it as well or, at least, be reminded of it again. God loves his people, he is in absolute control no matter what comes, and he can be trusted.

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