

Sermon – 27/05/2007 pm

What about Him?

Study Text: John 21:20-23

On the farm we had an old Clydesdale horse called Doll. In the sowing season my father would bring Doll in and harness her up ready to pull the pea planter. The harness included a large neck collar, a bit in the mouth with reins, and blinkers over her eyes. Doll had to pull the planter in straight lines across the paddock so it was important that she was not distracted. Horses, as you may know, are easily distracted by things they hear or see.

Peter was easily distracted. Jesus said to Peter *follow me* – and this was not the first time. What did Peter do? He turned around, saw John following and asked Jesus ‘what about him?’ Well – what about him? Was it Peter’s business? The question ‘what about him or her’ has led many a Christian to stumble, if not fall away.

Curiosity

The risen Jesus had just restored Peter unto himself. He had commissioned Peter to be a shepherd to the people of God. He had told Peter he would suffer in this ministry and finally die as a martyr. He called Peter to follow him, not just in walking up the beach but in life and in death.

Jesus did not call Peter under false pretences. He knew what lay ahead for Peter and told him. Yet he still called Peter to follow him. It is the same for followers of Christ today. Jesus does not promise you an easy ride in life. He said *whoever does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple* (Luke 14:33). And again – *no one having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God* (Luke 9:62). Did Peter remember these words? Do you hear these words of Jesus, and take them seriously?

Peter turned and saw John. Why did he turn, and why did he ask Jesus what would happen to John? Was he concerned for John, not wanting him to be left behind? Was he just curious, wanting to know everything about everyone? Or was he comparing himself to John with a competitive spirit? The disciples were not above such behaviour. In saying he would never stumble Peter made the remark – ‘even if they do’ (Matthew 26:33).

Whatever Peter’s reason for turning and asking about John, Jesus was not pleased. His answer must be seen as a rebuke to Peter. *If I will/wish that he remain till I come, what is that to you.* In other words ‘mind your own business Peter’. ‘He is my disciple and I have a will for him’. ‘As for you, follow me’. The ‘you’ in this phrase is emphatic. **You follow me!**

Jesus had just spent a long time restoring Peter after his spiritual fall. Peter must focus on **his** relationship to Jesus, not that of others. He must fix his eyes on Jesus and not be turning around to look at others. This is a sure way to stumble.

There is a place of course, an important place, to show concern for brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus had just told Peter ‘take care of my sheep’. But we must not forget that the sheep belong to Jesus. Whether they follow or not is ultimately in the hands of Jesus. Jesus has a

will for all his disciples but it not for us to get curious wanting to know the secret counsels of God.

‘There is a natural desire in men to know the things of others, and neglect their own; and to be more concerned about things to come than things present’. Some are called to one ministry and some to another, just as James was put to the sword by King Herod but Peter was saved at that particular time (Acts 12).

If Peter was actually comparing himself to John, or even competing with him for the affection of Jesus, then he certainly needed rebuke. Luke tells us that in the middle of the Lord’s Supper the disciples started arguing about who would be the greatest (Luke 22:22). Peter was probably mixed up in this, as well as John, one of the sons of Thunder – even though they were close friends.

At a college where I taught two men sang together in the church choir and did many things together. They were great friends. But when the principal’s post became vacant they began to fight. One was principal for a while and then the other got him removed. And on it went. They became bitter enemies and tore the institution apart.

Sinful human beings are always comparing themselves to others – sometimes for the better, but mostly for the worst. Those who do not know Christ are often seeking to get ‘one up’ on their friend or colleague. But should it be the same with followers of Christ? Should we be trying to outdo one another? Should we be comparing ourselves to others in order to make excuse for our failures? ‘He does not come to Bible Study so why should I?’ ‘She does not help in the kitchen so why should I?’ Jesus condemns such an attitude. ‘You follow me and don’t worry about him’ said Jesus in effect.

Calling

Peter was called by Jesus. He had a divine calling. He had a master who could do mighty works, a master who was full of grace and who forgave his sin. He was called by one who had defeated death and was ascending to his throne in heaven. Why would such a man want to compare himself with another man? Why would he want to ask ‘what about him’?

Who did you follow when you did not know Christ? It is a natural tendency to follow someone, to make someone our role model. Young people today look to sporting stars or movie stars to follow. As they get older they start to follow successful people in their career – in business, politics, academics or whatever. The trouble is all these role models fail in some way. Modelling our lives on some other person leads to disappointment. We end up saying ‘I am better than anyone else’ and so the cycle continues.

When Jesus calls someone to follow him that is just what he expects. Peter and the other disciples left all when they initially followed Jesus – they left their fishing and their family. And Jesus never failed them. He gave his life for them. Jesus will never fail you if you follow him. But he calls you to follow him with all your heart and not to turn aside, even if others do. ‘Though all may leave me still I will follow’ go the words of children’s chorus.

Jesus is our shepherd and we are his sheep. Sheep must not follow one another. What if one goes into a bog, or over a cliff in search of some tasty grass? Do all follow? They do so at

their peril. They should follow the shepherd who leads them along the safe path and into green pastures. Follow the shepherd not the sheep.

Contentment

I have learned in whatever state I am in to be content said the apostle Paul (Philippians 4:11). Whether hungry or full, whether in want or in plenty, whether suffering or at rest, Paul had learned to be content. It was something he learned, not something that came naturally. Natural man is restless and competitive. The spiritual man is content and follows Christ even if the whole world rejects him.

Godliness with contentment is great gain Paul told the young Timothy (Timothy 6:6). ‘Keep away from the useless wranglings of men of corrupt mind’ he told him. Peter felt uneasy when he saw John following. What was he doing? What was going to happen to him? Such feelings distracted him from following Jesus. Peter must learn to be content in what the Lord had for him in life. This is how it must be for every follower of Christ.

Conclusion

In conclusion let us observe another weakness in men -a readiness to take hold of any piece of information, especially that regarding the future. Jesus told Peter what lay ahead for him, but did he do the same for John? Peter wanted to know, but was he told? Jesus said *if I will that he remain till I come* (21:22). This saying started spreading among the brethren but it seems a vital word in it was overlooked – the word ‘if’. The message passed around was that John would not die (21:23).

Peter had probably died by the time this gospel was written, but John must have been alive. The message that John would not die, at least until Jesus returned, was leading to harmful speculation and false teaching within the church. What would happen to the faith of some if John died and Jesus did not immediately return? This of course is what happened. John died and Jesus has not yet returned.

John wanted to set things straight before he closed this gospel. Jesus simply said – *if I will that he remain till I come*. It was not the business of Peter, nor was it the business of anyone else what the will of Jesus was for his servant John.

Let us beware of so-called prophets today who go around telling others what is, and what is not, God’s will for them. Let us look first to ourselves and where we stand before the Lord. The Lord is well able to lead others. *You follow me* says Jesus. By faithfully following the Lord you will be more of a blessing to others than you will by meddling in their affairs – and God will be glorified.

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