

Following Jesus (6) - Following Jesus Into The Future

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Date: 12 December 2021

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] We extend a very warm welcome to everyone today to the service here and if you're joining us online, a very warm welcome to you as well. If there are any visitors with us, we're particularly glad to have you with company and joining us for worship this morning.

One or two things I need to mention just to highlight from the bulletin sheet, the Deacons Court will meet God willing tomorrow evening at 7pm, that will be on Zoom, and then on Tuesday the Youth Club is due to meet at 7.30pm and that will be in the MA Hall.

The other services through the week, you can see them listed there, including Ladies' Bible Study on Friday and the services next Lord's Day. Over the page you'll have an indication there or an information about a change of Congregational Treasurer.

Congregational Treasurer is a vital piece of the jigsaw of Congregational life and after more than 19 years service as Treasurer, Murdo MacPhail will be stepping down at the end of this month.

Murdo's contribution as Treasurer has been immense to the Congregation. He is as reliable as anybody I know, particularly with financial matters like this and the keeping of records, all of which is important to the role of Treasurer.

[1 : 21] We're grateful to him for his contribution over the years to the Congregation. We also pray for his successor, Donald MacLeod, Dooney as we know him, and he's also going to bring much experience to the post.

Because Dooney at the moment is Gift Aid Treasurer, the Gift Aid Treasurer will be Gordon Murray, who's taken over. We're grateful both to Gordon and to Dooney for agreeing to take over these positions.

As I said, they're very important in the well-being of the congregation. So do please pray for Murdo as he retires from the post and for Dooney and Gordon as well as they take up these new positions for themselves.

Now you can see an information there about light and life, the Gospel of John. This is the magazine here. It's not really a magazine. It's the Gospel of John in magazine format, which makes it ideal to hand out as a gift.

So you're invited to take a copy with you. There's no charge for it. And please consider giving it as a gift. This time of year, it's an ideal gift. And it has the text of the NIV version of the Gospel of John, along with some stunning photographs.

[2 : 28] Photographs are not as important as the text, of course, but they do sometimes help, especially for those who are maybe not used to coming to church or don't know the Gospel very well, just to bring their mind to read the passages itself of John's Gospel.

So it's an ideal way of showing your love for people and to present to them the good news in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So these then are the intimations I need to mention.

We're going to begin our worship singing, first of all, in Psalm 108. 108, that's in the Scottish Psalter version, page 386. We'll sing from the beginning, verses 1 to 6.

And so on to the end of verse 6 there, Psalm 108.

My heart is fixed, Lord. I will sing. Let's stand to sing. My heart is fixed, Lord.

[3 : 50] I will sing. And with my glory praise.

I'll wake up, so turning. I'll praise thee, Lord.

I'll praise thee, among the people, Lord. My nations sing, will I.

For above heaven thy mercy is great, Thy truth thou bleached the sky.

Be thou above the heavens, Lord, Exalted gloriously.

[5 : 11] Thy glory, O the earth above, Be lifted up on high, That those who thy beloved are, Be liberated may be, O do thou sin with thy right hand, And answer give to me.

Amen. Now let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Let's join together in prayer. Lord, our gracious God and our eternal King, we thank you today for this renewed privilege you have given us of being gathered together here to worship you in this place.

And we thank you as we have been singing of your mercy, that that mercy meets us every morning, every day that we come to live and breathe. We thank you for the greatness of your mercy, and we thank you too for the way in which you make your mercy certain toward us as we come to confess our need of it.

We thank you, Lord, today that in your mercy you have provided for us that salvation that you have given us to give praise for, and that you have given us in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

And we thank you today that you reached down in mercy toward us, to provide us such a rich salvation, to pluck us out of the depths of sin and of death that we brought upon ourselves.

[7 : 12] And Lord, we give thanks today that he is alive as the Savior of his people, and not only alive but exalted to the right hand of the Father on high.

We thank you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the way in which the redemption that we enjoy in Jesus Christ was brought about, that you chose to come into this world in the person of the Son, to take our human nature to yourself and to enter into our plight as sinners without yourself becoming sinful.

We thank you, Lord, for your sinlessness, for the perfection of the life you lived in this world, and for the way that you took the sin of your people to yourself, so that you came to be regarded and made sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in you.

We thank you today, Lord, for the death you died, for the manner in which you died it, for the way you rose from the dead and achieved that triumphant victory over death, over sin.

We give thanks today for the grace that you give us to enable us to follow you, to enable us, Lord, to commit our life to you, and through all the circumstances of life, to know the benefit of your Spirit guiding us and teaching us, molding us into your image, and bringing us onwards in the life of faith.

[8 : 43] We thank you today for the fellowship of your church, for your church itself in the way that you have composed it, a body spiritual that is united to yourself.

We thank you today, Lord, for the benefits that come to us from belonging to your church, the benefits that come to us through the gospel, through that good news that brings to us the message of salvation and life in Jesus Christ.

And we thank you, Lord, today for our place in your church, for the way that we come to avail ourselves of the gospel and its message, of your word in our midst, and of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, where you have set forth for us in a different manner aspects of your salvation that we benefit from in receiving them.

We thank you, Lord, today for the prospect that we have by your will of coming once again at the beginning of this next year to come to meet together in the Lord's Supper.

We ask that you prepare the way for that. Lord, we know that we have many anxieties during these days, many anxieties in relation to this pandemic, this virus that is going about the world.

[10 : 02] Lord, we ask for your protection. We ask that you would go before us in your care. We pray especially that we may know that you are with your people in all their circumstances in life.

Whatever your providence may contain for us, help us to follow you. Help us to do so, Lord, in the only manner in which your word sets forth, in obedience to your will.

We pray today for your blessing here as a congregation. We thank you, Lord, for the many privileges we have as we reflect upon a year that is now coming to an end.

We thank you for all that you have been to us over this past year and more. We thank you, Lord, for the way in which you enable us to reflect upon your goodness, reflect upon the ways in which you have made yourself known to us.

We thank you for all who have come to know you savingly in this past year. We thank you for those of your people who have come to cry out to you for blessing, those who have strengthened, those who still feel their own weakness and continue to look to you.

[11 : 11] Lord God, we pray that you would continue with us and that you would be a portion in life and onwards through the issues of life and even death too. We thank you too, O Lord, today for all the ways in which your blessing has reached us as a people beyond this congregation we belong

to.

Bless every gathering of your people today throughout the world. Bless them especially in more difficult circumstances than we face. Lord, we recognize that there are many throughout the world today who know you and fear your name but cannot meet in freedom and peace like we do.

Remember your church in these troubled parts of the world, your church in places of great famine and deprivation where food is so scarce that we have an abundance.

Remember them in places where persecution is rife against you people and where others are determined to exterminate, if it were possible, all those who confess the name of Christ.

As we look into your word, Lord, we see other times in the history of your people and of the world when violence against your people was an aspect of the community that they lived in.

[12 : 25] And we thank you for the way that you preserved, for the way that you brought on your church despite all the efforts that were made to eliminate it and exterminate it from the earth.

We pray today, Lord, for thankfulness that this is our portion, that we have such a God who goes before us. We pray, Lord, today for those who have particular difficulties in our own congregation and our locality.

Remember those who are still anxious regarding the virus and who have not yet had the confidence of coming out to gather physically with your people.

Lord, remember them. We pray where they are. Be with them in their homes. Be with them as they, many of them will perhaps be watching today online and taking part in the service in that way.

We thank you for that facility. We pray that you would bless it and that you would bless throughout the world those who manage in that way to hear the gospel, to participate even in a visual way to the worship of your church.

[13 : 33] Remember too, O Lord, those who look after us in our times of need. We pray again for the NHS, for the hospital services and hospice and care homes locally here as well as nationally.

Bless them, Lord, we pray, as they provide for us. Be pleased, O Lord, to provide for them as they commit themselves and dedicate themselves to the well-being of others.

We pray for other groups in our locality, O Lord, who have such a valuable contribution to make to our community life.

We pray for the street pastors. We ask that you would bless them, O Lord, at this time as they continue to go out late at night and into the early hours of the morning, seeking to give practical and other help to those who are in need.

We ask that your blessing, Lord, will be with them, that your protective care will always be their portion, that they will know you, Lord, going before them and being with them and surrounding them in the activities that they engage in.

[14 : 38] We ask that you bless our police force. Bless them, O Lord, at this time of restriction for themselves financially and in many other challenges that they face.

We pray that your blessing will rest upon them. We pray that you would maintain them, Lord, in integrity and in decency and that they be an example to us in our community.

We pray that you would grant blessing also, Lord, to those who look after us when our loved ones are taken away. We pray for the local undertaker and for his staff. We thank you for them and we thank you for the contribution they continue to make to our community.

Bless them, Lord, we pray, and continue to provide for them. We pray, too, for those who have lost employment. O Lord, we ask that those who have difficulties now facing the end of this year and without the regular wages that they relied upon, bless them, we pray.

Bless all those who have fallen into debt. Remember them, O Lord, as they struggle through the issues relating to debt. We pray for those who are tempted to enter into more debt at this time of year to provide for their children or relatives, seeing others that have a greater abundance of wealth than they have.

[15 : 58] O Lord, prevent them, we pray, from falling into further debt and help us to provide for those in need. We thank you for the food bank and we thank you for the provision that is made locally by that.

And we pray that your blessing will continue to be with those who administer it and with those also, Lord, who frequent it and use it and who are thankful for it.

And so we pray that your blessing will continue with us as a congregation. Bless today, we pray, our young people, our children, as they meet in Sunday school and creche and tweenies. Remember

them, Lord, we pray, and protect them at this time as well as our schools and our teachers as we commit them to you also.

We thank you for the contribution of our treasurer, Murdo MacPhail, over these many years. We thank you, Lord, for all that he has done and continues to do for the congregation.

And we pray that you'd bless him as he relinquishes the duties of treasurer. And we pray, too, that you'd bless Duny and Gordon as they take up the role of treasurer and gift aid administrator.

[17:04] We pray that you'd bless them, Lord, as they take up these new roles for themselves. We thank you for them. And for all others who contribute to the life of the congregation, many of whose contributions remain hidden from sight.

And yet, Lord, we know how valuable they are in your sight. So continue with us, we pray now, as we seek your blessing and as we confess our sin. Pardon us, we pray our many transgressions. Wash us freely in the blood of Christ. For his name we ask it. Amen. Let's read God's word now from the Gospel of John. Gospel of John, chapter 21.

We'll read from verse 15 through to the end of verse 25. John's Gospel at verse 15 of chapter 21. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

[18:10] He said to him, Feed my lambs. He said to him a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. He said to him, Tend my sheep.

He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know everything.

You know that I love you. Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep. 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. This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.

And after saying this, he said to him, Follow me. Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, Lord, who is he that is going to betray you?

[19:16] When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man? Jesus said to him, If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?

You follow me. So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not going to die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things and who has written these things and we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did where every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Amen, and may God bless to us again our reading of his own holy word. We're going to sing once more to his praise in Psalm 141 and sing Psalm's version this time, Psalm 141 verses 1 to 4.

O Lord, I call to you, come quickly, I'm in need, and when I cry to you for help, to my appeal give heed.

[20:36] Like incense, may my prayer before your face arise, the raising of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. Keep watch, Lord, on my mouth and guard my lips, I pray.

Let not my heart to evil thoughts be drawn and led astray. Keep me from taking part in what the evil do. Let me not taste their choicest food, lest I be false to you.

These verses, Psalm 141, O Lord, I call to you. O Lord, I call to you, come quickly, I'm in need.

And when I cry to you for help, to my appeal give heed, like incense, may my prayer before your face arise.

The raising of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

[22:06] Keep watch, Lord, on my mouth, and guard my lips, I pray.

Let not my heart to evil thoughts be gone and let us pray.

Keep me from taking part in what the evil do.

Let me not taste their choicest food, lest I be false to you.

Well, if you turn with me now, please, to John chapter 21. I'm going to look at a couple of verses from this chapter in the context, particularly verses 19 and 22.

[23 : 21] John chapter 21 at verse 19, where we read Jesus saying to Peter, after saying this, he said to him, follow me.

And then also in verse 22, we have the same emphasis. Jesus said to him, if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.

Well, this is going to be the last of our short series of studies in following Jesus, as we followed that theme throughout some passages in the Gospels. As you know, the discipleship of Peter began with Christ's call, follow me.

And his discipleship, the record we have of it in the Gospels, finishes with that same note of Jesus saying to him, follow me. Of course, we have Peter later in the book of Acts as well.

But in relation to the ministry of Jesus himself on earth, this is what you find emphasized, that he began with a response to the words of Jesus to follow him, along with the other disciples, of course, too.

[24 : 29] And as you come here to this passage, he finishes his relationship here on earth with Peter with these words, follow me.

And that's really Christ's emphasis, isn't it, for the whole of our Christian life. Here is Peter being told that this is really what's in store for him, that this is the kind of death that he's going to die. He's giving it some sort of description where he's talking about him being bound and being taken where he wouldn't want to go himself to show what kind of death he would die.

And Jesus, after he said this, he said, follow me. In other words, whatever is going to be Christ's plan for Peter, Jesus says to him here, follow me.

That's how it is for ourselves, too, all the way through life and through into death. This is what we would want to do. This is what we would want to hear. And this is what we'd want to respond positively to, the voice of Jesus saying, follow me.

[25 : 28] That's his emphasis for the whole of our Christian journey. It's a following of Christ. And the section division here really tends in a way to obscure the close relation between the verses there, 15 to 19, and then 20 to the end of the passage because the central issue in it really is about following Jesus.

You have to go quickly from verse 19 into 20 and just leave out the heading there, Jesus and the beloved apostle, however helpful that is. Sometimes these divisions are good. Sometimes they do obscure the closeness of the verses as they hang together in the way that they were put together. And so we're following that through in the way that it goes from the one passage to the other. And the central issue being follow me. So the two things that I want to apply to myself and then set before you arising from the passages is follow Jesus whatever is in his plan for you.

Follow Jesus whatever is in his plan for you. And secondly, follow Jesus whatever anyone else will do. Follow Jesus whatever you see in anybody else's life be they Christians or atheists or whoever. Follow Jesus. What is that to you? You follow him. That's the word of Jesus to us today. So first of all, follow Jesus whatever is in his plan for you.

[26 : 59] Now here you see verses 18 to 19 Jesus saying to Peter 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. This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God and when he had said this he said to him follow me.

Now you recall how Peter in his self-confidence had said as we read in Luke 22 in the past studies that we had where Jesus in saying things about what was going to happen to him.

Luke chapter 22 and at verse 33 you remember how confidently Jesus sorry Peter responded to Jesus' teaching there where he said whatever else will happen whatever whoever will deny you I will not deny you I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.

And of course he ended up as we saw denying the Lord three times as Jesus there predicted I tell you Peter the cock will not crow this day till you deny me three times that you know me.

[28 : 15] Now here is Jesus and he's saying to him this is going to be what the later stage of your life is this is what your life is going to end like.

It's not going to be the way you would have planned it it's not going to be your preference it's not going to be how you would have put it together it's not going to be how you would have come to the end stage of your life had it been left in your own hands this is what my will is for you this is my plan for you this is how it will be as I have actually done it you will have a loss of freedom you're not

going to have things the way that you have them now you're not going to have the same liberties as you have now there are going to be restrictions upon your life people are going to actually carry you where you would not want to go and you're going to have the kind of death that you would not have chosen for yourself and tradition tells us that Peter actually was put to death by crucifixion not mentioned in the Bible but it's fairly reliable that that is in fact how his life ended that that's what Christ was pointing out to here though it's not specified as such yet he said to him despite all that this is what is going to this is the future as I'm telling you so Peter is really knowing that this is what's going to happen to him and yet here is Jesus saying to him follow me and that's how it is for ourselves isn't it there are so many things in our life's experience that we would not have chosen ourselves that we would not have put together in the way that Christ has put it together in his plan for us and his emphasis for us today is follow Jesus whatever is in his plan for you however different it may be to the way you would have chosen your life to be however different the pattern of it is to the way you would have woven it together

I would have woven it together Jesus is saying to us today and this is lovingly on his part this is really his direction for our life this is something by which he is seeking that our life will be secure as we follow this direction as we follow this directive as we follow what he is saying to us in this passage whatever it's going to be he says follow me all of us here have something today in our life that we would not have chosen for ourselves maybe it's an illness you might have had a prognosis either here or if you're watching online something that you would not actually have expected or wanted something that's by the choice of Jesus by the plan of Jesus has entered into your life's experience it's something you're now going to have to live with just as Peter had to live with this prediction on the part of Jesus this truth on the part of Jesus as to the later stage of his life and the kind of death he was going to face so it is for ourselves something that's come unexpectedly into your life that hampers you that has as it were its hold upon you now and will continue like that as far as you see through to the end of your life it's not as you would have chosen but Christ has chosen it for you

God has himself determined this is what is in his plan for you and however that may be in terms of looking into the future and however concerning it may be to you and to me to have that kind of prognosis of illness of something that you have to live with whether it's mental or physical there it is it's in God's plan it's in God's wisdom that has been put there it's placed there deliberately on his part it's not an accident it's not something you would have chosen it's not something anyone else would have chosen for you it's not what your loved ones would have chosen but despite all that you may have in terms of fear and anxiety or whatever Jesus is saying to you today follow me follow me the key to dealing with it is following Jesus put your trust in him set your affection upon him look beyond the things of the present to where he leads you and guides you into this wonderful eternal life that he has provided for us maybe it's a bereavement all of us or most of us have experienced bereavement in our families up to now and sometimes these bereavements were expected sometimes they were not whatever kind of bereavement it is expected or otherwise it's always painful and it's particularly painful when it's not expected when it's been in difficult circumstances when there's an element of tragedy in it when there's something that deeply deeply pains the heart over and above what you might call is the natural course of life and Jesus is saying that's your lot and he's not saying that coldly he's not saying that matter of fact like he's saying that as he said to Peter here this is what

I've chosen for you why have I chosen this for you so that you will follow me so that you place your trust in me because placing your trust in me places your trust in one who's been there ahead of you and not just ahead of you in terms of sharing with others in the grief that bereavement brings but also being himself one who's been through death one who has experienced death one who's gone through all elements of death and on into the victory of resurrection and so Jesus is saying to me today yes your loved ones were taken away they came to the end of their lives they came to end their lives in circumstances you would not have chosen you would rather have kept them with you you would rather they were still there to be loved in this world but Jesus is saying after saying this he's saying follow me why should you not follow him though his though his will though his though his plan for you as we'll see later too is involves these difficulties these trials these pains follow me and of course there's as it is for Peter here there's old age there's the troubles of old age there's the limitations of old age

[34 : 52] I'm sure none of us is facing the prospect of old age if God spares us to see it without some kind of concern over it and Jesus is saying whatever that will bring whatever is in my lot for

you whatever is in my plan for you as your life goes on as you anticipate old age or as you have entered old age already whatever that category actually means wherever it begins I don't know but Jesus is saying follow me put your trust in me I am as relevant to you in your old age as I was for you in your young days I'm as capable of looking after you in your limitations of old age as I was looking after you in your young and exuberant days you see whatever it is in the lot that Jesus has appointed for us he is always saying to us follow me follow me because it's by far the best indeed it's the only thing to do that's going to be of benefit to us and of course there is as he points out to Peter here the inevitability of death the inevitability of death for us it's not just a matter of living with an illness difficult though that is at times it's not just a matter of living with bereavement difficult though that is always it's also a matter of facing death something that many people in the world don't want to think about very seriously something they know is inevitable and yet they don't really want to consider it as a way of preparing for it being ready when it comes and Jesus is saying to Peter

Peter this is what it's going to be like for you this is the kind of death you're going to die you're going to be bound you're going to have your limitations your ability to go from place to place curtailed and limited follow me nevertheless and following Jesus into death as far as death right through to the end of our life's journey in this world solemn point though it is in thinking about death God has given us the advantage of the gospel the advantage of his word in telling us exactly what death is about and where it came about and how it came about and what it's not only what it's about and how it came about but how it has been defeated yes it has been defeated it's been defeated in Jesus himself because following Jesus means following the victor following the one who has triumphed over death following the one who has been to the grave and rose out of it following the one who went into the death of the cross the death in which he bore the sin of his people and the penalty that that sin entailed and deserved and emerging from it victorious in the words it is finished

I have done it I've been successful I've managed this for you he's saying and so for you and for me as well despite the fact that you know that you're going to die and at some time it's going to come in your existence as well and your experience and mine whenever and wherever it is going to happen you know it's going to happen and Jesus is saying follow me follow the victor follow the one who's already in charge of death death is not something outside of his grasp not something outside of his control not something outside of his kingship or his lordship when Jesus rose triumphantly from the grave and then later ascended to heaven to take his place at the right hand of God he was ascending there triumphantly remember Psalm 68 where you find that wonderful emphasis he has led captivity captive he has ascended up on high led captivity captive those who are under the captivity of death and rescued from death he has led them up in his train as it were following him all the way through to heaven unless you face death today as a Christian you're facing something something solemn something serious something that really is the end of everything in this life that you know as far as the natural life we live is concerned but you're facing death as a Christian with your trust in the Lord united to Christ and therefore united to his victory and united to his triumph united to his exaltation united to the glory in which he now lives and if you're not a Christian today if you're not following him we haven't begun to follow him in the sense in which we've seen through these studies following him by receiving him and accepting him and coming to take him as your own personal savior if that's not the case then sadly this doesn't apply to you see to it if that is the case that you deal with that issue immediately because if you die without him you die eternally if you die without him there's no rescue from a lost eternity the rescue takes place in this world and you have the advantage of the gospel in this world you have the advantage of the offer of Christ offering himself to you in the gospel why is he offering himself to you why do we think of it as God's great gift because that's what the word of God describes it as

God's great gift of salvation in his son why is it described so that you will take him you will receive gifts this Christmas time God willing and the gifts that you receive may not be what you expected it may not be what you wanted but you're not going to just throw them in a corner and leave them unwrapped you're not going to say thank you and then not actually open to see what it is because thank you means accepting it as you see it as it's offered to you as you know its contents and our thank you to God for the provision of eternal life in Jesus Christ is receiving Jesus that's our thank you that's our gratitude that's our act of thankfulness in opening this gift and taking him for ourselves follow me so follow me whatever is in his plan for you

I know that's very easy for me to say but I have to apply to myself as well I hope I say nothing in regard to the preaching of the gospel and points that I've raised here in this first part of our study today that I don't apply to myself but whatever it is in God's plan for us whether it's illness whether it's bereavement whether it's anticipation of death itself whatever other things there may be in relation to life's experience Jesus through it all today is speaking to you and to me saying follow me follow me secondly follow Jesus whatever anyone else does now you see here Peter's inquiry from verse 20 he turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them the one who had been reclining at table close to him and said Lord who is he that is going to betray you and when Peter saw him he said Lord what about this man we take it that this was the apostle John Jesus said to him if it is my will that he remain until I come what is that to you you follow me we don't know why [42 : 49] Peter inquired about John this way maybe it was a concern that John wouldn't have to suffer the way that he was here telling Peter was going to be the case with him we don't know maybe he was just curious in any case the response of Jesus is really significant because what Jesus said is if it is my will that he remains until I come what is that to you you follow me in other words he's saying whatever my plan is for him that's my plan for him my plan for you may be very different doesn't matter it's not really your concern he's saying to actually try and work out or find out what's in my plan for somebody else it's your business it's your privilege to follow me what is that to you you follow me making comparisons is something that's very frequently done by each one of us I'm sure as we compare ourselves to others that's something we very often should not do but it's one of the faults that we have as sinful human beings we're all prone to make a comparison with other people maybe comparison with looking at the faults of other people which we're more ready to do than look at their positive qualities in any case we're very often carrying out these comparisons and comparing ourselves and measuring ourselves in regard to them well the only reliable comparison for us to make is with

Jesus himself because for a start we don't really know for sure and infallibly what is in fact the case in anybody else's life why should we make comparisons when we've got our own life to live anyway when it's our duty and privilege as Jesus is saying here to Peter what is that to you you follow me and following him in other words he's saying don't make it your concern to just live by what you see in other people's lives whatever you find in other people's lives you've got your own life to live you've got your own following of me to carry through notice what he's saying here if it is my will if it is my will that he remain till I come what is that to you see that's where that's where really everything boils down to that doesn't it what is my will for him what is Christ's will for you what is Christ's will for me whatever is the case for other people what he's saying to you and to me today it's my will for you that really you need to be concerned about whatever is in my plan for you you follow me whatever you see in somebody else's life you follow me remember

Romans chapter 12 one of the passages in the Bible that speaks about the unity or the not just the unity of God's people but also the diversity within that unity Romans 12 and verses 4 to 8 where he's saying for the grace given to him let each of you according to the measure of faith that God has assigned for us in one body we have many members and the members do not all have the same function so we though many are one body in Christ and individually members one of another having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us let us use them and then he mentions some of them there having gifts given to us the gifts of God that is given to us they differ according to the grace given to us let us use them we don't have the gifts perhaps that others have we don't compare ourselves with others envying the gifts that they have and wishing they were our own what it's the responsibility and the privilege and the duty of each person that

I have gifted with whatever gifts I have gifted them with to use those gifts alongside of the others in harmony with the others for the overall good of my church that's what he's saying if you're listening to the likes of Handel's Messiah for example that wonderful oratorio and you come to the well known hallelujah chorus just imagine if a choir that was setting out to sing that wonderful piece of music decided one day well I'm not going to follow Handel's arrangement of this chorus I think we'll just all sing the same notes and we'll have the same timing and we'll see how it sounds it would be a bit of a disaster wouldn't it instead of that brilliant combination of varying notes and varying expressions and various timings and harmonies and all the different tones that you've got built into it as the composer himself devised if you just had one single note and no variety what difference that would make it is the same spiritually for

God's church he has apportioned gifts to his people making them different to each other in terms of the gifts even the personalities that they are but they belong together they exist together they live together they work together they witness together they have that kind of combination of gifts that makes up the brilliance of God's kingdom the variety and the magnificence of God's endowment of his people with gifts that form his church in this world and will form his church in glory and comparing ourselves with others can very easily in a sense derail if you like our Christian service focus has to be on what God has given us to be and to do what kind of person he's made us to be as Christians what kind of gifts has he given us whatever gifts he's given to somebody else whatever role you have in the world or in the church or in your career that's his appointment that's his apportionment that is how he has distributed that gift to you may be very different to what he has given others but what is that to you you follow me you use your gifts in following

[49 : 11] Jesus in living for Jesus in saving Jesus the way he himself has given these gifts to you what if there are better preachers in the world than I am of course there are many many times what is that to me I have to live and I have to preach and I have to minister the way God has given me the privilege and the opportunity and the gifts to do so and for yourself too what if there are more discerning Christians in the world than you are yourself you may be saying of yourself what if others are more gifted in working with younger people what if others are more gifted in looking to the needs of older people what if others are more gifted theologically in their understanding what if other churches think differently to the way we he's saying you follow me that's the emphasis you follow me all of these differences only add to the richness of

God's kingdom as long as of course they're true to the word of God true to God's own specification as to what our life is to be individually and together but this is his emphasis for us today friends as we fast hasten towards the end of this year a year that's been so difficult so trying above most of the years that we've ever lived and as it looks as if these difficulties with COVID and other related issues are going to carry forward into the next year as well and however much beyond that we don't know God only knows but here is Christ's vision for you and for the way from

Jesus is to begin to doubt Jesus is to let the thought into your mind that somehow Jesus is not as wise as you first made out none of that has changed as far as Christ is concerned he's still the Christ he's still the king he's still in control he's still the governor he's still the one in charge of your life and of your destiny and of this congregation you follow me you follow me that's the note repeated throughout this great chapter let me finish with this you can see the way a rumor arose in regard to what Jesus said the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die but if it is my will that he remain till

I come what is that to you see here is the early church of the time some of them had heard this statement about Peter and what Jesus had said to Peter and very soon it was distorted into a rumor that he wasn't going to die at all this companion of Peter's but that's not of course what Jesus said but if it's my will that you remain till I come what is that to you what's the point the point is they lost sight so quickly of the main point that Jesus made the words of Jesus had been turned around to something that he didn't actually mean at all when he spoke in this way to Peter how easily you and I also can be diverted from the main issues that Christ and God is setting before us all sorts of things can divert our minds from the main issue we find that when we read the word of God for example sometimes we read passages or sometimes we hear or read books about them or perhaps hear sermons about them and they've missed the point they've focused on some of the peripheral issues in the passage focused on something that's not really the most important point that's being taught in the passage or the most important point that

Jesus is saying to his church here is something also to take from the passage today don't be diverted from the main issues of the gospel from the main issues that God is setting before you in his word don't be diverted from this main issue as well that we're looking at today this one single issue of following Jesus don't let anything distract you from that don't let anything derail your life so that you begin to follow someone else the main issue for me today the main issue for you today from this passage is how is it with my walk with Jesus how is it in my life of following Jesus how is it in my relationship with God am I today single mindedly setting my heart to follow him to follow him whatever is in his plan for me though

[54 : 52] I know that some of that may be very difficult very trying very testing but is it my resolve am I determined that come what may as God will enable me by his grace to follow my savior whatever is in his plan for me and as it to a resolve to follow Jesus whatever you see in somebody

else's life whatever anyone else does this is discipleship this is this is what it is to be a Christian follow me Jesus is saying hear that voice listen to that command respond obediently live your life as one who is following the king of kings let's pray lord our gracious god we thank you today for the way you set out for us in your word aspects of that path of following you lord we know that there are many things in your life's plan for us that we would not have chosen for ourselves that there are many things yet to be revealed in our life's plan as you have devised it we know lord the certainty of death at the end of it we pray lord that as we find these things specified in your word that we may indeed grow in our wisdom in following you that we may apply our hearts to wisdom and so learn to number our days and to continue lord to place our trust in you remember us despite all that is taking place in the world help us lord whatever we find that might divert us from that life of following you give us grace we pray to resist it to overcome it and help us with that single mindedness that you require of your disciples to continue to follow you in that life of faith bless us throughout the day we pray be with

Scott this evening as he leads us in the worship grant him your blessing oh Lord in these days and be with us as we continue to seek as a congregation to serve you in this locality and all of these things we seek with the pardon of our sin for Jesus sake amen we're going to conclude our worship singing now in Psalm 119 Psalm 119 and that's in the same Psalms version and from the beginning of the Psalm page 157 blessed are those of blameless ways who live according to God's word blessed are those who keep his laws who with their whole heart seek the Lord all the way through to verse 8 I'll praise you with an upright heart as your just laws are learned by me all your decrees I will obey do not forsake me utterly first section there of Psalm 119 to God's praise blessed are those of blameless ways who live according to

God's word blessed are those who keep his laws who with their whole hearts seek the Lord they keep themselves from doing wrong by walking in his perfect ways you have established laws for us that are to be obeyed always oh that my ways were steadfast

Lord in making your decrees my aim so when I think on your commands I would not feel this grace or shame I'll praise you with an upright heart as your just laws are learned by me all your decrees peace I will obey do not forsake me utterly now may the grace of the Lord

Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more Amen ... the Thank you.