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**The Beloved Witness**

**John 21.20-25**

**Series: Signs of Life**

**January 29, 2023**

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- I. Introduction
  - A. It's interesting how we mark time
    - 1. We often do it by the calendar
      - a. That would probably be the normal way
      - b. Even though it may not be the most memorable
  - B. But we also mark the time by significant events in our lives
    - 1. Most of us remember where we were on 9/11/2001 – the day planes flew into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon
      - a. Because for our generation there was the time before 9/11 and the time after 9/11
      - b. And the character of the time would never be the same
  - C. In our lives I remember quite vividly the year 1980
    - 1. It was the year I was hired at West Virginia University
      - a. It began a 32 year period where we raised our children
      - b. Where I began a fruitful academic career
      - c. Where we were led to a church where we would then be led into ministry
    - 2. And it's impossible for us to imagine what life would be like today had we not had those three decades in Morgantown, WV
      - a. 1980 was a very significant marker of time for our family
  - D. Of course, 2013 was also a significant time for us
    - 1. That was when our time in Morgantown, WV came to a conclusion
      - a. I retired from WVU
      - b. We backed up our home
      - c. And moved to Fort Myers Florida
      - d. In a snowstorm!
    - 2. It marked the time when God called us to come minister at TVC
      - a. That was 10 years ago this week
      - b. We remember that time like it was yesterday
  - E. 2016 was another time marker for us
    - 1. It was April
      - a. Following a Sunday service I drove to Daytona Beach for a District meeting
      - b. Following the meeting on that Monday evening I drove back home
    - 2. Tuesday I spent the day in meetings with several church committees
      - a. Went to bed

- b. But the sleep was restless
    - c. I couldn't get comfortable; eventually, early in the morning, I got up to go to the bathroom
    - d. Immediately got sick in the bathroom
    - e. But it wasn't the normal sickness – Jean recognized that right away
    - f. She checked my blood pressure and called 911
    - g. I was having a heart attack
  - 3. Now heart attacks are significant events, I think you would agree
    - a. Significant enough to mark time
    - b. Praise God that through timely and professional medical intervention, and two stents later, and of course, the Great Physician – there would be no significant heart damage
    - c. But for us there would be the time before the heart attack and the time after the heart attack
  - 4. That will be seven years ago this April
- F. I say all of that to say that 2 ½ weeks later I started preaching through the Gospel of John
  - 1. We've spent more than six years in this wonderful book
  - 2. It hasn't been uninterrupted, of course
    - a. It's been my practice to do different series on communion Sundays
    - b. There have been Advent series
    - c. There have been special messages for days like Palm Sunday and Easter
    - d. Each year I've preached about the mission of The Village Church
    - e. And there was another significant series marking the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation
  - 3. But our main course, our bread and butter, over more than six years has been the Gospel of John
- G. And this morning will be the final message in the Gospel of John
  - 1. Message number 145
    - a. Yes, I keep track...
- H. Now to spend that much time in one book would be unsustainable unless the Gospel of John weren't the treasure chest of biblical riches that it is
  - 1. Covering essentially every major doctrine of the Christian faith
    - a. In a memorable way
    - b. In an engaging style that could only come from the pen of the Apostle John
  - 2. And most importantly, is itself the very Word of God
    - a. Revealing the Son of God
    - b. To be the incarnate Savior that we all so desperately need

## II. **John's Purpose**

- A. John's purpose is clearly stated
  - 1. Although, oddly, and typically John-like – he states it toward the end of the book

2. **John 20:30-31** (ESV) —
    - a. 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
    - b. 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
    - c. and that by believing you may have life in his name.
  3. Not everyone has been here through the entire series – which we titled, based on these verses, “Signs of Life”
    - a. But it bears asking, as we come to a conclusion of this series
    - b. Do you now believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?
    - c. And, have you experienced “life in his name” – the abundant life (**John 10.10**)?
  4. If you do not yet believe, if you have not yet experienced life in his name, now is the time – maybe the last time – to seriously consider the testimony of this witness, John the Apostle
- B. **The Signs**
1. Consider the signs that John has recorded for us
    - a. **Changed the Water into Wine** (**John 2.1-11**)
    - b. **Healed the Royal Official’s Son** (**John 4.46-54**)
    - c. **Healed the Paralyzed Man** at the pool of Bethesda (**John 5.1-15**)
    - d. **Fed the 5,000** (**John 6.5-14**)
    - e. **Walked on Water** (**John 6.16-21**)
    - f. **Healed the Man Born Blind** (**John 9.1-7**)
    - g. **Raised Lazarus from the Dead** (**John 11.1-45**)
  2. Seven signs
    - a. Of course, as we read in the purpose statement, there were many others that Jesus did
    - b. But John chose seven to include – a good biblical number!
    - c. Seven which demonstrated Jesus’ compassion, His power, His sovereignty over the natural world, His control of life and death
  3. Signs – because they signify something about Jesus
    - a. Some of them quite explicitly
    - b. Fed the 5,000 so He could teach that He is the **Bread of Life**
    - c. Healed the man born blind so He could demonstrate that He is the **Light of the World**
    - d. Raised Lazarus from the dead to show that He is the **Resurrection and the Life**
    - e. All of the signs confirm that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God
    - f. No one could do the signs that He did unless He is God
- C. **The Truths**
1. In addition to the signs, there are the great truths of the gospel, the essential doctrines, that John has not just articulated, but illustrated, in his own unique way
  2. **The Eternal Nature of the Son of God**

3. The Creation
4. The Prophetic Ministry of the Baptist
5. Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world
6. The nature of True Discipleship
7. The prophecy of the Destruction of the Temple
8. The necessity of being Born Again (regeneration)
9. The Love of God for a broken world
10. The good news of salvation Beyond the Jewish People – Samaritans and Gentiles
11. The Healing Ministry of Jesus
12. The Equality of the Son and the Father
13. The Sovereignty of God in saving a people for Himself
14. The Supremacy of Christ over the Sabbath
15. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit
16. The Forgiveness of Sin that comes through Jesus
17. The Freedom that comes through abiding in Christ
18. The reality of Satan and Evil
19. The Supremacy of Jesus over Abraham
20. The Shepherding Ministry of Jesus
21. The Authority of Christ to lay down His own life for His sheep
22. The Compassion of Jesus for the grieving and hurting as He wept over the death of Lazarus
23. The Kingship of Jesus
24. The inherent Sinfulness of Humanity apart from the transforming grace of God
25. The Servanthood of Christ, and His model for His disciples
26. The Teaching of Jesus to Love One Another
27. The Identity of Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life
28. The Necessity of Coming to God Through Christ
29. The relationship of the World to Christ and His Church
30. The Sovereignty of Christ over His own Suffering
31. The Suffering of Christ as our Substitute
32. The victory of Christ in His Resurrection from the dead
33. Oh, the truths we have encountered in our study!
  - a. Do you now believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?
  - b. Are you now experiencing life in His name?

D. The Witness

1. John 21:24 (ESV) —
  - a. 24 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.
2. This gospel is not some fanciful novel
  - a. You will not find this in the fiction department of your local library (or at least you shouldn't!)
3. This is the testimony of an eye-witness to the life and ministry of Jesus

Christ

4. And whoever wrote those last words of the gospel – it appears to be an editorial addition
  - a. He confirms the authenticity, the veracity, the validity, the reliability of everything John has written
5. His testimony is true
  - a. Do you now believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?
  - b. Are you now experiencing life in His name?

### III. Peter and John

- A. Recall what this final section, this epilogue as it were, includes
- B. Jesus had appeared to the disciples following His resurrection
  1. John records three such occasions
    - a. Though there were others
  2. John records the first two Sunday encounters when He appears to the disciples in a locked room
    - a. One without Thomas, the other with him
  3. And Chapter 21 involves another encounter
    - a. Seven disciples were in Galilee fishing
    - b. They'd been out all night – caught nothing
    - c. Jesus shows up on the shore
    - d. Calls out to them to throw the net on the other side of the boat
    - e. And they catch 153 fish!
  4. They realize it's Jesus
    - a. Peter throws himself into the water, half swims, half wades to shore (they were about 100 yards away)
    - b. The others gather the fish in the boat and make their way to shore
  5. And when they get there they find Jesus cooking breakfast
- C. They have a wonderful time of fellowship and encouragement around a morning repast
  1. Then Jesus takes care of unfinished business with Peter
  2. He restores Peter
    - a. Peter – who had denied Jesus three times in the events leading up to His crucifixion
    - b. Jesus engages in His famous inquiry about Peter's love for Jesus
    - c. Each time affirming Peter in his ministry in feeding his sheep
    - d. You remember that, don't you?
    - e. "Do you love me?"
- D. Then Jesus reveals to Peter that in the later years of his life he would himself be crucified
  1. **John 21:18–19** (ESV) —
    - a. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted,
    - b. 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."

- c. 19 (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.”
  - 2. And then comes our text for this morning
- E. **John 21:20–23** (ESV) —
  - 1. 20 Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?”
  - 2. 21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?”
  - 3. 22 Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!”
  - 4. 23 So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die;
  - 5. 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?”
- F. Interesting encounter, that John includes to wrap up his testimony
  - 1. The disciple whom Jesus loved is, of course, John himself
  - 2. And the encounter indicates a fascinating relationship between Peter and John
    - a. And in fact, indicates that Peter, though restored, isn’t yet entirely sanctified
    - b. And he engages in a bit of a comparison
    - c. Which Paul would later condemn as foolish, unwise (**2 Corinthians 10.12**)
- G. Remember, Peter and John were in the inner circle of the inner circle
  - 1. There was the company of believers – probably more than 100 at the time of the crucifixion and resurrection
  - 2. There were the 12 disciples who became apostles – 11 without Judas Iscariot – they were the inner circle that Jesus chose
  - 3. Then there were the inner circle of the inner circle – Peter and John and John’s brother James
    - a. They were the three who were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration
    - b. They were the closest
- H. And now, Jesus has just told Peter that when he’s old...
  - 1. ... And you can identify with this can’t you
    - a. You used to be able to do all kinds of things when you were young
    - b. But eventually you’ll be old
    - c. And other people will be in charge of you
    - d. Other people will dress you
    - e. Other people will lead you
    - f. Lead you where you don’t want to go
  - 2. And then Jesus tells Peter that he will be crucified
  - 3. And Peter, naturally I think, says to himself – hey, I’m one of the three
    - a. John – he’s been with us from the beginning
    - b. He’s my best friend; he’s my bud

- c. What about him?
  - d. How's come I'm going to be crucified, and you haven't said anything about him?
- I. And Jesus tells Peter, "Mind your own business"
  - 1. "If it's my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"
- J. You know, we're all different
  - 1. We each have different personalities, different gifts, different desires, different levels of energy, different inclinations, different ambitions
    - a. God has made us uniquely
    - b. No one is exactly like anyone else
- K. **Peter**
  - 1. **Extrovert**
    - a. He's the initiator, the catalyst among the disciples
    - b. He's the first to respond
    - c. He's vocal about it
    - d. He wears his thoughts and emotions on his sleeve
  - 2. He was the one who made the great confession
    - a. He was the one who put his foot in his mouth and challenged Jesus right after he made his great confession!
  - 3. He was the one who cut off the servant's ear the night of Jesus' arrest
    - a. Nobody else did that
  - 4. He was the one who followed Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest's house
    - a. He was also the one who failed to acknowledge Jesus
    - b. But no one else was even in the same zip code
  - 5. Peter was "ready, fire, aim"
- L. **John**
  - 1. **Introvert**
    - a. Practically never hear anything John ever said
  - 2. He was the writer
    - a. Aside from Paul, he wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else
    - b. Whole gospel
    - c. Three epistles
    - d. The Revelation
  - 3. John was the thinker
    - a. He was "ready, aim, think about it, aim again, maybe fire, maybe think about it again, then fire"
    - b. He was "measure twice, cut once" kind of guy
  - 4. Very different from the impulsive Peter
- M. We should learn something by this example
  - 1. We shouldn't expect others to be like us
    - a. And we shouldn't expect ourselves to be like others
  - 2. We should – in a sanctified kind of way – mind our own business
- N. And how do we do that?

1. Well, we do that by obeying Jesus' final command

#### IV. The Final Command

- A. The last thing Jesus says in the Gospel of John...
  1. It's not the last thing Jesus says in His earthly ministry
    - a. Luke records Jesus speaking the Great Commission just before His ascension
  2. Acts 1:7-8 (ESV) —
    - a. 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.
    - b. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
  3. Then He was taken up into the clouds
    - a. So that was the last thing Jesus said
  4. But the last thing John records Jesus as saying in his Gospel is this:
    - a. "Follow me"
  5. He said it twice
    - a. After Jesus tells Peter that, when he's old, he will have his hands stretched out in crucifixion, He said it
    - b. John 21:19 (ESV) — 19 ... And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."
  6. And then, after Peter turned to Jesus and asked Him about John: "What about this man?"
    - a. John 21:22 (ESV) — 22 Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"
- B. Not that surprising that John ends his gospel with this final command: "Follow me"
  1. Because that's where John started his gospel
  2. John 1:38-39 (ESV) —
    - a. 38 Jesus turned and saw them [two of the disciples of John the Baptist] following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and you will see." ...
  3. One of the two was Simon Peter's brother, Andrew
    - a. He found Peter and told him about finding the Messiah
    - b. He brought him to Jesus
    - c. Jesus changed his name from Simon to Cephas (Peter)
  4. John 1:43 (ESV) —
    - a. 43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."
  5. So the Gospel of John begins with Jesus' first command
    - a. "Come, follow me"
  6. So the Gospel of John ends with Jesus last command
    - a. And it is the same as the first command



- b. “Follow me”
- C. Reminds me of Claudia Howard
  - 1. You don’t know Claudia
    - a. Long since with the Lord
    - b. She was our elderly next door neighbor when we lived in my grandfather’s house as a young married couple
    - c. We were trying as a young couple how to navigate living in the same town with two sets of in-laws
    - d. And her advice was – never forget it – “Start out the way you want to end up”
    - e. Won’t go into detail in what she meant by that – or what we understood that to mean
    - f. But “Start out the way you want to end up”
  - 2. That’s exactly what Jesus did
    - a. “Follow me” – that’s how He started
    - b. “Follow me” – that’s how He ended
  - 3. “Follow me” – bookends for the gospel of John
- D. Remember John’s purpose
  - 1. **John 20:30–31** (ESV) —
    - a. 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
    - b. 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
  - 2. What does believing that Jesus is the Christ mean? What does believing in Christ look like
    - a. It means, **“Follow me”**
    - b. Not me – Jesus, of course
    - c. Follow Jesus
    - d. That’s what believing looks like
  - 3. And if you follow Jesus, you won’t compare yourselves with other people
    - a. You won’t look sideways at your friends, even at those you admire
    - b. You’ll look straight ahead – look at Jesus
    - c. And follow Him
    - d. Where He leads you
  - 4. That’s not the only place we learn about this command – “Follow me”
  - 5. **Luke 9:23–25** (ESV) —
    - a. 23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and **follow me**.”
    - b. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.
    - c. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?
  - 6. Jesus, in this episode, puts flesh on those bones
    - a. He spells out what “Follow me” looks like

7. Both a negative and a positive dimension to it
    - a. Negative – deny oneself
    - b. Positive – take up the cross of Jesus
- E. **Follow Me**
1. **In Self-denying**
    - a. We are to set aside anything that we would be attached to that would distract us from wholeheartedly following Jesus
    - b. Certainly means sins
    - c. The Bible talks about besetting sins – those sins that we find ourselves committing habitually
    - d. Those sins that we just don't think we can stop committing
    - e. Those sins that we really want to hang on to
    - f. We need to deny ourselves our sinful impulses
    - g. God gives us, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, the capacity to deny ourselves
    - h. We need to follow the Spirit's influence, His voice, and resist, by His grace and power, the inclination to sin
    - i. But it also means even good things that distract us from our commitment to Christ
    - j. Things that are not, in and of themselves, sinful
    - k. But things that are obstacles in our devotion to Christ
    - l. "Let him deny himself..."
  2. **In Cross-carrying**
    - a. "Take up his cross daily"
    - b. We have so completely misconstrued that verse over the years
    - c. Kind of like a difficult family member
    - d. Saying: "Behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law"
    - e. People often joke about that difficult in-law by saying "Well, I guess that's my cross to bear"
    - f. No!
    - g. If you take up the cross of Jesus, you are taking up the means of your own execution
    - h. Bible study in France during a month of ministry and we were studying a parallel passage of this Luke text
    - i. And people were all over the place about taking up one's cross
    - j. So after a while I interjected to the group, "Some of you (speaking of some of the ladies in the group) are wearing a cross. We're in France – why don't you wear a guillotine instead?"
    - k. The cross and guillotine have the same function – instruments of execution
    - l. Only in this case, you're carrying it yourself for yourself
    - m. You're carrying the means of your own execution
    - n. But here's the thing – you're doing it joyfully!
    - o. Like it's the greatest privilege imaginable, that you could be so

identified with Jesus, that you would be willing to do anything for Him – even to die for Him

- p. **Hebrews 12:2** (ESV) — 2 ... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...
  - q. The joy set before Him – the redemption of His people
  - r. And you can participate in that redemption
  - s. By taking up your cross daily
  - t. “Whatever you want, Lord – I will count it joy to follow You – even to death”
  - u. Do you still believe?
3. **In Eye-fixing**
- a. In order to follow Jesus, you need to keep you eyes on Him
  - b. **Hebrews 12:1–2** (ESV) — 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, [**fixing your eyes on Jesus**] the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
  - c. Keeping your eyes on Jesus, you won’t be wandering off to look sideways at others
  - d. But you will stay on the path Jesus has for you
  - e. And you’ll find the destiny Jesus has for you
- F. Do you still believe?
- 1. I hope so – because if not you’ll miss the reward
  - 2. **Luke 9:23–25** (ESV) —
    - a. 23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.
    - b. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?
  - 3. You will save yourself when you
    - a. Deny yourself
    - b. Take up His cross
    - c. And follow Him
- G. Everything John wrote in his gospel is summed up in this final command of Jesus
- 1. **“Follow me!”**