

Follow thou me

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to consider words you will find in the Gospel according to John chapter 21. And we may read at verse 20.

The Gospel according to John chapter 21. Reading at verse 20. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also leaned on his breast at supper and said, Lord, would you see that betrayeth thee?

Peter, seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

Follow thou me. Especially the words at the end of verse 22. What is that to thee? Follow thou me. If you read the previous chapter, the 20th, you would almost conclude as you read it that John is drawing his Gospel to a close.

It has been said that this 21st chapter is as though, it's like an appendix to the rest of the book. It's as though he couldn't put his pen down without a, a, doing something that was in his heart to do.

[1 : 42] And therefore he took it up again and has been said, and has written something of enduring interest for us.

he has raised, he has raised, as has been said, a monument, more durable than brass, not only to his master, the Lord Jesus Christ, but to his own very good friend, Peter.

The whole chapter really is about Jesus Christ and Peter. The chapter in which he is publicly restored to the work to which God had called him.

And in it we have a miracle performed by Jesus that prompted action on the part of Peter. We have a question, a very important question, addressed to Peter by the Lord.

A question that demanded and indeed produced, demanded an answer from him. A question that provoked grief on the part of Peter.

[2 : 47] Grief that the Lord had to ask him this question, lovest thou me? And the answer that Peter gave the Lord was accompanied by a requirement on his part to serve the Lord Jesus, feed my lambs and feed my sheep.

And that leads us to the passage, the part of which I want to deal with here tonight. The last section in this chapter in which the Lord addresses a command to Peter, a command that demanded obedience on his part.

A very simple one. Follow me. Follow thou me. Now notice, before we come to look at the import of this demand, notice, or rather command, notice the circumstances that gave rise to these words.

In verse 18, Jesus tells Peter, we are told here very pointedly, about the kind of life that he is to live and particularly the kind of death that he is to die.

And he puts it in a very striking way. Peter, he said, when you were old, when you were young, you did what you liked and you more or less went where you liked.

[4 : 07] But, as you grow older, another is going to direct you. He is going to lead you. And if you had your own way, you wouldn't take that way at all.

He will lead you in a way where you wouldn't go yourself, really. But he is in control of your life. And, we read in verse 19 that he had said this to him, signifying what death he was going to die.

And the inference is there that it's very clear that the Lord brings before Peter the circumstances and the very prime circumstances of the life that he was to live and the death that he was to die in his service.

And it looks as though the two of them are walking together at this time. And perhaps some movement behind Peter or in the vicinity drew his attention to his very close and dear friend John.

And looking around, he saw John. And of course, Peter being Peter, couldn't resist asking the question, Lord, what's going to become of John?

[5 : 18] To that question, Jesus gives the answer, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. If I will that it tarry till I come, that's not your concern.

Your great concern is to follow me. Now, these were the circumstances that gave rise to these well-known words.

And there are some people who claim that Jesus was here rebuking Peter. Well, he may have been. But, even if he were, there is great teaching in the rebuke that he did address to Peter.

There are some who say that Peter was giving praise to un-Jew inquisitiveness. Well, again, that may have been the case. But one cannot help feeling that the thought that really gave rise and the sentiment that gave rise to this question in Peter's heart, Lord, what is going to happen to John?

One cannot help feeling that the sentiment was not that of inquisitiveness, not that of crying into the affairs of someone else in a sort of a nosy way.

[6 : 41] Rather, it was the sentiment of the brotherly affection that he had for this disciple above all else because they had come together at a very early stage of their lives as we read here tonight in John in Matthew chapter 4.

For three years, they had been close companions of one another and of the Lord Jesus. And as the Lord's death drew nearer, so Peter and John were brought together closer in the bonds of brotherly love and affection that was to deepen even more after the Lord's death.

And one would like to think that it was the concern of love and affection for his friend that evoked this question in Peter's heart.

Lord, I wish I knew what was going to happen to John. Peter answered, the Lord answered, Peter, that is not your concern.

Your great duty and responsibility is to follow me. and I would like to look at these words tonight as they bring before us the chief business of life.

[8 : 06] As it has been said, the first and the most important step that anyone can take and having taken the most consistent life that one can live is namely to follow Jesus Christ.

Now, I know full well that there are difficulties that come in the way of many people, come in the way of us all in applying yourselves to this most important of all business in life.

There were people, for example, in the Bible who had profound questions to ask Jesus and he always countered their questions with his answer. Let us remind ourselves of one or two of them.

Remember the day that someone came to him and said, Lord, how many are going to be saved at the end of the day? And you know how many people are taken up with that question in their own circles from time to time?

People debate these things. I wonder if Jesus will have more people on his side at the day of judgment than the devil. Well, one would like to think that he will, but we don't know.

[9 : 11] The simple answer to the question is that we don't know. You remember when that man asked the Lord, are there many that will be saved? Remember the answer he gave them? That's not your concern.

Your concern is to make sure that you're saved. Strive to enter in at the straight gate. Remember another occasion, connection with discipleship. They wondered about the meaning of discipleship.

Remember the answer he gave? If any man will be my disciple, let him follow me. And here again in the case of Peter, genuinely concerned about the future with reference to John.

Just been told about the future with reference to himself, at least, in general terms. And now very concerned about John. To him the Lord gives the same answer.

Follow me. In other words, Peter, let nothing come between you and this great end. To you and to me, the Lord is saying the same thing tonight.

[10 : 15] Let nothing come between us and this great end for which we have been created. To follow the Lord Jesus Christ. As I've said, of course there are difficulties.

Of course there are questions arise. Problems that you have confronted with. Misgivings. And fears. And thoughts that cause anxiety and worry in your heart from time to time.

What he's saying to us all the time is this. Don't become so preoccupied with these things that you miss out on the great business of life.

Follow me. Now there's no one in this church tonight but a person who knows full well what it is to be preoccupied with things and very often preoccupied with perfectly legitimate things.

things that are real concern to yourself in your own life and within your own family in your community at your work in the congregation.

[11 : 22] church. We all know what it is to have thoughts crowding in upon your mind. And thoughts that take your mind away.

And what happens is that you find yourself spending hour after hour after hour mulling over these things. Turning them over in your mind.

Looking at them from every conceivable angle. you know the danger of that? As you continue like that you miss out. You fail to recognize the responsibility and the great responsibility that the Lord has laid at your door at that particular time.

What is that to thee? Follow thou me. And this is the great design of the gospel. The gospel comes to you and to me tonight so that it might make us more desirous than ever of following the Lord Jesus Christ.

By following we understand the word to me love, trust, serve, obey the Lord and commit your life and your way to the Lord.

[12 : 45] this becomes our clearly defined duty and our responsibility. One word sums it up. It is our priority in life.

Speculates about the truth, speculates about the future and the light of the present or even the light of the past, thinking about the unknown ways of God, wondering what is going to happen and what is the unrevealed will of God, wondering about these hidden providences, these things that have sprung up in your life and seem to have devastated your whole existence, thinking about these things, no doubt with forebodings, about the press, about the future and the light of the present, these things only come between us and this great end, this great business, follow me.

Now, there are various areas in which I would like to look at this with you tonight, apply it as it concerns ourselves in various ways. I want to look at four things in particular and look at these things very simply with you.

First of all, as regards sin, then, secondly, as regards providence, thirdly, as regards the teaching of the Bible, and finally, connection again, related to providence with reference to the future as it affects ourselves.

First of all, with reference to sin. Now, those of you who were here this morning in the Gaelic service will remember quoting one of the great sayings of Rabbi Duncan that the most irrational thing in God's universe is sin.

[14 : 50] Irrational because it was never meant to be in God's universe. Sin is a distortion of all that God meant your life and mine to be and all that he meant this world to be.

Sin. And this is the great problem that confronts mankind tonight, this irrational thing. The sin that causes so much agony and so much despair and so much despondency in so many human hearts.

There's so much heartache in the world tonight. So many broken spirits and broken homes and broken lives. And one word tells us why all these things are sin at the root of it all sin.

Now there's much about sin that you and I cannot understand. Let me tell you one or two things that we'll never understand. Not even in heaven. We will never understand how sin came to be in the experience in the existence of this universe.

Do you know where sin originated? Do you realize that it originated in heaven? It entered heaven. It came from heaven when Lucifer fell from heaven.

[16 : 27] Now how did sin get into heaven? Well you know you may have meetings from dawn to dusk until the time you're a hundred you can talk about these things you'll never get the answer to the question how did sin enter heaven?

We don't know. How could it enter a holy place? We don't know. How could sin enter into the heart of a holy angel? Who can tell?

How could sin enter the heart of a holy man and woman on earth Adam and Eve? We don't know. How could the serpent approach a woman and speak to her as I'm speaking to you tonight?

We don't know. The Bible uses terms to sum up these things and speaks of the mystery of iniquity. And you and I will never understand anything about the origin of sin either into this world or into heaven from where it came.

We can't understand these things. There's much about this sinful world that you and I can't understand. You know the way you ask questions well how did that happen?

[17 : 42] There are so many tragedies in life as I mentioned earlier. So many what people will call tonight so many inconsistencies in life.

You know if you thumb your way through the Bible you'll come across this very often. I'll speak about in a minute. Jeremiah I think in chapter 12 wasn't it said to the Lord Lord he said there's I can't understand how iniquity seems to thrive in the world and righteousness seems to be trodden down under fruit.

Do these things not perplex yourselves at times? I'm sure they do. Why is it that people who are the enemies of Christ why is it that people like that seem to get on in life?

They seem to get on. And those who love the Lord Jesus Christ life seems to be so difficult for so many of them. Why are these things so?

We don't know. God has the answer to these things. What people might refer to as the sheer haphazard meaninglessness of it all.

[18 : 56] And at the root of it sin iniquity. Are you perplexed about these things tonight? You look out upon our world and you can't understand what's going on.

Well, my friend, let's get this straight. There's something that concerns you far more than the world around you. Oh, yes, there is.

And it's not being unbiblical to say that. There's something that concerns you far more than this evil environment in which you have your own existence. What is it? It's yourself.

It's yourself. You know what the Lord is saying to you tonight about this? All these things that are so perplexing to you. You hear about these things and you can't understand them and you have no answer for these things.

You make sure that you're not looking at these things day in day out without stopping for just stopping once to have a look at yourself. Listen to what the Lord said to Peter.

[19 : 58] What is that to thee? Follow thou me. What's he saying to Peter? Whatever happens to John, you make sure that your life is the way it ought to be.

And when you consider all this sin that makes things so irrational in the world, what's the Lord saying to you tonight? Well, my friend, have you had a look at the sin in your own life?

You can't explain where it came from. You have no answer to the origin of evil. But there's a deeper problem confronting you tonight. It's the sin in your own heart.

What is that to thee then? Follow me. And that's the answer to your problem as a sinner. And you can never adequately deal with the world around you and with all its inconsistencies and with all the rationalities in it.

You can never adequately deal with any one problem that is in it. Till you've dealt with a problem that is yourself. Who was it?

[21 : 09] Was it Chesterton who once replied to the once retarded question what is wrong with this world? He gave the answer I am I am how many of you here tonight have come and are faced up to that reality have begun where you must begin with yourself.

The problem with the world at large lies just there. There are many people in this world who are concerned about the evil that is in it and the inconsistencies that are in it and the irrational nature of many things that happen in it.

There are many people concerned about these things but the tragedy with these people is this that they try to solve the tragedies in the world without coming to the Lord that he may deal with a tragedy that is themselves.

That's the problem. What is that to thee? Follow thou me. I often think if one could only get this message if one could only get this thinking across to some for example and besides just one example peace movements the people are concerned about the threat of war and the holocaust that such a war would bring to pass in this world.

They set up peace camps and they have peace movements and they have protest movements and they have this and the next thing and they complain and they throw attention to the things that these people are doing or trying to do and no doubt many of them genuinely concerned about what is going on and wishing that these things would not happen but I wonder how many of them have stopped to ask themselves this sin that is so much a part of my life have I shown concern about it before I begin to show concern about it in the lives of others and the Lord the message of this text for you and for me here tonight is first of all this have you come with the life that is your problem to the only one who can sort it out for you the

[23 : 36] Lord Jesus Christ that's your priority follow thou me there is no higher principle says gardener spring in a book recently published on called the attraction of the cross I recommend it to you there is no higher principle of the gospel than this the first duty of the sinner is to go to the cross and be saved is to follow Christ it is not only his first duty but his highest privilege and that is yours and mine tonight the Lord bids you my friend listen to this message before you do anything else with your life but with anyone else's life what is that to thee follow thou me he's asking you to be saved by himself and you know that in this part of the world the term is used not used in many places in the land it is used of those who are converted you know what people say when someone comes out to the prayer meeting for the first time have you heard that so and so is following what does it mean well it is just that that person has committed his life to another it is not that coming to the means of grace it is not that just reading the bible and beginning to pray and coming to christian fellowship it's far more than that far deeper than that it must be they are committing their lives to christ what is after thee follow follow thou me secondly in the area of providence now this is a very difficult area indeed to interpret and to understand as is sin with reference to its origin and so on i feel myself that though i wouldn't claim to be an old christian any an experienced christian anyway i still feel that the longer i go on the more wonderful that the more wonderful i study the providence of god becomes it's wonderful to see the hand of god in our lives to recognize what the bible of the charter cathartic speaks about the providence of god unfolding in his most wise and powerful and preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions how little we understand of the providence of god in our lives how wonderful the control that he exercises there are aspects of it as i said that we just cannot understand i've referred to this already the tragedies that seem to occur in life the inconsistencies and yet the bible bids us to believe this that god asserts his sovereignty and that he claims the right to do what he will and claims the right to veil himself in darkness as he does it see we have no right to claim of the almighty god tell me why you've done this we can ask the question and we all ask the question i know that we ask the question as you know full well someone once said at the minister at the funeral of our minister in this island there is no question oftener on the lips of the people of god than the question why and very often we come away with no answer to the question what does the lord bid you do in these circumstances follow me believe me that i know the answer believe me that i know the end from the beginning of course there's something in us all that would like to peer into the unknown wonder what is going to be

what will the end be we don't know but god knows what is that to thee therefore follow thou me all god asks you to do and asks me to do is to confide in his wisdom to leave these perplexities in his hand to trust that he knows the ask and to believe that he does all things well to say with job confronted with a poverty that was crushing his spirit though he slayed me yet i will trust him and if you and i do that that will eliminate the danger and the folly of peering into the unknown ways of god it will save us from coming to these conclusions that are completely groundless and business it will save us from convincing yourselves of certainties that will never happen it will save us from building these bridges which we don't know we never know how we're going to cross until we come to them and when we come maybe the bridge isn't there at all you see my friend the problem with you and with me very often was referenced to the providence of god is this that we seem to take the responsibility of the government of this world away from god into our own hands we seem to take the responsibility for the governing of our own lives out of his hand into our own we seem to take the ordering of our own providence the directing of our own affairs out of his hand and into ours as always saying to god if i were in control i would do things better than that how often have you fallen into that trap perhaps unwittingly and unknowingly and these words come to you with a staggering reproof what is that to thee follow thou me you see our responsibility is to leave the things that we cannot understand in the hand of god leave the things that we don't know in the hand of god and put our hand in his and follow him by believing that he knows trusting that he will do all things as he has always done them well you see in other words we cannot explain the providence of god but we can believe that god can explain it remember the way the poet put it behind our life the weaver stands and works his wondrous will or weaves his wondrous will we leave it in his all wise hand and trust the rest to him that's not easy no command of the lord is ever easy and i wonder if the longer one goes on the more difficult one finds to obey the lord but the path of obedience is always the path of safety what is that to thee follow thou me i wonder if there's anyone in this church tonight this province at this very moment is so perplexing you're closed in on yourself and you're wondering about this and about the next thing and you're all uptight as they say and you're worried you know my friend the lord understands the frailty of your heart the frailty of your mind he understands it but remember this he bids you do something with it

follow me you commit these things to him and that's the best step you'll ever take thirdly with reference to the bible the things that we are asked to believe now i know and i readily acknowledge this that there are people who have real problems with the bible what we might call intellectual problems they've got difficulties it's not that they have anything that they have anything against the christian faith or christian people for whom they have the highest regard i don't doubt it i believe also that they show an interest in the things of god as far as that interest goes there are fearful problems for them there are these things that the bible brings before them that they must believe well let us make one thing clear at the outset the gospel is a wonderful revelation of wonderful truths and it makes wonderful claims it sets before us an infinite god and you and i cannot understand the infinity of god we're so small you see our minds are so puny and god is infinitely great and the problem with a lot of people is this they would believe if they could only understand well i've got a message for you you've heard it often before hear it again you'll never understand god because he's far far beyond your understanding what then am i to do you're to believe you're to believe there are many things that the most gifted intellect with faith in christ cannot understand and yet they believe let me tell you one of them the great object of faith is the lord jesus christ what is that to thee he says to peter follow thou me who was speaking to it was god in our nature the lord jesus christ god clothed in human flesh that was who we're speaking to can you understand that well i claim i'll make this confession i can't i can't understand how god could become one of us and yet it's at the very heart of my faith i believe i believe passionately that he did and that he was in this world as you and i are in this world do you believe that my friend do you believe that oh you say i have difficulty when i say this to you your mind will never grasp it until you believe it and the mistake that so many people make is this i would believe if i could only understand instead of putting it the other way around i will believe and then i will understand you see the devil is standing at your shoulder tonight tugging at your heart strings working away at your mind and your understanding your will and saying this ah don't you be conned into taking that step the devil will have you taking refuge under that refuge of lies suggesting to you that everyone must understand before they believe you ask these elders here tonight how much

do they understand of the godhead ask them how often their minds are perplexed as they try to grapple with a great teaching of the trinity called three and one father son and holy spirit that god becoming becoming man that god man dying for us dying our death tonight ascended and reigning in heaven the holy spirit working in the world in the hearts of men and women boys and girls how much of the doctrine of election and predestination do they understand they believe them with all their heart and they love these truths but there are many of them that is beyond their understanding read psalm 111 learn it the young people are learning it in the sabbath school just now that a marvellous psalm which speaks of the greatness and the goodness and the glory of god the whole works of the lord our god are great above all measure and yet sort out the hour of everyone that doth therein take pleasure that's it so much of the revelation i can't understand it's beyond my puny understanding what do i need i need faith i need to follow jesus i need to believe i need to trust i need to obey you see and before i come to close in a word or two the things that the bible brings before us are not the objects of human reason salvation but of faith they are not the subjects of experiments not the subjects of observation but of faith and if you are trying to understand your way into salvation you'll never be saved there's only one way which you can do it follow me trust me commit your way to me and that's what makes a big man become a small man that's what makes the great individual become nothing when he recognizes lord i've striven all these years to understand this and to grapple with this and i failed and i'm unsaved lord lord i come to thee as jesus said unless you become a little child you can in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven does that mean that you've become childish no but childlike and what is the characteristic of the child it is this it lives its life in dependence upon another therefore my friend acknowledging the difficulties that you have with your own intellect confronted as you are with the claims of the bible i say this to you again as you've heard it often and often before notwithstanding all these things the way to salvation is through faith in christ follow me are you prepared to become small enough to do it finally the answer the same answer comes to us with reference to the future now i suppose that

in one respect that is no area maybe in which i might be able to sympathize with you more than in this particular area of your own thinking if i were to make one just personal reference here tonight i must admit i must be honest with myself in the presence of my people that the moment the moments at which i'm at my lowest ebb myself are at those moments when i try to peer into the unknown what is to be what is to be and i have constantly to remind myself of this message that the lord gave peter what is that to thee follow thou me you see tomorrow is not in our hands but the duty and the responsibility of today is this is the point this is the point and there are times when we fear for ourselves you fear for yourself as i fear for myself we fear for our families we fear for our congregations we fear for our communities for our country we fear for the world i'm sure that there's no mother and father here tonight who isn't concerned about the future for their family how often do you ask yourself about your own offspring oh well i wonder how things will work out for them perhaps you heard the story of one of the early church fathers who lost a child at very very tender age and many years afterwards a brother minister of his said to him once at a synod oh well he said i wonder speaking of a son whom who had died many years before that i wonder he says where he would be today if he had lived and his father replied ah i said that's not the question that confronts me the question that confronts me is where is he where is he and you know isn't it significant that the bible so often brings us back to this consideration of course the kind of life that they're going to live when they leave your hearth perhaps the profession that they're going to have or the work they're going to have if they're fortunate enough to have work or employment these things are a great concern to parents and rightly so my friend there's a higher consideration on that there is that relationship to the lord jesus christ and i think that this is where we as parents really fall down so often to become so concerned about things which in themselves are important for our offspring but there is something more important follow thou thou me and in what way can you best fulfil that command by being the best christian mother and father that this world knows by leaving for them and giving to them an example for them to follow it applies in every area you know we speak of a christian service and we speak and unfortunately and i think that we in the ministry and missionaries i think that we are to blame for this more than anybody else for suggesting to people that there is a kind of full-time service outwith the legitimate place of service

[43 : 44] that god has given you within your own home in your own office at work and so on we tend to think of christian service as being in the ministry or being a missionary being away in africa or in india anything except something in store and away my friend whatever the lord has placed you in his providence tonight there is the area of your full-time christian service be it as a mother in the home a father at work teacher in the nicholson or in any other school giving you something to do in the sabbath school maybe whatever it is in the ministry in the pulpit in the elders box wherever it is be sure that you apply this to all that you do follow thou me and that will take care of all these concerns that you and i have and i know full well tonight if you to be honest with yourself and if i to be honest with myself this is where our lives are at fault that in your own particular area of service you are not following the lord fully you are not trusting your life to him and committing your way to him the way you ought to do we shall best say the future has been sent and secure from that which we fear by doing with our might the work of the present commit your life and to him to act and to live responsibly god gives to each one of us our work to do and we do it at our best when we follow him today and one other thing in connection with this when he bids us obey this command remember that at the same time he gives us the power to respond because the command includes not only the promise of Christ himself but the grace of Christ and we can only avail ourselves of his grace when we come to him and when we follow him we can only become recipients of the blessing of the fulfilment of his promise as we follow him in the path of our obedience and how important the command is then as we read here tonight addressed to Peter at the very beginning of his life follow me addressed to him constantly during his discipleship follow me amongst the last words that he ever heard from the lips of his lord on earth

Peter your life is to be a dying one and particularly your death but remember follow me it comes to us again tonight and if you are concerned here tonight about yourself for about somebody else the best way to express that concern is by following the lord sin is a problem in your life come to the only one who can deal with it to the lord jesus christ providence is perplexing you if you have some particular difficulty understanding the ways of god commit that to the lord himself if you have got intellectual problems as I said with the bible believe that the lord can interpret his own word to you if you are concerned about the future tonight you are worried maybe about tomorrow the rest of the year what is going to happen how are things going to be well the best thing you can do with that is follow the lord now commit your way to him as never before and if you are concerned about your loved ones commit them to him as well whatever you do don't let any carking care divert you from the greatest responsibility that you have tonight to follow carefully and lovingly and obediently with all your strength with all your strength and with all your soul because to that end you and I are particularly called what is that to thee follow thou me let us