

EVENT 8: THE GREAT CALL TO TOTAL COMMITMENT

JOHN 21: 18–25

Introduction

This is the final passage of John’s gospel. It is the great call to total commitment.

- I. Total commitment demands following the leadership of another (the Holy Spirit) (v. 18).
- II. Total commitment demands the cross — death to self: “Follow me” (v. 19).
- III. Total commitment demands undivided attention to one’s own task (vv. 20-23).
- IV. Total commitment demands bearing witness to Jesus Christ (vv. 24-25).

I. *John 21:18 Commitment and Following the Holy Spirit*

Total commitment requires the leadership of another (the Holy Spirit). Who is meant by “another”? In this context it can mean either who were to carry Peter to death, the Romans; or the Holy Spirit, who was to carry Peter through a life of suffering and martyrdom for the cause of Christ. Jesus seem to be referring to the whole of Peter’s life, ranging from his earlier years when he did what he wished over to his older years when he would be doing what God wished. Because of this, it seems best to interpret “another” as the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was challenging Peter to serve Him, to “feed my sheep” (vv. 15-17). He was calling Peter to total commitment, and total commitment requires following the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Note two points.

1. When Peter was young he girded himself, dressed and walked where he willed. Before he knew Christ, he...
 - ran his life as he willed
 - went where he wished
 - chose the pleasures he desired
 - did what he wanted
 - talked as he willed
 - chose the profession he wanted

When he was younger, before he ever came to know Christ, Peter was able to live and do what he wanted when he wanted. But no more. Peter could no longer live as he wished. Jesus Christ, his Saviour and Lord, was now to control his life.

2. When Peter was old and mature, the Holy Spirit would dress him and carry him places he would not choose or will to go. This, of course, refers to the suffering and martyrdom Peter was to undergo for the sake of Christ.

Since Peter was accepting the call of Christ to *feed His sheep*, Peter would have to...

- live his life as the Spirit willed
 - choose the profession the Spirit willed
 - do what the Spirit wanted
 - go where the Spirit wished
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Note: Jesus was saying that Peter was to be led “where he did not want to go.”

=> He was to live a life of suffering (see his imprisonments, Acts 4:3; 5:18; 12:4).

=> He was to die the death of a martyr. His death was to be for the cause of Christ and the glory of God.

Remember that Peter had a wife (see *Peter*; Mt. 8:14). At the time of this event, Peter was to live some forty or more years, so he was probably a newlywed. Tradition says that Peter’s wife served with him in the ministry for many years. A touching picture is given by Clement of Alexandria who says that Peter’s wife was martyred with him:

“On seeing his wife led to death, Peter rejoiced on account of her call and her conveyance home, and called very encouragingly and comfortingly, addressing her by name, ‘Remember thou the LORD’” (Stromateis 7:6. Quoted by William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mathew*, Vol. 1, p. 313.)

There is strong evidence that Peter was crucified in Rome. Tradition says he felt so unworthy to die in the same manner as His Lord that he begged to be crucified upside down.

Thought 1. The call of Christ is to *total commitment*, not just to commitment. Total commitment demands that we follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

- 1) We can no longer dress and walk as we will.
- 2) We are to dress and walk as the Holy Spirit wills. (See notes, *Holy Spirit*, Jn. 14:15-26; 16:7-15.)

Thought 2. The call of Christ involves persecution. The true believer lives a sacrificial and godly life, bearing a strong testimony and a strong witness. Such a life is rejected and opposed by most in the world.

2 Tim 3:12 *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

Phil 1:28 *Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God.*

1 Pet 4:12-14 *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

1 Pet 2:21 *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.*

The world persecutes the person who lives godly; it persecutes him at work, at play, at home – wherever and whenever it pleases. The world...

- reproaches
- ridicules
- mocks
- by-passes
- shuns
- ignores
- attacks
- curses
- abuses
- murders

Christ was calling Peter to such a life, telling him that the Holy Spirit would carry him to places he would not choose. Christ tells us the same thing. Total commitment requires following the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and all who follow the Holy Spirit shall suffer persecution.

Thought 3. We shall die, everyone of us. How we die should concern us...

- whether we die in self; having lived in comfort, ease, plenty, pleasure, wealth, extravagance, pride, unbelief.
- whether we die for Christ: having lived a godly life, bearing testimony, witnessing, helping, giving, ministering and meeting the desperate needs of a world reeling in sin and death.

Heb 9:27 *Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*

2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

MATHEW 08:14 PETER

*When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. **Mathew 08:14***

Note these facts about Peter's home life and family tree.

1. Peter had a wife. He was to live some forty or more years, so he and his wife were probably newlyweds when Christ called him. Interestingly, tradition says that Peter's wife served with him in the ministry. William Barclay quotes a touching picture by Clement of Alexandria who said that she was martyred with Peter: "On seeing his wife led to death, Peter rejoiced on account of her call and her conveyance home, and called very encouragingly and comfortingly, addressing her by name, 'Remember thou the Lord'" (Stromateis 7:6. Quoted by Barclay. *The Gospel of Mathew*, Vol. 1, p. 313). There is strong evidence that Peter was martyred by crucifixion in Rome. Tradition says he felt so unworthy to be crucified like his Lord that he begged to be crucified upside down.
2. Peter had a house. He was formerly from Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44). Here he is seen in Capernaum. After Jesus called him to be an apostle, he probably moved to Capernaum where the headquarters of Jesus was located.
3. Peter looked after his mother-in-law. Apparently she was old and widowed, needing to be cared for by her children. Peter demonstrated real compassion and a tenderness of heart in allowing her to live with his family.

4. Peter opened his home to guests. Mark says that the home was that of Peter and Andrew; however, it was probably owned by Peter, since his wife and mother-in-law are mentioned. Note that Jesus, James and John were being entertained by Peter as guests (Mk. 1:29f). It is possible that Jesus stayed at Peter's home when in Capernaum and that Peter's home was Jesus' head-quarters.
5. Peter's father was Jona or Jonah (Jn. 21:15-17). He had at least one brother, Andrew (Jn. 1:41). □

II. *John 21:19 Commitment and Death to Self*

Total commitment requires the cross, death to self. One must *follow* Christ (see *Cross and Discipleship*, Lk. 9:23).

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

Luke 14:26 *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple."*

Luke 14:33 *"In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."*

John 8:12 *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

John 12:26 *"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me."*

III. *John 21:20–23 Commitment and Undivided Attention*

Total commitment requires undivided attention to one's own task. Peter asked Jesus what John would be doing in his ministry. Peter and John were very close. John was younger than Peter, probably still a teenager. Apparently, Peter had taken a very close liking to John and had taken him into his care even before Christ had come along. Peter's interest in John's task and future was therefore natural. Note three things.

1. Jesus rebuked Peter. He told Peter that John's task was not his concern. His own task was to be his concern. Peter was not to look at another man's call and ministry and...
 - be distracted
 - desire another ministry
 - copy or conform to that ministry
 - wish he had that ministry
 - compare their calls and ministries
 - meddle

1 Cor 10:32-33 *Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God — even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.*

1 Cor 10:24 *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*

Phil 2:3-4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

2. Jesus challenged and called Peter again: “Follow me” (v. 22).

=> Concentrate on your own call and task.

=> Focus your attention, will, energy and efforts upon your own call and task.

=> Realize that God knows where you can best serve and that He calls you to that task.

Acts 20:28 *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

1 Pet 5:2 *Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve.*

1 Cor 9:22-23 *To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

1 Tim 1:12 *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

Jer 3:15 *Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.*

Jer 23:4 *“I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the LORD.*

Ezek 3:17 *“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.”*

3. John corrected a rumour, an error spreading throughout the church. Some had taken the words of Jesus and misconstrued them, saying that Jesus meant that John would never die. Some were saying that John would survive until Jesus’ return to earth. John very simply said this was not what Jesus was saying.

Thought 1. Note how easily the Lord’s words are misunderstood unless they are taken at face value, exactly as He spoke them.

2 Tim 2:15 *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

IV. *John 21:24–25 Commitment Demands Witnessing*

Total commitment demands bearing witness to Jesus Christ and fulfilling one's task on earth, just as John bore witness and fulfilled his task. John bore witness: the Gospel of John is his testimony to the world. And note: John emphasized that his testimony was true; he had not lied.

John 20:31 *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Thought 1. The primary task of every believer is to bear witness to the truth: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who has come to give life to man — both abundant and eternal life. (See *Works of Jesus*, John 20:30)

John 10:10 *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

2 Tim 2:2 *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

1 Pet 3:15 *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. ■*

JOHN 21: 24

DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST; HOPE FOR MAN

*This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. **John 21:24***

The great witness of John (and of the other gospel writers) is:

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Very simply stated, the great witness is the glorious news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ changes the fate of world history and the whole attitude of man. If the death and resurrection of Christ had never taken place...

- then of all creatures, man would be the most miserable and hopeless
- then the life of Jesus Christ would have been the most tragic and despairing event in all history

Why? Because the most merciful and compassionate, the most giving and helpful human being in all the world was treated and killed in the most savage way. However, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ did happen, and because it did, it has changed the whole perspective and truth of world history. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, life and history have become purposeful. Since Christ has died and risen from the dead, men look at the cross and get a sense, a feeling...

- that the punishment for sin has been paid (atonement)
- that sin can now be forgiven (forgiveness)
- that a perfect life has been sacrificed for man (propitiation)
- that man can now be reconciled and made one with God (reconciliation)
- that man can now be reconciled to man, both personally and worldwide (peace, unity, community, fellowship)
- that man can now be declared righteous (justification)
- that man can be made into a *new creation* before God (regeneration)
- that man can be redeemed (redemption)
- that man can be set apart unto God (sanctification) □

JOHN 20:30

THE SIGNS OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. **John 20: 30***

The great fact, Jesus did many other signs that are not recorded in this gospel by John. He did many wonderful things. He was busy every day, actively involved either in worshipping God alone or in teaching and ministering to people. For about three years, Jesus was constantly demonstrating that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. He gave all the evidence in the world:

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| => acts of love and purity | => acts of righteousness and justice |
| => works of mercy and compassion | => works of miracles and power |
| => works of godliness and sovereignty | => words of truth and salvation |
| => words of peace and faith | => words of hope and joy |
| => words of morality and discipline | => words of commitment and self-denial |

The point is that Jesus' life — His character and behaviour, His preaching and teaching, His miracles and power — proves that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. No man could do the things He did unless He were the Son of God. Who He was and what He did prove it.

Note that Jesus did not do the signs in secret, that is, out in a desert or off in a corner of the world. He did them out in the open, publicly. John said He did the signs in the presence of His disciples. They witnessed the signs, for Jesus saw to it that there was adequate witness and testimony. Note what John says in his epistle:

***1 John 1:1-4** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.*

***1 Cor 15:44** It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

***1 Cor 15:50** I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*

***Acts 13:36** “For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.”*

***Acts 13:37** “But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.”*

***1 Cor 15:42** So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable.*

***2 Cor 5:1** Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*

***2 Cor 5:2** Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.*

Note one other fact: John says that he has been highly selective in the signs he has chosen to record in his gospel. There were “many” signs which Jesus gave; so many in fact, “I suppose that even the whole world itself would not have room for the books that would be written” (Jn. 21:25). John selected only a few signs to record. He had a specific purpose in mind, so he chose a few signs that would help meet that purpose. □

LUKE 09:23 CROSS AND DISCIPLESHIP

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 09:23

People in Jesus' day knew what it meant to "take up" a cross. They saw scores of criminals bear the cross to the place where they were to be executed, and they witnessed scores of crucifixions, some even by the side of the roads that led in and out of the cities.

The cross does not mean merely bearing one's particular hardship in life, such as poor health, abuse, unemployment, invalid parents, an unsaved spouse, a wayward child. The cross is always an instrument of death, not just an object to carry or bear. The Christian is to die mentally and actively. He is to deny himself daily. He is to let the mind of Christ, the mind of humbling himself to the point of death, be in him and fill his thoughts every day (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). He is to put his will, his desires, his wants, his ambitions to death. In their stead, he is to follow Jesus and to do His will all day long. Note this is not negative, passive behaviour. It takes positive, active behaviour to *will*, to *deny self*, to *take up one's cross*, to *follow Christ*. A person has to act, work, get to it, be diligent, consistent, and enduring in order to die to self.

There are several ways the believer dies to self. Romans 6:11-13 spells out the ways as clearly as they can be.

Rom 6:11-13 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (see Rom. 6:2-10)*

1. The believer reckons or counts himself crucified with Christ.

Rom 6:11a *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin.*

Rom 6:6 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Gal 5:24 *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

2. The believer reckons or counts himself dead to sin, but alive to God.

Rom 6:11 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

1 Pet 4:2 *As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

3. The believer does not let sin reign in his body.

Rom 6:12 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

Col 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

4. The believer does not yield the parts of his body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.

Rom 6:13a *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness.*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

5. The believer yields himself to God — as much as those who are alive from the dead are yielded to God.

Rom 6:13b *But rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life.*

Rom 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Rom 13:14 *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

6. The believer yields his body members as instruments of righteousness.

Rom 6:13c *And offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

Gal 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

It should be noted that one's hardship or burden can bring a person to the place where the Lord can deal with him. It is then that the hardship becomes the cross and denial of self that Jesus is talking about. With an act of self-denial, the Christian can then count or reckon himself alive to God (Rom. 6:13). He can then follow Jesus. This is an act which can be described as committing all that one is and has to Christ. It is an act that needs to be repeated every day (see Mt. 10:38). □