

9AM & 11:15 Notes Sunday 4/7/19 - Jeff Lyle

“The Distracted Disciple” John 21:15-22 9AM

It might sound somewhat simplistic to some, but it really is true that each Christian's life can be summed up with the headline of, "I am a Jesus-follower." As we enter into relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, Heaven's expectation is that we live all our days following Him in trusting obedience. As we all commit to keep our eyes on Jesus, many potential distractions come along that can result in us getting off track. One of the most common and lethal distractions to those who are to follow Jesus is our tendency to fixate upon what is happening with other people. The life of a Jesus-follower requires intense focus on the Lord as He leads us. When we become distracted by how He is leading others, or the degree to which we believe they are faithfully following Him, we become sidetracked as we take our eyes off of Him. No clearer example of this danger is found in Scripture than that of the Apostle Peter. From this pivotal moment in his life, we see how easy it is to get distracted from following Jesus, and how intense Jesus is in His command for us to keep our eyes on Him.

I. The Gentle Confrontation from Jesus (15-17)

A. Peter had experienced a personal implosion - His denials of John 18:15-27 & quitting the ministry in John 21:3

Three years before this scene, Peter had been called by Jesus to leave his fishing business and to become a disciple who would give up everything to follow the Messiah. Scripture reveals Peter to be somewhat impulsive with his actions and words. Yet, Jesus never gave up on Peter. When Peter declared himself to be more faithful and trustworthy than all the other disciples, Jesus let Peter know that he would soon implode by denying Jesus in the hour of his betrayal. When this prophetic word came to pass exactly as Jesus had said, Peter fled in shame and humiliation. In the end, Peter went back to his fishing business and had quit his calling. Jesus, however, was not done with the self-willed Peter. He would use this man for something great, but not before Peter came to terms with where he was with his Lord.

B. Peter had experienced gentle confrontation (15-16) - “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.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” 16 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.”

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It is so gracious of Jesus to go after Peter to welcome him back into fellowship and his calling. We are reminded here that Jesus uses those who have failed miserably in the past. Jesus uses those who are struggling in the present. May all of us as Jesus-followers commit to similar grace for those who fail us.

C. Peter had gained clarity about his level of devotion (17a) - 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."

Peter's primary spiritual flaw was that he vastly overestimated his love for Jesus. There was a lot of Peter's flesh that was continually in play. He was naturally bold. He seemed to always assume that he should lead. He spoke often before he thought through what he would say. He compared himself to others who he presumed to be lesser than him. After Jesus went and found Peter back on his fishing boat, He confronted Peter about one primary thing: the level of Peter's love for Jesus. Three times, the Lord gently confronted Peter about where he was on the love-spectrum. When Peter replied that he, indeed, did love Jesus, he received instruction from Jesus to return to caring for those whom Jesus loved. Peter was not called to be a fisherman. Jesus called him to be a shepherd of souls.

D. Peter experienced grace and was fully restored by Jesus (17b) - "Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

No shame. No guilt. No lectures. Jesus moved in firm but highly relational actions to re-establish His relationship with His struggling disciple. Peter was reassured three times that his Lord still had plans for him. Though the situation would have been uncomfortable as Peter had to come to terms with his imperfect level of love and devotion, the end of the process was that Jesus was welcoming Peter to resume his journey in following the Master.

II. The Clear Communication of Jesus (18-19)

A. Lesson 1: Peter would no longer be self-governed (18a) - "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted..."

Peter's biggest struggle (and ours also) was that he preferred to live a self-governed life. We are hardwired in our flesh to seek out those things which benefit us. We prefer to make our own decisions, live by our own values, plan our own calendars and fulfill our

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own dreams. That is how our flesh is hard-wired, but salvation re-wires us with the nature of Jesus. Still, we war between our flesh and His Spirit at times. We have to put to death our impulse to self-govern. Jesus was promising Peter that the days wherein he lived according to his own dictates had come to an end. Peter would be following Jesus from now on. Because of that, Peter would experience a loss of being in control. Peter, like all Jesus-followers who came after him, would renounce governing their own lives. We have a Lord, and His name is Jesus.

B. Lesson 2: God's plan for Peter would involve hardship (18b) - "...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."

Because Peter would follow Jesus by faith, he would eventually meet the same destiny that his Master met. Peter was being promised by Jesus that his destiny would include a loss of freedom. Peter would yield to those who would take him into custody, and they would impose their wills upon him. Contrary to the current trend of popular messaging in the Church, God's will for us is never to be assumed to be solely blessing, prosperity, elevation and increase. The true message of the Gospel contains more blessing than we can measure, but that blessing comes through decrease, humility, surrender and various levels of suffering. If we cannot receive this as being part of the life of a Jesus-follower, then we have not yet embraced the true message of the Gospel.

C. Lesson 3: God's ultimate goal for Peter's life was God's glory (19a) - "This He said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God."

Let's not rush past this part of verse 19. Jesus was calling Peter to live for Him and then to die for the glory of God. Jesus communicated this to Peter as part of his being received back into fellowship and ministry. Undeniably, Peter understood that Jesus was calling Peter to give his own life for the Savior. It is very easy to verbally tell Jesus that we love him. Peter had just done so three times. We will only prove the genuineness of our love when we come to place where we understand the cost associated with being His. While we may not give our lives for His Gospel, we will certainly be required to pay a price that regularly costs us something. We sacrifice our reputation. We invest our time in selfless ministry that may not always yield visible results. We take the position of servant in our relationships with others. We release our finances into Gospel mission. We will be hated by this world system if we truly love Jesus. We will experience persecution if we are living godly lives. Each of us say YES to Jesus with the understanding that our following Him comes with a price. If it never costs us anything, we cannot be truly following Him.

D. Lesson 4: Peter's primary calling was to follow Jesus (19b) - "...after saying this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

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The Scriptures reveal that Jesus called Peter to follow Him no fewer than three times. We might think that the first time this was released to Peter, he would have clearly understood. Yet, Peter is like us. We can begin by understanding that we are to line up behind God's Son, but we are prone to try and resume our natural desire to be in the front of the line, leading our own way. The stronger and more gifted you are, the more you will likely struggle with remaining a faithful, submissive follower to the will of the Lord. We get impatient. We can become impulsive. Following is not the favorite thing of most of us, especially when we do not love the direction in which we are being led. Peter was originally called by Jesus into relationship and ministry with the words, "Follow Me." More than three years later, it was still the same message that he was hearing from Jesus. We all do well to examine whether or not our own heart-posture remains that of a yielded follower who moves when Jesus moves, waits when Jesus stands still, and obeys when Jesus calls us to keep walking into the unknowns behind Him.

III. The Unyielding Expectation from Jesus (20-22)

A. His loss of focus (20-21a) - "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?'" 21 When Peter saw him..."

B. His lack of boundaries (21b) - "...he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

It did not take Peter long to slip right back into his old patterns. On the surface, this may not seem like a significant moment, but we cannot afford to minimize what was happening. After Jesus had intentionally worked to restore Peter back into relationship with Himself, and after confronting Peter with his need to accurately assess the degree to which he was truly faithful to Jesus, and after recommissioning Peter back into shepherding His flock, and after clearly commanding Peter to commit to following Jesus...Peter became immediately distracted with what would be asked of John. Yes, Peter took his eyes off of Jesus and put them onto another disciple. It is impossible to accurately quantify just how many Christians have lost their way in moments like this one which Peter is experiencing. God moves intentionally to bring us fully to Himself, He empowers, equips and calls us to His plans for us, and then we fall prey to taking our eyes off of Him and inserting ourselves into the lives of others whom He is leading. There is a necessary component of following Jesus Christ which demands that we detach ourselves from being preoccupied in how He is leading others. nor can we become

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engrossed in how they may or may not be responding to His work in their lives. Peter was not to be concerned about John's destiny. He was being called to listen exclusively to the Lord about his own destiny. Obedience requires a militant focus and an unwavering ear to hear. Peter was in danger of immediately falling after Jesus had done great work to stand him up again.

C. His lesson to learn (22) - "Jesus said to him, "If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!"

Jesus did not allow any opportunity for Peter to misunderstand what He was expecting. Peter was rebuked here by Jesus. He was firmly told to mind his own business. John was none of his concern. Jesus is well able to lead John fully into His plan for John's life. It sounds a little harsh to us, but Jesus clearly understands how detrimental it is when one of His followers takes eyes off of Jesus and scrutinizes other people. The message to Peter is also a message to each of us. None of us is commissioned by Jesus to inspect the lives of other Christians. We do not get a vote in what Jesus decrees for the lives of others. We can pray for them, assist them, and come alongside of them in times of counsel, but we have no ground to stand upon in demanding to know what they are doing or what God is doing in their lives. For the third time in his life, Peter is commanded to line up behind Jesus and to remain there. Follow Me. Follow Me. Follow Me. We cannot do this long if we have one eye on our Leader and one eye on others who are to follow Him.

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"Don't Waste Your Weakness" 2 Corinthians passages 11:15AM

Everything in our culture demands us to be strong. We are summoned to become more. We are offered every possible resource to enhance our beauty, lengthen our lives, deepen our wealth, promote our name and obtain our dreams. For Jesus-followers, there is a paradox that confronts us in our souls. The Gospel calls us to carry our cross. The Bible promotes humility and servanthood. The Kingdom reveals weakness as the doorway to experience glory. The end result is that Christians live at the crossroads of culture and Kingdom. The Apostle Paul reveals four tests in his own life that every believer needs to pass. If we can pass these tests in the way Paul teaches, we will find ourselves centered in the most satisfying, glorious reality that believers can experience. Each test holds the same pattern: a challenging experience, wisdom gained from the experience and a new course of action to which we commit ourselves.

I. The Test of Troubling Circumstance (2 Corinthians 1:8-10)

A. The experience (8) - "For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself."

As Paul committed to the life of an apostolic missionary, he committed to a life of intense rigors. Travels, sparse resources, hostile environments and human opposition dogged him wherever he traveled to spread the Gospel of Jesus. As he describes his experience in Asia Minor, he summarizes its impact by admitting that it was so burdensome that Paul entered into a deep desperation. He was being crushed by circumstances that were taking him well beyond his own natural strengths. Paul would NEVER state that God will not lay more upon you than you can bear. It was quite the opposite. God was allowing circumstances that were knocking the Paul out of Paul.

B. The wrong conclusion (9a) - "Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death."

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Let's not dilute what Paul is stating here: the mighty Apostle thought he would be unable to recover from whatever God was allowing to hit his life. It felt like a death-sentence and it had gotten inside of Paul. Paul was maxed-out and completely devoid of any remedy to his circumstances. He felt he was being swallowed. He felt like darkness would win. He felt like this was the end of his life.

C. The wisdom gained (9b-10a) - "But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10a He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us."

Yet, in the end, Paul did not die. He actually did find the way of escape. Darkness did not devour the apostle. He was brought to the end of himself by God's sovereign allowing of the heaviest of weight to pounce on his soul. Now, looking back, Paul describes the wisdom that was imparted to him through this impossibly difficult chapter in his life. He was made to learn that God never wants us to trust solely in ourselves. We are not to rely on anything within us. Certainly, we have gifts, skills, experiences and resources which God has given us. Yet, none of those things are to be trusted in. We must learn what it means to rely upon God when nothing else proves sufficient. God brings dead things to life, but the only way we can know this is true is if He allows things to die first. We want to give lip service to the resurrection paradigm of Christianity. We want to skip to the overcoming power of God. Yet, how will we know the power to overcome if we do not have the trouble to undergo? When God brings us through impossible circumstances, we gain the growing wisdom that He will be faithfully present in all future impossibilities that confront our lives. we learn that He is truly our deliverer.

D. The course of action (10b) - "On Him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again."

What good is wisdom if we don't apply it? Our course of action points us forward into deeper hope. We do not look to our strengths to protect us, insulate us, immunize us or rescue us. We always look to God. Our action-item is that we become people who learn to instinctually trust in God. We intentionally set our hopes upon Him - His name, His character, His promises and His power to deliver us.

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II. The Test of Unknown Outcomes (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

A. The experience (16a) - "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away..."

Paul moves us into a second test from his own personal experiences. He brings up the reality of the inner self versus the outer self. Because Paul viewed himself as a spiritual being living in a physical body, he was free to place greater emphasis on the development of his inner being above that of his external self. The outer self represents all that is temporary, passing or sourced in human strength. He confessed the reality of the body being in a process of passing away. He felt his weakness. He sensed his diminished personal ability to live the life assigned to him by God. He did not fear his weakness. He would not be one to lose heart as he came to terms with his limitations. With no shame, no fear, no apologies, Paul declared that his outer self was being reduced. He would not put confidence in his flesh.

B. The wisdom gained (16b-17) - "... our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."

While his outer self was experiencing a reduction, Paul's inner man was increasing. He had received the wisdom to see the Kingdom correlation that connects the reduction of that which is human with the increase of that which is from God. As Paul's outer man was fading away, he recognized spiritual growth. He was able to understand that there was a process that God had employed to bring Paul into Christlikeness. Day by day, the Apostle was being renewed, reshaped, reinvigorated in the spirit. Because he had the wisdom to treasure his growth in the Holy Spirit, he concluded that the affliction which produced the growth was not worthy to be compared with the fruit it was bearing in him. While Paul described earlier his depth of agony in his many situations, he now shares that they were actually only a light affliction. He now assigns the weightiness to the glory being produced in his life. He was experiencing the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus at one and the same time. He knew the affliction would pass, but the glory would be eternally his. He wisely concluded that there was no valid comparison between the cost to him and the reward for him.

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C. The course of action (18) - "...we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

Paul now reveals his course of action that flowed from what he had experienced and learned. He would no longer focus on the temporary things. He would aim his intentions toward the invisible things of the Kingdom, knowing that these things possess an eternal nature to them. Everything outside of God and what He was doing in and for Paul had a temporary nature. Why spend time fixating on those things when they would never last? The cost was temporary, the reward was forever. Paul learned to live with his heart focused upon the end-game, not the difficulties along the way. He could either focus on the challenges and pains, or the profit that those things would bring him as he waited patiently upon the Lord. We are faced with the same choice: give our hearts, minds and souls to what is being taken from us, or to wisely think upon what God will offer us in the place of those things which are temporary in nature.

III. The Test of Personal Decrease (2 Corinthians 11:23-30)

A. The experience (23-28) - "Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one-I am talking like a madman-with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."

B. The wisdom gained (29) - "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?"

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Paul uses a couplet of rhetorical questions to reveal to his readers the wisdom which came from his own personal decrease. Because he himself had endured all of the painful challenges that he mentions in verses 23-28, he is now able to enter into the role of a sympathetic priest on behalf of others who are struggling with their own seasons of decrease. If Paul were always strong, always on the top, always winning, he would not be the kind of Kingdom servant to whom people could turn in the hour of their own need. He would be aloof, disengaged and unsympathetic had he not known what it meant to be decreased in this life. Paul connects their weaknesses to his own experience of weakness. When others in the Kingdom fell at a stumblingblock placed in front of them by the enemy, Paul could take it personally as if it had happened to him - for many times it had happened to him. Wisdom from our own painful seasons of decrease and trial will cause us to pause, asking, "Whom might I help in the future from what I am painfully learning in the present hour of trial?" We can know that we have passed this test when we no longer consider our season of decrease to be primarily about our own loss but, more hopefully, about someone else's potential gain as we think ahead and foresee our ability to help them through what we have learned about the season of personal decrease.

C. The course of action (30) - "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness."

Having received an expanded, elevated understanding of what good can come through our seasons of personal decrease, Paul commits himself to an action-item. Instead of mourning his weaknesses, instead of compensating for anything lacking in himself, instead of feeling robbed of presumed ease and comfort, Paul commits to view his weaknesses as something positive. If he is forced to boast about what makes him a qualified servant of the Lord, he will not list his amazing victories, he will catalog the things which cause him to depend more fully on the Lord. While others brag about the good they have done, Paul declares that he will promote how God has worked through his losses, his weaknesses, his afflictions and his pains. This is maturity! Paul had grown to understand that God is most highly exalted in the context of circumstances wherein we are most greatly lowered. God would be his boast. The more challenging things were to him on the outside, the more opportunity there would be to experience growth on the inside.

IV. The Test of Contentment Amidst Struggles (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

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A. The experience (7-8) - "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me."

Just prior to writing the two verses above, Paul had described for his readers a deeply supernatural experience which was so profound for him that he did not know whether he was in his body when it occurred or out of it. Caught up to the third heaven, Paul was told things that he was not allowed to share with anyone. In the presence of God Himself, Paul received a supernatural revelation that blew away anything he could learn via normal processes. Note carefully what he says above: in order to keep Paul humble, God allowed an affliction to come into Paul's life. Though nowhere do the Scriptures say that God personally sent the affliction to Paul, it

is clear that he did nothing to prevent it. Why would God allow for this provocation of Paul's flesh to come to him? In order to prevent Paul from becoming potentially conceited about what he had seen, heard and experienced in his heavenly transport. The thorn in his flesh is not specified for us, but it is described as a messenger sent from Satan that pained Paul. Paul's initial response is the same as yours would have been. He asked the Lord three separate times to remove the painful affliction. Like all of us, Paul impulsively wanted the difficulty to go away.

B. The wisdom gained (9a) - "He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."

The answer from the Lord was likely as painful as the thing itself. The Lord told Paul that He would not make the painful thing go away. The thorn in Paul's flesh would remain with him. Yet, this was not an answer to be viewed as a dismissive shrug from Jesus. The declining of Paul's prayer was wrapped in an explanation. Jesus told His faithful apostle that His grace was sufficient for Paul. Along with the thorn, Paul would be granted with all- sufficient grace to live out his life with the affliction still present. Again, we are not told the exact nature of the thorn. We are told, however, that it's pain could not eclipse the deposit of

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grace that accompanied it. Paul was the first one to specifically learn that the grace of God will keep His children in every circumstance that finds them. Paul would have enough to endure and overcome, even though his painful problem would remain.

C. The course of action (9b-10) - "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Now, Paul informs us of the remarkable steps of action he took from his revelation that the pain would remain with him. He declares again that his weaknesses would all the more remain his place of boasting. We cannot miss this: Paul's greatest desire was to be free of the thorn. The Lord told Paul NO. Paul did not get bitter. Paul did not shrink back into a victimization mentality. Paul did not rehearse before the Lord why he deserved better from God. Paul writes that the abiding thorn would be intentionally viewed by him as something in which to boast. Why? How? Because the constant awareness of his personal weakness would welcome the power of Jesus Christ to rest upon Paul at a level that Paul could not experience apart from the thorn. The problem forced Paul to press in to the Lord more deeply. He knew every day how much he needed the Son of God. He would never become arrogant to believe that he could make it a day without Jesus. Even beyond that foundational piece of wisdom, Paul grew to the place where he remained content with the thorn and anything else that served to weaken him. This is nearly unheard of in modern times! Paul learned to live with a quieted soul of peaceful contentment even as the thing that troubled him most remained his daily reality. It was not just the thorn he had learned to contentedly live with. He had learned to live in the reality of other weaknesses, insults from his opposition, intense seasonal hardships, violent persecution and total upheaval! The thorn trained Paul how to live in the power of Christ as he had zero sufficiency of his own upon which he could lean. So, he would boast in the very things that we try to deny or hide or fix. Paul was not ashamed of his weaknesses. He learned to thank God for those things which forced him into a deeper fellowship with his Lord. He came to the place of understanding that his weaknesses were the gateway to the power of God.

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