

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

JANUARY 2025 | JOHN 21:19b

*...And after saying this he
said to him, 'Follow me.'*

John 21:19b, ESV

RESTLESS OR RELAXED

The Apostle John was explicit in telling his readers the purpose of his narrative in the Gospel of John, chapter 20 and included another important event in chapter 21 that completed his story. He wrote the account of Jesus using eight miracles, which he calls signs. Each of them pointed to the reality that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and all of them together give grounds to believe in Him in such a way as to have His very life imparted to them. The whole account repeatedly shows the contrast between life as defined by

the temporal boundaries of this world and the life from heaven as demonstrated by Jesus. It is that eternal life that He offers to those who believe. In chapter 21, John tells about the encounter of the restless with the relaxed.

Dallas Willard once asked a group of Christians what one word best described Jesus to them. There were many good answers: holy, kind, meek, compassionate, powerful, loving, ruler, savior, etc. They then asked him what word he would use. He said, relaxed.

That is an unusual word to our ears. Our society is characterized by movement, stress, busyness, antacids, and anxiety. Success is often measured by how intense and uptight we are. We have no time for “slow dancers” on our dance floor. When I heard that account of Dr. Willard, the word relaxed sounded like life. Jesus lived relaxed.

The very first sign that John mentions in his gospel narrative is the wedding feast where Mary, the mother of Jesus, pressed Him with the need for more wine. He answered that His time had not come. Panicky circumstances are not what moved Him. When the storm on the sea threatened the disciples, Jesus was asleep. When Lazarus was very sick, Jesus waited two days before coming to meet his two frustrated sisters. When the temple police came to arrest Him in the temple, He calmly continued because they could not touch Him. On the last night together with His twelve, He calmly announced that His hour had come.

No one took His life. He gave it.

Contrast that life with the life of the disciples. After the resurrection, Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem. They just couldn't. Somebody needed to do something! After all, they had been through a lot of confusing stuff. They thought Jesus would be a deliverer like the warrior king, David. Instead, He died on a cross outside the city. They had seen His resurrected body and believed, but it was different. Jesus seemed to appear randomly in different places, and they couldn't just wait. Peter spoke for the restless group and broke the ice by announcing: “I am going fishing.” I don't know if any of them remembered that Jesus said to wait, but seven of them went with Peter. It is understandable. They didn't know where they fit. They weren't sure what “follow me” meant at this stage. They reverted to something they knew how to do; something they could succeed in. Like us, they just had to do something. They had left their nets but somehow found them for their night on

the sea. They caught nothing! Of course not. Their life wouldn't be about what they could do without Jesus. He who rules the fish made sure they didn't succeed.

The encounter of the restless with the relaxed happened on the sea shore shortly after their failed attempt at activity. Jesus did not fuss at them for not waiting. He was relaxed as He hosted a breakfast picnic. Their new life would be one of being served by the Lord, as strange as that seems. They would get their provision for their task by sitting at the table He prepared. Nothing except what comes from the table is able to fulfill the mission they are given. They can only give what they receive while waiting and dining with Him. They caught fish when they did it in obedience to His command. He is the ultimate fisherman. He made them partners. He even invited them to put some of their fish on the grill with His. Partners! Like Adam and Eve in the garden, they are partners with Jesus in a grander mission: taking the transform-

ing gospel to the world, thereby subduing it.

Peter and John get special attention, but what the rest witness is life-changing for them as well. Peter honestly believed that his commitment was fire proof, yet he denied Jesus as he warmed by a small fire. Jesus knew that that level of life would not survive what He was sending them in to. Their interaction during the post-fishing breakfast revealed that Jesus was giving Peter a kind of love that heretofore had only been known by the Father and the Son. Peter finally admitted that he didn't know how to judge his own heart and decided to leave that to Jesus who commissioned Peter to feed His sheep. The mission became clear. Their destinies were now directed. They were His partners in shepherding the sheep who would hear His voice and come to Him.

The restlessness? It was solved by Jesus' prophecy and His command. In essence, Jesus told Peter that when he was young, he initiated all his actions out of his own

self will and self effort, but in the future he would be led. He would be dressed by others, led to martyrdom by others, and would glorify God by his life and death. Jesus simplified things for him and those listening. One phrase must be emphasized. "Follow me." Jesus took over the role of initiating all actions. He promised that He would make His will known, and they only had to obey. They would succeed in their mission because of their partner. His work on the cross had guaranteed the success of the mission. Sin was forgiven. Justice was satisfied. Death was defeated. Restoration of all things was secured.

Restlessness had one last gasp: "What about him?" Peter asked regarding John. Jesus' answer offered relief from hours of worry and jealousy: "That is none of your business! You follow me." There was no room for comparison and competition in the new community. Each one had his own special role. Together they saw the known world shake because of the

power of the message they carried. All but John died a martyr's death, but the gospel could not be stopped. And it all came from a Lord who was still relaxed. That is the life He gives to those who believe in Him.

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