

# Those Who Have Stayed

Luke 22:28-30 | November 15, 2020 | Bryce Beale

One of the clearest marks of true faith, as opposed to false, is that true faith continues on. It stays with Jesus through “the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to,” through the fire and wind and sleet and storm that beat against the disciple’s face as he or she presses forward.<sup>1</sup>

“If,” Jesus said to his followers, “you abide in my word”—that means, if you stay or remain in my teaching and truth, and not throw it away—“you are truly my disciples.”<sup>2</sup>

Over and over the Apostle John pens this word: “abide.” It means remain, and it is always the mark of the true disciple.

“Whoever confesses,” he writes in his first letter, “that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”<sup>3</sup> The abiding goes both ways—you in God and God in you. The two remain together.

And if they do not remain together, the discipleship is a façade. So as we saw in Luke 8, the seed of God’s word sown by the road is plucked up quickly by birds; the word thrown onto the rocky soil has no root and dries up; the word in the thorn bushes is choked and dies. But, Jesus concludes, “as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”<sup>4</sup>

Think for yourself—how many persons have you known who seemed to love the Lord, who read the word of God and memorized it, who learned the correct terminology and passed quite well as a true disciple, but who afterward walked away from it all? And on the other hand, how many Christians have you known who seemed to do much more poorly than those who left, who struggled and struggle and doubt and, perhaps, even disappear now and then before returning. Yet behold, here they are. Which is the true disciple? Not the one who seems to thrive for a time—the one who remains, who abides, who continues on.

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act III, scene 1.

<sup>2</sup> John 8:31 (ESV).

<sup>3</sup> 1 Jn. 4:15.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 8:15.

“The one who endures to the end will be saved.”<sup>5</sup> Because those sheep who are sheep indeed have been captured completely by the grace of God, and their Shepherd will keep them going forward, despite whatever sheepish silliness may be in them.

And this honestly is an amazing thing, is it not? When you sign up for almost anything else, much rides on your performance. If you do poorly at work, if you do not meet quotas and criteria, then you are let go. If you do not pay your dues at the country club, then you are no longer a member there. And if you consistently fail your friends, they may fail to be your friends any longer.

Yet what we learn from Jesus’ own disciples in his lifetime, and what we hear from his own lips, is this: the one mark, the one final proof of your true belief, is not a perfect performance or even an excellent performance as a Christian—certainly this is what we all aim for, and nothing less—yet the final proof of discipleship is simply that you continue with Jesus.

It is not in the end the most diligent and disciplined disciples who receive their reward, but those who continue on, running or plodding or crawling.

In our text for today Jesus turns our eyes to his original Twelve disciples, his apostles, and in them we learn this lesson as clearly as it can be learned. They were not in Jesus’ lifetime great disciples, none of them. They failed more often than they succeeded, and doubted more often than they believed. Their understanding was dim and, very soon, they will abandon Jesus in his hour of need.

But they stayed with Jesus. That was almost all they had going for them! They remained and, even after they leave him temporarily, they return. For this reason, Jesus in his kindness promises them rewards beyond what any of us can imagine.

Let’s see this lesson from our Savior, as we sit with him at his Last Supper, the night before his death.

#### **LUKE 22:28-30**

These are words meant first for the Twelve—or rather, the Eleven, since Judas will go to his own place. Yet they reverberate

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<sup>5</sup> Mark 13:13; Matt. 24:13.

past that original group and touch us too. There is a gracious message in these words for them, but also for us. Because here we find the infinite mercy of our Shepherd, who requires so little of us and promises us so much.

Those are therefore the two subjects we will consider: what Jesus does require of his disciples—that they remain—and what he promises them—a kingdom! We will consider this duty and this promise both in regard to the Twelve, and in regard to any here who are the disciples of this same Savior.

## Stay

First then, what is the one duty, the one deed required of a disciple and fulfilled by these first eleven men?

Verse 28 answers: “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials.”

In the course of his ministry, Jesus gained and lost many disciples. You may remember that incident in John 6 where, after Jesus said his followers must eat his body and drink his blood, he suddenly had far fewer feet trampling along behind him. “When many of his disciples heard it,” says John, “they said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’”<sup>6</sup> And then, in verse 66: “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”

Not every disciple of Jesus stayed with him.

That may surprise us in hindsight—how could you have Jesus in the flesh before you, the greatest figure of all history, the Son of the living God, and leave him to go back to your little first-century Palestinian house? But we think that only because we sit here in comfortable seats considering it.

Jesus’ three long years of ministry are well summarized by him with these words: “You are those who have stayed with me *in my trials*.” He did not tread an easy path, and neither did those who tread that path behind him. He lived trial by trial. He had after all to be tempted like us in every way, so that he could become a sympathetic high priest.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> V. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Heb. 4:15.

Yes, these Twelve did see spectacles, did behold marvels at the hand of Jesus, even at their own hands. But that was only one part of their experience. In between, they suffered—they suffered *in Jesus' trials*, by sharing them.

For example, Jesus was not only a loved figure, but a sharply hated one. That means his followers likewise were and are hated, by their association with him. “If,” Jesus told them, “they have called the master of the house Beelzebul [that is, Satan!], how much more will they malign those of his household?”<sup>8</sup>

He is crystal clear in John 15:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.<sup>9</sup>

So, these disciples in the upper room stood by their master even when he was hated by the most important people of their day, the religious leaders. And though that hatred splattered off of Jesus onto them, they held their ground. They stayed with Jesus.

What is more, from the start these men were required to renounce all they owned, effective immediately. In the parallel to our text in Matthew, Peter notes, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”<sup>10</sup> Jesus would not have accepted them on any lesser terms—to be with him, they had to leave all else behind. They could not be with Jesus and stay at home, so they had to give up one or the other. That was not an easy sacrifice.

You can see why Jesus warned away that eager would-be disciple in Luke 9.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him,

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<sup>8</sup> Matt. 10:25.

<sup>9</sup> Vv. 18-20.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. 19:27.

“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”<sup>11</sup>

The disciples had no fixed home, none. They did not go travel and then return home to rest—there was no home to return to. This way of life seems easy and manageable only to those who do not have to live it! But they lived it—and nevertheless, they stayed with Jesus in this trial too.

Paul would later call this whole experience, of suffering because of one’s association with Christ, “shar[ing] his sufferings.”<sup>12</sup> These men shared Jesus’ sufferings by staying with him in them.

It was not easy for them to stay with Jesus!

But, on the other hand, it was not hard either. Had Jesus’ required of them moral excellence and a quick grasp of his truth, that would have been hard. In fact, they would have failed. Had Jesus demanded, in line with every religion of human origin, that these men, these future leaders of the movement, should be exemplary in their faithfulness, in their nobility, in their wisdom, in their goodness—if he had required that they be great men, that would have been a yoke too great for them to bear.

So, though the suffering was hard, the yoke itself was light. Jesus is in our text about to promise these men immense rewards. But see on what basis he gives them these rewards: “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials.” Not, “You are those who have understood when others did not”; not, “You are those who were mighty in faith when others doubted”; not, “You are those who have been a perfect, even a decent, witness of me when others have evangelized poorly.” Jesus says only, “You are those who have stayed.”

Certainly holiness matters very much to Christ, and he means to produce all sorts of good fruit in his disciples. But I speak now to you who feel yourselves unworthy ever to be a disciple of Jesus—you who even now wonder if you are strong enough to suffer with Jesus, like these men.

These were not great men! They feared, they doubted, they failed, they stumbled, they misunderstood, they bickered, they

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<sup>11</sup> Vv. 57-58.

<sup>12</sup> Phil. 3:10.

abandoned. Just like you! Just like me. Cut them and they bleed. Yet they are true disciples, accepted by their Master, as you yourself can be.

There is that one trait only pointed out by Jesus in our text: they stayed with him.

The devil is working harder this year than I have ever seen him work before. And I do not at all doubt that he has been busy among you, suggesting to your thought all sorts of insecurities and fears: “How do you know God really approves of you, and what you are doing in life? Maybe you are entirely misguided. You are failing so absolutely that you dare not expect him to be happy with you. If you really want to be a faithful Christian, you have a lot to fix in your life first—and since you’ve never been able to fix these things before, it is unlikely you’ll ever be a useful Christian, or a Christian at all!”

The devil works in mists, uncertainties, and insinuations. Open a window to let in a ray of light, and all his lies dissipate at once. Here then is the light of God’s word: these disciples, these men whose names are engraved on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem, they had every weakness I have, but they *stayed with Jesus!* That was enough to win them all of heaven’s glories.

That simple and imperfect faith that, when Jesus asks, “Do you want to go away as well?” replies, “Lord, to whom shall we go?”—that faith gifted to us by God which presses us forward, sometimes mightily, sometimes at a crawl, sometimes in simple desperation—that is enough.<sup>13</sup>

These eleven in the upper room were in no way exceptional, these fishermen with all their foibles. But they stayed with Jesus. And you, what does God require of you this morning, but to go to Jesus, and to stay with him? He will bear the heavy load; you will feel some of the aftereffects of his own sufferings, but he alone will feel God’s wrath for your sin.

There then is the first part of our passage, the duty or the deed done by these men: they stayed with Jesus in his trials.

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<sup>13</sup> John 6:67-68.

## Rewards

And now as we proceed to the second part, the tender mercies of Christ unfold like a new blossoming flower. It is mercy enough that Christ should even notice this one, small virtue of his small band—they stayed with him.

But now see what rewards he promises them for having done this small thing, a thing which he as their Shepherd enabled them to do in the first place!

He offers them these immense rewards:

You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus had just before rebuked the Twelve for fighting over who might be the greatest. They were thinking like Gentiles, like unbelievers, vying for the highest seat of power and prestige. And Jesus rightly reprimanded them for acting like the world. The greatest of them should not aim for the highest seat, but for the lowest. He should be the servant of all the rest—that is greatness.

But now he says something quite surprising to these same men. He has just said, “Stop trying to be kings!” And now he promises them, “You will be kings.”

This will be their reward for staying with Jesus in all his mistreatments and weakness and suffering. By not reaching out their hand to take power now, they win power later. They have a grand and rich reward.

Our text in its original did not contain the commas we have put in, so verses 29 and 30 could read one of two ways: “I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom,” and then an explanation of what he means by kingdom or kingship: “that you may eat and drink,” etc.

Or, “I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me a kingdom, that,” and then what he assigns to them.

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 22:28-30.

But whether you see a comma in verse 29 or not—whether Jesus assigns to them “a kingdom” or that they sit at his table and on thrones, which amounts to kingship—makes little difference to the meaning.

The Father had determined in his eternal plan to seat his beloved Son on the throne as Messiah. He would, after his Son’s suffering, give him all authority in heaven and on earth. The Messianic kingdom is the Messiah’s kingdom, and Jesus is the Messiah.

So here is heaven’s destined king, and what does he do with his authority? He relegates it. His Father assigned it to him, now he assigns it to those who will rule under him—these fishermen! This unexceptional bunch who, despite their many stumblings, stayed with Jesus in his earthly troubles.

These men will eat and drink with Jesus at, notice, “*my table in my kingdom.*” Like small Mephibosheth who sat at David’s royal banquets, these insignificant Galileans, men whose names otherwise you and I would never have known, men who were not kings on earth, not great men here—they will dine in the kingdom, when Christ comes to rule in his millennial kingdom and to renew all things.

We have already seen Jesus’ promise that believers will feast with him in that coming kingdom. But now we find an almost unbelievable reward offered these men.

They will “sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

At a parallel place in Matthew’s gospel we get more details of what Jesus said: “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”<sup>15</sup>

There will be twelve thrones for twelve men because Matthias, at the start of the book of Acts, a man who also stayed with Jesus from the very beginning of his ministry, will take Judas’ spot. And these men will judge—not in the sense of discerning between right and wrong, for there will be no wrong in that world, but in

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<sup>15</sup> Matt. 19:28.

the sense of ruling—over the nation of Israel, which will have repented in mass and received all her promises.

What is perhaps most remarkable to note at this point is that this promise, this reward of kingship for simply staying by Jesus' side, is not limited to these few men. They in a special way will oversee ethnic Israel, it seems, but they are not the only persons who will reign with Christ.

Let me speak to you, Christian, who have surrendered yourself to Christ and who stay with him. Now, you walk with him in trials, do you not? This year has seen its fair share of them. And you may feel disoriented and wonder even what God expects of you in this confusing cultural moment. You are in a nation that rages in a sort of civil Civil War, in a church that has been shaken by conflict, in a community cloistered by a pandemic, among many persons receiving diagnoses of cancer and disease. And if still you are following after Jesus—even if it is with no more than that desperate faith of the disciples who said, “To whom else shall we go?”—then you are staying with Jesus in his trials. No, not his earthly trials, but when Saul persecuted Jesus' disciples, that Master asked him, “Why are you persecuting *me*?” Your trials are his, and his are yours.

You who have stayed with him in his trials, what hope do you have when those trials are at their hottest?

This: you will reign with Christ. You will not always be subject to the harsh winds of trial, powerless to prevent them. You, you yourself, will sit upon a throne. Not the twelve appointed to these men, but one assigned to you.

Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, said that he labored for the elect so that they might receive “eternal glory.”<sup>16</sup> You—if you have stayed with Jesus, if you are his, you are the elect. You have ahead of you eternal glory. What can that mean? He explains: “if we endure [that is, if we stay], we will also reign with [Christ]”!<sup>17</sup>

We! That is you and me right now. We will reign, on thrones, making decisions.

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<sup>16</sup> 2 Tim. 2:10.

<sup>17</sup> V. 11.

First Corinthians 6 says the same thing: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”<sup>18</sup> Perhaps you didn’t! But now you do. You, the saints, will judge—rule!—the world under Christ. “Do you not know,” the text continues, “that we are to judge angels?”<sup>19</sup>

“The one who conquers,” our Savior promises in Revelation 3, “I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”<sup>20</sup>

You stay with Christ under fire and, when the fire lets up, you conquer. Don’t let the devil scare you with his false bravado, as though by all his efforts he were winning in any way. Don’t leave the line, don’t flee; you hold your ground, Christian.

The battle cannot go on forever. You stand with Jesus now, and you will not and cannot fall. He will uphold your hand. Your sins are on his cross, your tears are in his bottle, and your name is in his book. There is a table set for you, and a throne prepared.

Stay with Jesus, no matter what trial may appear. He has assigned to you, after all your troubles, a kingdom.

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<sup>18</sup> V. 2.

<sup>19</sup> V. 3.

<sup>20</sup> V. 21.