

John 21:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.
And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

Analysis

This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. John's editorial comment explains Jesus's cryptic prophecy: **This spake he, signifying by what death** (τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν σημαίνων ποίω θανάτῳ/touto de eipen sēmainōn poiō thanatō). The verb **signifying** (σημαίνων/sēmainōn) means to indicate by signs or symbols—Jesus spoke metaphorically about crucifixion.

The purpose clause is crucial: **he should glorify God** (δοξάσει τὸν θεόν/doxasei ton theon). Peter's martyrdom would not merely be tragic death but divine glorification. The future tense **should glorify** prophesies what John's readers knew as historical fact. This transforms martyrdom from defeat to victory—through faithful death, Peter would honor God, demonstrate Christ's power to sustain, and witness to resurrection hope.

Jesus earlier used identical language about His own death: 'The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified' (John 12:23), immediately explaining this meant His death (12:24). Peter's death would mirror Christ's—both glorifying the Father through obedient suffering.

After this sobering prophecy, Jesus issues the simple command: **Follow me** (ἀκολουθεῖ μοι/akolouthei moi). This echoes Jesus's original call to Peter (Matthew 4:19) but now with fuller understanding. Discipleship means following Jesus not only in life and ministry but through suffering to death. The present imperative

Follow (ἀκολουθεῖ/akolouthēi) demands continuous, ongoing following—even unto martyrdom.

Historical Context

By the time John wrote this Gospel, Peter's martyrdom was historical reality, giving this passage poignant retrospective power. Early church tradition records Peter's crucifixion in Rome, likely during Nero's persecution following the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64. Tertullian writes that Peter 'endured a passion like his Lord's' (crucifixion), while Origen adds the detail of Peter's request for inverted crucifixion.

For John's readers facing persecution under Domitian or afterward, this passage provided crucial encouragement: martyrdom glorifies God, Christ foreknows and ordains the manner of our deaths, and following Christ may indeed lead to execution. Yet this is not defeat—it's the highest honor, conformity to Christ's own suffering.

The phrase 'Follow me' in context of Peter's approaching martyrdom gave interpretive framework for all Christian suffering. Jesus doesn't promise safety or prosperity but costly discipleship. The same Lord who called Peter by Galilee's shore calls him to Rome's cross—and the same Lord strengthens for both.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that martyrdom 'glorifies God' transform our view of suffering and persecution from tragedy to purposeful witness?
2. What does it mean that Jesus calls us to 'follow Him' knowing this may lead to suffering and death—and what does faithful following look like?

3. How should Christ's sovereignty over the manner and timing of our deaths affect our fear of death and our willingness to take risks for the gospel?

Interlinear Text

τοῦτο	δὲ	εἰπὼν	σημαίνων	ποίῳ	θανάτῳ	δοξάσει	
This	^{G1161}	spake he	signifying	by what	death	he should glorify	
G5124		G2036	G4591	G4169	G2288	G1392	
τὸν	θεόν	καὶ	τοῦτο	εἰπὼν	λέγει	αὐτῷ	Ἀκολουθεῖ μοι
^{G3588}	God	And	This	spake he	he saith	unto him	Follow me
	G2316	G2532	G5124	G2036	G3004	G846	G190 G3427

Additional Cross-References

2 Peter 1:14 (Parallel theme): Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.

John 21:22 (Parallel theme): Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

Matthew 10:38 (Parallel theme): And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

Philippians 1:20 (Parallel theme): According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

John 12:33 (Parallel theme): This he said, signifying what death he should die.

1 Samuel 12:20 (Parallel theme): And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart;