

# John 21:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

## Analysis

**Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.** Christ's response firmly redirects Peter from comparison to personal obedience. The conditional clause **If I will that he tarry till I come** (ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἔως ἔρχομαι/ean auton thelō menein heōs erchomai) establishes divine sovereignty—the phrase **I will** (θέλω/thelō) emphasizes Christ's sovereign choice. The verb **tarry** (μένειν/menein) means to remain, abide, continue living.

The phrase **till I come** (ἔως ἔρχομαι/heōs erchomai) likely refers to Christ's second coming, though it could mean 'until I come in judgment on Jerusalem' (AD 70) or simply 'as long as I choose.' The ambiguity is intentional—Jesus refuses to satisfy Peter's curiosity, instead asserting His sovereign right to determine each disciple's path.

The rhetorical question **what is that to thee?** (τί πρὸς σέ;/ti pros se?)—literally 'what to you?'—is sharp rebuke. Jesus essentially says: 'My plans for John are none of your concern.' This isn't harsh but necessary correction. Peter's calling is to follow Christ, not monitor other disciples' assignments or compare suffering.

The command **follow thou me** (σύ μοι ἀκολούθει/sy moi akolouthei) repeats verse 19's imperative but now with emphatic pronoun **thou** (σύ/sy)—'You! You follow me!' The emphasis individualizes the call: Peter must focus on his own obedience,

not John's destiny. The present imperative demands continuous action—keep following, regardless of what happens to others.

## Historical Context

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Jesus's words 'If I will that he tarry till I come' sparked misunderstanding, as verse 23 immediately clarifies. Some believers interpreted this as Jesus promising John wouldn't die before the Second Coming. This misunderstanding may have caused confusion when John grew very old—was Christ delayed? John's editorial clarification in verse 23 corrects this: Jesus didn't promise John wouldn't die, only hypothetically stated His sovereign right to determine John's lifespan.

Church tradition records John as the only apostle to die of natural causes, living to extreme old age in Ephesus (some traditions claim he lived past age 90). He outlived Peter by 25-30 years, surviving persecution under multiple emperors, and was reportedly the last surviving eyewitness of Jesus's ministry. Yet his long life didn't mean easier calling—tradition records John's exile to Patmos (Revelation 1:9) and various persecutions.

For early Christians facing persecution, Christ's words taught crucial lessons: God assigns different paths to different servants; we must not compare our suffering with others'; our calling is personal obedience to Christ's specific word to us; divine sovereignty determines the length and manner of our service. These principles countered both jealousy (Why does he suffer less?) and pride (I'm suffering more than others).

## Related Passages

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**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. How does Jesus's sharp question 'What is that to thee?' challenge our tendency to monitor and compare other Christians' callings and experiences?
2. Why is it significant that Jesus uses a hypothetical ('If I will...') rather than actually revealing John's future to Peter?
3. In what areas of life are you distracted from your own calling by observing others' paths, and how does Christ's command 'Follow thou me' reorient your focus?

## Interlinear Text

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λέγει	αὐτὸν	ό	Ἰησοῦς	Ἐὰν	αὐτὸν	θέλω	μένειν
saith	unto him	G3588	Jesus	If	unto him	I will	that he tarry
G3004	G846		G2424	G1437	G846	G2309	G3306
ἔως	ἔρχομαι	τί	πρὸς	σέ	σύ	ἀκολούθει	μοι
till	I come	what	is that to	thee	thou	follow	me
G2193	G2064	G5101	G4314	G4571	G4771	G190	G3427

## Additional Cross-References

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**Mark 9:1** (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

**Revelation 2:25** (Parallel theme): But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

**1 Corinthians 4:5** (Parallel theme): Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

**Revelation 3:11** (Parallel theme): Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

**1 Corinthians 11:26** (Parallel theme): For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

**Matthew 24:44** (Parallel theme): Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

**John 21:19** (Parallel theme): This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

**James 5:7** (Parallel theme): Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

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