

The Comparison Game
John 21:20-25/#thegospelofjohn

How often, even this week, have you been thumbing through Facebook and churning in jealousy over the vacations people get to go on that you don't?

How many times this year have you looked over at a husband's arm around his wife and dreamed of having the type of marriage that couple seems to have?

What would it be like not to live paycheck to paycheck and have what other people have?

What would it be like for your husband to make enough money for you to be a stay at home mom? What would it be like to actually get away from the insanity of being with the kids 24/7 and go to work?

What would it be like to not have a kid who struggles?

We so desire equity, but in our ignorance we look with envy at one another's lives and want to swap places. We make snap judgments about things that are too great for us. We create caricatures of people's lives that romanticize what appears to be an advantage they have over our lives. Daily we drink from a poisonous well of comparison that steals joy from our soul and keeps us distracted from the task at hand. The ticket to a miserable life is to keep your eyes on others.

In John 21, Jesus describes Peter's future life assignments. Jesus recommissions Peter to be an undershepherd and servant leader (vs.15-17). Not only that, but Jesus tells Peter that he is going to be stretched out and crucified on a cross as a martyr (vs. 18-19). This isn't the most charming life-assignment.

Peter's response and maybe your response is to look around and say - is there equity in this world? Why does everyone else's life look so much better than mine? If I have to suffer, then surely John should be expected to suffer in just the same way, for the same period of time, under the same circumstances.

Every single person is fighting battles, battles that we do not even have a clue about. Their lives look so much better than ours because we don't know about their struggles and pain. In John 21 we learn something about our calling through Peter's calling. Our calling is to follow Jesus wherever He leads us, not where He leads the person next to us. What God does with you, he doesn't necessarily do with others.

**Don't compare; God works with us individually and uniquely.
Follow Him anyways!**

²⁰ Peter turned around and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. (This was the disciple who had leaned back against Jesus' chest at the meal and asked, "Lord, who is the one who is going to betray you?")²¹ So when Peter saw him, he asked Jesus, "Lord, what about him?"²² Jesus replied, "If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours? You follow me!"²³ So the saying circulated among the brothers and sisters that this disciple was not going to die. But Jesus did not say to him that he was not going to die, but rather, "If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours?"²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies about these things and has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.²⁵ There are many other things that Jesus did. If every one of them were written down, I suppose the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (John 21:20-25)

Besides Jesus, the two main characters at the end of the Gospel of John are Peter and John. They play key roles in the upper room discourse (13:8-37), they stayed close to Jesus during the arrest and trials (18:10-27), and John was at the foot of the cross when Jesus took His last breath (19:26-27). They were both involved in running to the tomb when they heard the news of the resurrection from Mary Magdalene (20:2-6). But now Jesus explains that their paths are going to diverge somewhat, and this doesn't sit well with Peter.

Last week we learned of Jesus' restoration and recommissioning of Peter to shepherd and feed the sheep, but also to glorify God through dying as a martyr (v. 18-19). It is a very natural and instinctual question to move your eyes from the prize and onto those around you, to ask Jesus whether others will share your fate.

Peter responds like so many of us do. In the face of such a challenging life-assignment from Jesus, we would also wonder who else is in the same boat with us. Who else is going to follow Christ to death? Am I all alone? Am I the only one who will suffer like this? What about John and the other disciples? Will they too be "stretched out and carried where they do not wish"?

Like each of us, Jesus' invitation for discipleship to Peter is personal. Jesus offers Peter's life assignment to Peter and no one else. Jesus' invitation for discipleship is personal to you as well. Jesus has a unique offer to you and no one else. This is what is going down in your life and it's going to be different. It's going to feel harder than what others around you are going through and I'm still asking you to follow Me!

The Apostle Paul fills in some gaps in 1 Corinthians 4:2-5 by explaining that our calling is to be remain faithful as a steward and daily remember that Jesus is the One who will sort everything out in the end.

² Now what is sought in stewards is that one be found faithful. ³ So for me, it is a minor matter that I am judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not acquitted because of this. The one who judges me is the Lord. ⁵ So then, do not judge anything before the time. Wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of hearts. Then each will receive recognition from God. (1 Cor. 4:2-5)

Paul says, "I am not concerned with the judgment of man or a human court (or false teachers in his situation 3:9-11). I don't even have the capacity to judge myself. The one who judges me is the Lord!" There is only One who can bring to light the things that are dark and hidden motives of the heart. Paul is not that One and neither are you.

In vs. 21 Peter asks, "Lord, what about John?" Jesus says to him, "If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours? You follow me!" (vs. 22). A rumor had gone around in the early church, based on a misunderstanding of what Jesus had said to Peter, that John would be the one original apostle who would remain alive until the Lord returned. Jesus didn't say that John would stay alive until his return. He only said it was none of Peter's business.

Whose business is Peter's life assignment or John's life assignment? It is the one whom John has been testifying about as he indicates in vs. 24. Verse 24 is like the Apostle John's signature at the end of His Gospel. Instead of telling us why he has written the things he has (like he does in chapter 20:30-31), he tells us in the last verse of the Gospel what would have happened if he'd tried to write down everything about Christ - "the world itself wouldn't be able to contain the books that would be written" (vs. 25).

Remember the stats that David Newkirk gave us? Jesus' time of ministry involves about 1080 days. In the four Gospels only 50 days are covered and within those days, they were partial. That leaves us with only 4.6% of Jesus' life chronicled in the Gospels. John has given us all the information we need to make a decision about Jesus (20:30-31), but the truth is we cannot contain the majesty, power, and grace of Jesus Christ in all the libraries of the world. Paul says, "*All things in heaven and earth were created by him— all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers— all things were created through him and for him.¹⁷ He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him...²⁰ and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross— through him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*" (Col 1:16-17, 20)

Follow Him anyways!

Jesus basically says to Peter - what concern is it to you if I give John a life that looks different than yours? Follow Me! Jesus is saying to you - what concern is it to you if your life assignment is unique and different? I'm asking you to follow Me!

- What is it to you that this family gets to go on this vacation and you don't? You follow me.
- What is it to you that this couple has a marriage that seems better than yours? You follow me.
- What is it to you that this family has been given more financial opportunity? You follow me.
- What is it to you that she gets to stay home with the kids or what is it to you that she gets to work and get away from the kids? You follow me.
- What is it to you that your kids struggle but everyone else's kids seem to thrive? You follow me.

Jesus has a work for you to do. It's going to be different than anyone else's work. We have been given a new nature, with a new heart. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and given all the riches of Christ Jesus so that we can let go of what people are doing on the right or left of us and focus on our life assignments. Jesus says - I want you to worry about you.