

**Video: More Coke.** So many of us are tempted to compare who we are, what we have and what we can do with others. And possibly these days the temptation is greater than ever before.

Advertising, television and especially social media encourage us to play the comparison game.

- Are we attractive enough?
- Do we wear the right clothes?
- Do we drive the right car?
- Do we own the right phone?
- Are we having as much fun, laughter or love as the next person.
- How many friends or followers or likes do we have?

And even as Christians we can fall into that trap. We can be tempted to compare with other believers when it comes to our

- Our worship experiences
- Our Bible knowledge
- Our spiritual gifts
- Our ministry role
- Our evangelism successes
- Our answered prayers

But there are real dangers in all of this. It robs us of our joy and contentment in who we are and what we have. It breeds jealousy and envy. It causes competition and rivalry. But most of all it distracts us from the one we should focus on. It makes us focus on the gifts, rather than on the giver.

And so at the end of John's gospel, we are again encouraged to fix our eyes on and follow Jesus.

As we saw last week, Jesus had just restored Peter not only to a relationship with himself, but also to the privilege of serving him and suffering for him:

- He called Peter to take care of his followers and teach them his truth.
- And told him that he'd glorify God by laying down his life for him.

It was at that moment, that Peter was tempted to compare himself to others.

John 21:20-25: **"Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?")"** <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, **"Lord, what about him?"**

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, **"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."** <sup>23</sup> Because of this, the rumour spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, **"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"**

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

<sup>25</sup> Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

### 1. Take Your Eyes Off Others

Peter had just had an amazing experience with the Risen Christ:

- He had once again experienced the miraculous power of Jesus in an unexpected catch of fish.
- Then he had experienced the wonderful presence of Jesus, as they shared breakfast together on the beach.
- And then he had experienced the outrageous grace of Jesus, when his three denials were dealt with through an invitation to declare his love and a commission to share that love with others.

But like so many of us, Peter got distracted. **"Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them."**

John 21:20 Most people understand this to be John, the writer of this gospel. He usually described himself in this cryptic way. And for some reason, John distracted Peter.

#### a) Don't Be Distracted

And this wasn't the first time Peter got distracted from looking to Jesus. Do you remember when Jesus walked out to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a storm? He called Peter to walk towards him. And so **"Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus."** Matthew 14:29.

It was an amazing act of faith. **"But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save**

me!” Matthew 14:30 When Peter had his eyes fixed on Jesus, he was able to do the impossible. But when he was distracted by the storm, he started to sink!

I think many of us can similarly be distracted from looking to Jesus. Have you ever been in church, or reading your Bible, or praying and suddenly find yourself focussed on something completely different?

- Your phone rings, you get a message or a notification pops up from your social media feed.
- You suddenly remember something urgent that you forgot to do.
- You start worrying about some problem or difficulty coming up later in the day.
- Something catches your eye and your concentration is lost.

I don't think this is just for people with attention deficit issues. I think this is simply the spiritual battle that we are all in. The Devil knows how powerful it is when we focus on the Lord, and so he will do anything and everything to distract us from him.

And so the writer of Hebrews encourages us: “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.” Hebrews 12:1-2

### b) Don't Compare

So we need to watch out for distractions. And one of the major distractions in our lives is comparing ourselves to others. “When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’” John 21:21

Jesus had just told Peter about the hardships that he was going to face as a believer. He was going to have his hands stretched out and be taken where he didn't want to go. This indicated that Peter would face the horror being crucified for his faith.

But what Peter wanted to know was, “What was going to happen to John?” Was his life going to be tough too? Was he going to face martyrdom as well?

I guess Peter didn't want to have it tougher than others. He wanted to know that this suffering was going to be spread out equally among the disciples. He wanted it to be fair!

That's so like us. So many of us are tempted to compare our lives with others. Why is it so hard for me and not for him? Why does she seem to get on so easily and things are so difficult for me? Why have they been given all the gifts and I can't do anything?

But Jesus didn't comply with Peter's request. Do you see how he responded? “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” John 21:22

Jesus was not saying that John wasn't going to die until he returned. In v23, John squashed that rumour that had spread among the Christians of his generation. According to 2<sup>nd</sup> century writers John was exiled to Patmos and then died as an old man in Ephesus.

But what Jesus was saying to Peter was kind of like “Mind your own business.” Yes, we are called to encourage each other and care for each other. But we are not called to compare ourselves with each other.

### c) We Are Called To Love

In part this is because comparing ourselves with each other causes competition and envy. And that leads inevitably to disagreements and division. As James says: “Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” James 3:16

And so comparing ourselves with others doesn't belong in the selfless and loving community that Jesus wants his people to be. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It is not rude, it is not self-seeking.” 1 Corinthians 13:4–5

### d) We Have Different Roles

But comparing ourselves with others is also out of place in the church because God has a specific plan for each of our lives. Yes, the general principles are the same. He wants all of us to follow Jesus and become more and more like him. But the specific details of the plan are not the same.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.”

Each of us who’ve trusted in Jesus are part of his body and we are all called to work together for God. But we have been given different gifts, different roles and different abilities in God’s kingdom.

#### e) We Have One Lord

And we don’t get to choose them. Instead this is according to God’s sovereign purpose and plan for our lives. “God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” 1 Corinthians 12:18

And so it doesn’t make sense to compare ourselves with others. It is meaningless to compare and contrast our lives and ministries, our successes and struggles with them. We’re not called to the same roles. We’ve not been given the same work. We’ve not been blessed with the same gifts.

Instead, we need to seek to honour the Lord in the role he has given us, working with all the strength he has provided, using the gifts to the full that he has gifted us.

This was Paul’s ambition: “We make it our goal to please him.” 2 Corinthians 5:9

We need to seek to honour Jesus, and leave everyone else to do the same! And so as Paul says in Romans 14:4: “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls.”

## 2. Fix Your Eyes on Jesus

And so instead of looking at others, our eyes need to be fixed on Jesus. Jesus said to Peter, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” John 21:22

We need to keep our eyes on Jesus, not on other people. Don’t compare, compete and criticise. That will destroy our commitment and strength. Instead we need to follow Jesus!

To follow him, whatever anyone else does. Whatever anyone else experiences. Whatever successes or struggles they have. Whatever choices they make.

We need that single-minded focus that Joshua expressed near the end of his ministry: “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

And that is what John’s gospel has been encouraging to do all along. As I hope most of you will know, our theme verse over this past year and a half as we’ve been studying this amazing book has been: “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31

John’s purpose in writing this gospel was that we would focus on Jesus. He wants us to understand his identity, put our faith in him, receive the life that he alone can give and follow him.

#### a) He is the Son Of God

That’s because only Jesus is worthy of our complete focus because he alone is God with us. John declared this at the start of his gospel. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1

The Word is the eternal Son of God. He is the Holy One who has always been in constant fellowship with God the Father and God the Spirit. He is the Creator of this universe, the Giver and Sustainer of life.

And yet, for John, he was someone that he knew personally. The Word was his friend, his teacher, his leader. That’s because: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

This is the mind-blowing reality of who Jesus really is. He is fully God and fully man. God incarnate. Immanuel. God with us.

This is what Jesus has claimed through the 7 I Am Statements in this gospel. For example, when he said, “Before Abraham was born, I am.” John 8:58, he was using the covenant name of God. He was claiming to be Yahweh, the eternal self-

existent one, who doesn't depend on anyone else and who doesn't change.

You might remember that the Jews understood what he was claiming. That's why they ["Picked up stones to stone him."](#) John 8:59 They believed his claim to deity was blasphemous.

But Jesus backed up these claims with convincing proof of his identity. This is what John has shown from the 7 miraculous signs that he has described. Only the Son of God could:

- Turn water into wine
- Speak the word and heal an official's son
- Restore a man who had been an invalid for 38 years
- Feed a crowd of over 5,000 from a boy's packed lunch
- Give sight to a man born blind
- Raise Lazarus from the grave
- And defeat death by rising again.

And these are only a carefully selected collection of some of the amazing things that Jesus did. John wrote: ["Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."](#) John 21:25

That's why only Jesus is worthy of our focus. He is unique in his identity. And he is so amazing that we will never get to the end of the awe and wonder of who he is and what he has done.

#### b) He is the Saviour

And because of this, he is the only one who can save us. This is what Jesus has claimed throughout this gospel with his 7 I Am Sayings:

- He said, ["I am the bread of life."](#) John 6:35, as he is the only one who can satisfy the hunger in our souls.
- He said, ["I am the light of the world."](#) John 8:12, as he is the only one who can lead us out of the darkness of sin.
- He said, ["I am the gate."](#) John 10:9, as he is the only entrance into salvation.
- He said, ["I am the good shepherd."](#) John 10:11, as he is the only one who loved us so much that he laid down his life for us.
- He said, ["I am the resurrection and the life."](#) John 11:25, because he is the only who can rescue us from death.
- He said, ["I am the way and the truth and the life."](#) John 14:6, as he is the only way to God.
- He said, ["I am the vine."](#) John 15:5, as he is only way we can be fruitful for God.

Jesus is the one and only Saviour. And so if we want to be saved, if we want to know God and be brought into a relationship with God, and be with God forever in heaven, then we need to put our faith in him, and him alone!

#### c) He is the Source of Life

And so if we want to know real, everlasting life in all its fullness then we must not be distracted by anyone or anything else. We need to fix our eyes on Jesus, and like Thomas bow before him and declare him as our Lord and our God, because he alone is the source of that life.

Jesus said, ["I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."](#) John 10:10.

#### d) He is the Shepherd

And if we've received this life, then we need to continue to wholeheartedly follow him. Because he is the Good Shepherd. And his sheep are defined as those who listen to his voice and follow him.

And when we do this, we can rest in the security, love and freedom that he alone can give. Jesus said, ["My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand."](#) John 10:27–28

#### Conclusion

So let's not be like Peter here.

- Let's not be distracted by other people.
- And let's not compare our successes or struggles with them.

Instead, let's fix our eyes on Jesus.

- Worship him as the Son of God.
- Believe in him as our Saviour.
- Depend on him as the Source of life in all its fullness.
- Follow him as our Shepherd, the one who will never lead us astray, and who will never let us go.

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August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020