

## The sermon

### Intro

We're tempted to compare our lives with others. Why do they have it better than me? Why is my suffering worse than theirs? Why do they never suffer at all?

Let's look to John for some guidance.

### Body

#### Point 1: A subtle reminder (21:1-14)

##### READ 21:1-14

Sunday morning Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. Sunday evening Jesus appeared to the disciples. A week later Jesus appeared to the disciples with Thomas present. Now Jesus appears to a group of disciples at the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberius (John 6:1).

They've left Jerusalem. They're back in Galilee.

**Nathaniel** is probably the apostle Bartholomew. Bartholomew's never mentioned in John, but Nathaniel is. The apostle Philip brought Nathaniel to Jesus (John 1:45-49). In the apostle lists Bartholomew always follows Philip (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14). And Bartholomew is a family name. So Nathaniel is likely his personal name.

Evidently the apostles have gone back to fishing. Before following Jesus, the sons of Zebedee, James and John, were business partners with Peter in the fishing industry.

Fishing didn't mean they had given up on Jesus. They just needed some food and money while in limbo. Before the crucifixion, Jesus promised that he would meet them in Galilee (Matt 26:30-32). After the resurrection, Jesus told some women to tell the brothers to go to Galilee, where Jesus would appear to them (Matt 28:7, 10). They're exactly where they were supposed to be (Matt 28:16). The fact that they're in Galilee means they obeyed Jesus' instructions.

### Event

The group of seven went fishing at night. Nighttime was considered the best time for fishing. Fish caught before sunrise could be sold fresh early in the morning before the competition got theirs out.

They caught nothing that night.

As the sun began to rise (21:4), Jesus appeared, but they didn't recognize him. Frequently the resurrected Jesus supernaturally prevented disciples from recognizing him (Luke 24:16, 31).

He asks if they have any fish. Pretending to be a customer? The answer's "no." He assures them if they cast on the right they'll get some.

They listen and catch so many fish they couldn't haul it in (21:6). John gets it: *"It is the Lord!"*

Peter rushes in the water to get to Jesus. Jesus eats with them in his resurrected body. We'll eat in heaven. Someone thought it important to count the fish.

*"the third time"* = the 3<sup>rd</sup> time before a larger group. Appearances to individuals (e.g., Mary Magdalene, Peter) or 2-3 don't count.

### déjà vu?

This event has a bit of déjà vu. Jesus prevents them from catching anything. After a long night of catching nothing, Jesus directs the fish for a large catch. Yes, Jesus has authority over the animal kingdom. Haven't we seen this before? Yes.

### **READ Luke 5:1-11**

Matthew (4:18-22) and Mark's (1:16-20) accounts reveal it was this time when Jesus said, "*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*" (Matt 4:19).

### **What's going on?**

It's as if, by a miraculous haul of fish, Jesus reminds them of their initial calling. Even though they fell away, nothing's changed. The mission remains.

### **Application**

We're not the apostles, but we are called to give up everything to follow Jesus and be fishers of men. Some may be gifted as evangelists, but evangelism is the duty of every one of us.

We do this knowing people need to hear the gospel in order to be saved. We do this knowing the gospel is powerful to save. We do this knowing Jesus is with us wherever we go, "*to the end of the age*" (Matt 28:20).

Be optimistic, not defeated. Natural, not awkward. Peaceful, not antagonistic. Ask people, have you ever heard the Christian gospel? If no, would you mind if I shared it with you? If yes, verify they understood the gospel. What is the gospel exactly?

Ask people how their life is going? When they reciprocate, share the difference God makes in your life to spark conversation. Intentionally peak curiosity by sharing things like I'm really struggling with intense back pain, but God is sustaining my joy. Things were hard with son, but God seems to be improving our relationship.

### **Point 2: Loving Jesus, the prerequisite for self-denying service (21:15-19)**

#### **READ 21:15-19**

***"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"***

Jesus could be saying do you love me more than you love your friends? Or do you love me more than the other disciples love me?

Taking "*these*" as boats, fish, and nets fits the situation. Peter is being re-commissioned so to speak. As was the case in Luke 5, Peter is challenged once again to leave everything to follow Jesus.

*And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him. – Matthew 4:19-20*

After humiliating and crushing failure, Peter is challenged to leave his nets once again.

***"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"***

Peter is asked three times. Maybe to match Peter's three denials? Each time Peter responds, "*you know that I love you.*" Jesus, being God, knows everything. He knows what each of us is thinking right now. He knows what we were thinking about last night. Jesus already knows Peter's heart. He's just forcing Peter to think about it.

***"Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep."***

Jesus hasn't discarded Peter for three denials. Peter's mission remains.

*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. – Matthew 16:18*

This hasn't changed. **Feed** highlights Peter's purpose: to help God's people grow into maturity by providing spiritual nourishment. **Tend** is the verb for "to pastor" highlighting the need to watch over, care for, and guide God's people. Jesus will build his church through Peter's pastoral work.

*Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." – 21:18*

The phrase "you will stretch out your hands" was common language for crucifixion. Peter's hands will be stretched when tied to the horizontal part of the cross. Then he'll be forced to carry his cross to the crucifixion site against his will.

Peter, you're going to die a humiliating, degrading, slow, excruciating, torturous death. Peter, you'll build my church. You'll care for my people and help them grow. And you'll glorify God by being crucified. Things won't end well for you Peter. I'm telling you beforehand.

Peter was crucified in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero.

**"Follow me."**

History's repeating itself. Luke 5 all over again. After three denials, Peter's challenged by the risen Christ to follow once more.

Do you see what's going on here?

Peter has failed → Jesus is forcing Peter to examine himself → Jesus is re-stating the task → Jesus is telling him the task will end in crucifixion → Jesus is reinstating Peter.

Jesus is saying I haven't given up on you Peter. What I said I'd do through you is still gonna happen. Care for my people well. It's not going to end well for you Peter. Pastoring is going to be costly. You're going to need to love me to endure. Peter, your care for my sheep will come at great cost to yourself.

Jesus is speaking plainly. Not sugar-coating it. Peter's gonna need to love Jesus supremely.

### **Application**

Most of us aren't called to pastor. Most of us aren't called to leave our homeland to make new disciples. I would guess we probably won't die for our faith? Certainly not by crucifixion. What does this mean for us?

At the most basic level, we're called to follow Jesus. And we'll need to love Jesus a lot to follow him. Following Jesus might mean parenting well or bringing the gospel into a family long steeped in false religion or teaching in the church or serving as a deacon or encouraging a Christian friend to endure well in trial or enduring physical affliction well and using that affliction to share the gospel. Christianity is practical. Following is practical!

We all have particular avenues to follow Jesus. These areas will differ among us. Some avenues we'll share like evangelism and encouraging one another and serving in the church. Opposition and insults and ostracism will vary from person to person. You might endure significant suffering for the glory of God.

Peter's crucifixion was for God's glory. For God's honor. God's value was on display when his servant Peter willingly embraced crucifixion. What suffering must you endure for God's glory? How are you called to follow Jesus today? How does a settled love for Jesus enable you to press on?

Love for Jesus is the life-blood for following Jesus, whether in ease or hardship. This means cultivate affection for Jesus. Delight in him!

### **Point 3: Accept God's will without comparing (21:20-25)**

#### **READ 21:20-25**

*"the disciple whom Jesus loved"* asked a question during the last supper: *"Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"* Peter has a question about that disciple. What's going to happen to him?

*"If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"* – 21:22

**Verse 23** clears up some confusion that was going on when the *Gospel of John* was written. Apparently, some disciples jumped to the conclusion that Jesus would return before John died. That's not what Jesus said. Jesus was giving a hypothetical. He wasn't saying he would return before John died.

How do I know this loved disciple is John, son of Zebedee? **Verse 24** identifies *"the disciple whom Jesus loved"* as a witness to these events. So the writer has to be one of the seven present for this meal. The loved disciple was present at the Last Supper, so he has to be one of the 12 apostles. There's only one apostle named John: John, son of Zebedee. The title, the *Gospel of John*, indicates it was written by a man named John. The early church agreed: this disciple is the apostle John.

In the *Gospel of John*, we only have highlights of what Jesus said and did.

#### **Application**

I want to highlight Jesus' statement, *"If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"*

Jesus is saying, "Peter, it shouldn't matter to you how John dies. My will for each disciple is individually customized. Circumstances will vary from person to person. There's no need to compare. Peter, focus on following me in the path I've chosen for you."

Meaning God's will for each of us will vary from person to person. Don't compare our lives with each other. Follow Jesus by submitting to the path he's set for you. Embrace all that God brings into your life as opportunity to glorify him.

#### **What this meant for Peter**

In Psalm 139:16, David believed that *"in your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."* Other Scriptures like John 21:18-19 indicate this isn't unique to David. God wrote our days before we were born! For Peter this means God formed death by crucifixion. Psalm 23:6 says, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."* God's goodness and mercy were following Peter as he endured crucifixion. God strengthened and sustained Peter's faith and joy while he comforted Peter and reminded him of pleasures forevermore in the kingdom of God. Romans 8:28 says, *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good."* God was working Peter's crucifixion for Peter's good. Do you believe this?

What this means is embrace God's customized will for you. Realize God will deal with you differently than he deals with me. You will face trials I won't. You will experience joys I won't. This is God's prerogative.

Trust that God is **good, sovereign, and wise**. These truths will comfort and guide you when you're tempted to compare.

### **Application**

There were times comparison would have crushed me.

In 2005, my sister 10 years younger was married and a year later my brother six years younger was engaged. Why did God make me wait so long and not them? Hope was dawning!

In 2007, my brother was a youth pastor. Two brother-in-laws were youth pastors. Kaitlin's cousin was a youth pastor. I graduated seminary in 2005. Is there something wrong with me? Will it ever happen for me? I really wanted (even lusted for) paid ministry instead of working at a shipyard.

In 2018, I'm in Kentucky and one of the professors at the seminary was a guy who grew up in a church pastored by Al Mather. I met him years earlier when he was visiting a church I was a member of. I moved back to New Hampshire. He stayed in that church. A church where a good number of the men become Christian authors. If only I stayed in DC? How did he become a professor and author when I completed seminary before he started?

If I didn't know truths like Psalm 139:16; Psalm 23:6; Romans 8:28 and others that teach God is good, sovereign, and wisely guiding my life I would have despaired playing the comparison game.

Christian, embrace God's customized will for you and follow him in it. Don't say to a suffering saint at least you don't have it as bad as Jerry. A trial can be crushing regardless if others have it worse. The comparison game can distract in both suffering and blessing.

Peter and John. Both were loved. Both were shown mercy. Both were treated justly. Both were guided wisely. Yet they had differing experiences. Same with you and me.

### **Non-Christian**

Maybe you're considering Christianity. What does this mean for you? The Christian life begins with following Jesus. That's coming to grips with our sin and seeing our need for forgiveness. Coming to grips with the fact that God is ruler and we're not. Coming to grips with the fact that we can't save ourselves. Only Jesus can earn our salvation and take our punishment away. So begin by placing your trust in the death of Christ to take away your sins. Then turn from sin by following Jesus.

And continue to follow Jesus. No matter what path he brings you down. Loving him until the end. Because he first loved us on the cross.