

# John 21

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[ 0 : 00 ] Sit down and turn back to John 21, which we heard earlier. Rivalry. It's there in each one of us, isn't it?

It's drilled into us from an early age as a virtue. Be the best. We cannot help making comparisons with other people.

Thomas Hardy writes in his book, *Jude the Obscure*, love has its own dark morality when rivalry enters in. We're often guided, aren't we, and enslaved to the question that Peter asks Jesus in John 21, looking at another disciple.

That one question that can drive so much of what we do. Jesus, what about this man? Rivalry can creep in amongst us, and it can stifle church activity. It can keep you from accepting the calling in life that Christ has given to you and living within your means.

But in the building of the church, John shows us here that Jesus uses all sorts. It takes all sorts. This is the third and final appearance of the risen Jesus Christ after Easter Sunday, isn't it?

[ 1 : 33 ] And it's a revelation of the living Jesus that galvanises his disciples back into activity. Jesus gets them fishing and producing fruit. He gets them back to work.

You see, we saw last week, didn't we, that the resurrection appearances are followed by church activity. The resurrection means there is no power vacuum in the church.

The disciples aren't just sitting around twiddling their thumbs because the Lord is back to work. But I think the meat of this chapter is that it acts as an epilogue to tie up the story of the disciples as Jesus builds the foundation of his church for the future.

And particularly important is the missional relationship between the disciples as they get back to work. As an example of that, we've got the relationship between Peter and John who wrote the gospel.

If you look through the chapter, those two men feature quite prominently, don't they? When Jesus appears, they're singled out. If you look at verse 7, That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, It is the Lord.

[ 2 : 53 ] And when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, He put on his outer garment for he was stripped for work, And he threw himself into the sea. The disciple Jesus loved there.

That is John. And again, later, when breakfast is finished, Jesus takes Peter aside for a kind of private chat. Do you love me?

But who is close by? Verse 20, Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. Surprise, surprise, there he is again.

And in the end, Peter asks about that disciple's calling. And we wonder why they're in this chapter so much, don't we? Why special mention of these two disciples?

Well, their relationship has kind of been developing throughout the whole gospel. And they are kind of paradigmatic of the complexities And complementarity and conflict that can be between Jesus' disciples.

[ 3 : 59 ] Now, I think it's worth just looking through, quickly through, Some of the passages where they feature in the gospels. I don't feel that you've got a turn there, But I'll read them out to you.

Back in chapter 13, verse 23, The two of them are together. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, that's John, Was reclining at table at Jesus' side.

Simon Peter motioned to him, Asking Jesus of whom he was speaking. The two of them are together again. Later in chapter 18, Simon Peter followed Jesus.

And so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, He entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood outside of the door.

The other disciple is another way that John uses to speak about himself. And again, in John 20, Just outside the empty tomb, The two of them are there again, aren't they?

[ 5 : 04 ] In verse 2, Mary, he ran and went to Simon Peter, And the other disciple, The one whom Jesus loved, Said to them, And said to them, They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, We don't know where they've laid him.

So Peter went out with the other disciple, And they were going towards the tomb. Both of them were running together. But the other disciple outran Peter, And he reached the tomb first.

It's a really funny detail, Isn't it? In John 20, That the two of them are running together, To the tomb, Like in some kind of race, Even.

John outruns Peter, But doesn't go in. And Peter kind of takes the plunge, Crosses the threshold, And goes in, And gets to the finish line first. What we see developing through the gospel, Are two men, With different tendencies, With different gifts, And different callings, Amongst the twelve.

The two of them are together, At key moments in Jesus' life and ministry, At Jesus' arrest, At his betrayal, At his resurrection, And now, Here they are again, At the appearance of Jesus from the dead.

[ 6 : 25 ] John seems to be giving us, Doesn't he, The sense that the two of them, Are in some way being compared. Their reactions, Their behaviours, They're placed side by side.

There may even be some rivalry between them. And so in John 21, Whatever is going on between them, Jesus directly addresses it.

Jesus wants to sort it out. Because they are not, To be in competition with each other, But to complement each other, In the ministry, Because it takes all sorts, In the church of Christ.

So Jesus, I think with Peter here, Highlights three antidotes for rivalry, In the Christian life. Three antidotes for rivalry.

First of all, Love for the Lord Jesus. Love for the Lord Jesus. I think many of us know this passage quite well, The deja vu moments, Of the charcoal fire conversation, With Jesus.

[ 7 : 37 ] Peter's been there before, Hasn't he? At the charcoal fire, When he denied Christ, Before his crucifixion. And Jesus repeats the same question, Do you love me?

Do you love me, Peter? Allegedly, It was Spurgeon, Who had a lady come to him, Saying that she felt called, To the ministry.

Spurgeon asked about, Her home life and family, And when he heard, That she had 13 children, Said, Well, Praise God, Not only has he called you, To the ministry, But he's given you, A congregation as well.

In whatever place, You are called to be, Whether it's, As a mum of 13, Or what may feel like that, Or a dad, Or in an office, Or in retirement, Or in a classroom, Or in eldership, Or in full time ministry, There really is, Only one thing, That Jesus requires of you, That you love him, The conversation, It echoes the conversation, Of the fire denial, Charcoal fire denial, Of association with Jesus, Only days earlier for Peter, And it is a lovely moment, Isn't it, Of reinstatement, For Peter, The chance to put the past, Behind him, For a renewed commitment, To Christ, Because it happens, Ministers fail, Quite spectacularly, Jesus shows that, There can be an opportunity, For renewal, It isn't necessarily, One strike and you're out, But the question itself, Is central, Do you love me?

[ 9 : 31 ] Although important, The first, Important, The first consideration, Isn't Peter, Do you have the gifts? Peter, Do you have the skills? Do you have the personality?

Do you have the acclaim? It's not even actually, Peter, Do you love my sheep? Is it? Jesus gives us the priority here, You can't say to someone, I love you, But I hate your kids, I love you, But I want to trash your house, I love you, But I want to steal your money, If you love the person first, You will naturally want, What is best for their stuff, For their belongings, And there could have been other things, Good things that Jesus asked Peter, Do you want to see my kingdom grow, Peter?

Do you want people to hear the gospel? Do you want my church to thrive? Some of the good things, But they're not adequate, If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, But I've not love, I'm a noisy gong, I'm a clanging cymbal, If I've got prophetic powers, And if I understand all mysteries, And all knowledge, If I have all faith, So as to remove mountains, But if I have not love, I am nothing, If I give away all I have, If I deliver my body to be burned, But have not love, I gain nothing, Paul says, This is what Jesus is interested in here, So whatever you're calling, Love for Christ is everything, You can lead a Bible study, You can change a nappy, What matters?

Do you love me? Jesus says, And just imagine disciples who do that, Loving him, Loving him more than praise, More than acclaim, More than fame, More than recognition, A love which could fuel, Quite quiet, Unnoticed service, In a home, Or in a church, Or in work, It's quite liberating actually, Isn't it?

When you think about it, Rather than seeing, Everyone else's eyes, Staring at you, You've only got one person, That you've got to think about really, One person to please, And to love, The focus at last, Is on Jesus, The main worry, Is how you see him, Not in comparison with others, Not in rivalry, Love for the Lord Jesus, Peter learns it, Secondly, He has to learn to admit, His own limitation, He has to learn to admit, His own limitation, Peter, Great character, Isn't he?

[ 12 : 44 ] He goes down, As someone, Who acts first, Thinks later, Who shoots his mouth off, And he is someone, We know, Who makes grand, Gestures of loyalty, To Jesus, Who makes sweeping, Pledges, Of commitment to him, Earlier in the gospel, Peter says to Jesus, Lord, Why can't I follow you now, I'll lay my life down for you, Lord, Jesus answered, Will you lay your life down for me, Peter?

Truly, Truly, I say to you, The rooster won't crow, Till you've denied me three times, He's so keen, To prove his worth, Isn't he, Peter? Chops off someone's ear, To prove himself, Maybe, To feel like he's got a prominent place, In the twelve, To feel like Jesus sees him, As significant, Seeing the other disciples, As rivals, Perhaps, He wants to be someone, To be in the crew, So he desperately tries, To be the big man, He wants to believe himself, Isn't he?

That he can be, He wants to convince himself, That he's got what it takes, But there's a moment here, Where he finally realises, And admits the hollowness, Of his own strength, And the emptiness, Of his own good intentions, He admits, And accepts his own limits, The threefold question, Do you love me?

Gives Peter another chance, Doesn't it? But just notice, The way that Peter answers, Lord, You know, That I love you, You know, That I love you, The third time, He's grieved, Do you love me? And he says to Jesus, Lord, You know everything, You know, That I love you, Something's changed, In Peter here, It's the first time, Peter doesn't try, To prove himself, With a grand gesture, He's done, Isn't he?

[ 14 : 59 ] With over the top promises, And rather than bravado, Rather than pointing, To his own actions, To prove his love, Rather than saying, Lord, I'm going to prove it to you, Give me the chance, He just says, Lord, You know, He defers, To Jesus' knowledge, Of him, He just rests, In the knowledge, That Jesus has, Of him, And where his heart, Really is, No more self-serving, Pledges, No more self-reliance, No more competing, Because Jesus knows, He knows him, Jesus can be, And is the judge, Of his true love, And of his true spirituality, So Michael Costa, Was a great, Orchestral conductor, And one day, As the story goes, He was rehearsing, With his entire orchestra, A full number was in, And he had a full-size choir, With him as well,

And at the loudest part, Of the piece of music, That they were rehearsing together, Midway, He suddenly stopped, And called for silence, And he noticed, A missing detail, Where's the piccolo? He said, What's happened to the piccolo? The piccolo player, Had pulled the sickie, Hoped to get away with it, He said, We can't go on, Without the piccolo, It's the smallest instrument, In the whole orchestra, But the master noticed, Peter is understanding, Isn't he, That the Lord is the great conductor, Of his church, And every body, In the body, Is a somebody, And there no longer, Needs to be, Great ostentatious, Pledges of brilliance, And he can have a realistic, Assessment of what he can, And what he can't do, Something different, About Peter here, He's less showy, Old Peter might have said, Lord I'll prove it to you, I love you, I'll die for you, But he's had the experience, Hasn't he, Of facing his own failures, Seeing his own sinfulness,

He sees his own limits, Quite clearly now, And anything he does do, Or feel, He entrusts to Jesus, His loyalty, And his love, In a way, Are Jesus' business, Aren't they?

He is a man, Who is now, Not out to compete, And be at the centre, And to be showy, To be part of things, In such a way, As everyone knows he is, He can simply pray, To Jesus, In a relationship with him, You know, That I love you Lord, You know I'm a somebody, No more lip service, No service, No more hypocrisy, Because Jesus you know, And loving you is everything, Loving the Lord, Admitting limitation, And thirdly, And lastly, He must embrace, His calling, He must embrace, His calling, Jesus drives, This conversation, Towards Peter's calling, In life, And his service, Lord, What about this man, Peter says, In verse 21, Jesus replies,

[ 18 : 32 ] Doesn't he, What is that to you, Verse 23, Concentrate on your own duties, Peter, Concentrate on what I'm asking you, To do here, Never mind him, You, It's emphatic, You follow me, Part of the reason, He asks that, Is because Jesus, Actually has dropped a bomb, On Peter's vocational plans, Just look at verse 18, It's quite strange, Isn't it, Truly I say to you, When you were young, You used to dress yourself, And walk wherever you wanted, But when you're old, You'll stretch out your hands, And another will dress you, And carry you where you do not want to go, Here is Jesus describing, The calling, That he is sending Peter out, Into, And he's talking about, The end of his life, He's talking about, When he gets old,

When he will lose his independence, And he will be subjected, To another, It's not an easy verse, To understand what he's saying, Is it, Maybe we imagine, An elderly Peter, Perhaps in a hospice, Being dressed, By someone, But that's not it, Having hands, Stretched out, Here, What Jesus is describing, Is a common way, Of talking about, The moment before crucifixion, John adds, Doesn't he, As a little note, In verse 19, This he said, To show what kind of death, He was going to die, To glorify God, This is his calling, In bringing glory to God, Peter is going to be a martyr, This is the path laid out, By Jesus for him, What about this guy, Says Peter, You can't blame him, Can you, The disciple Jesus loved, None of your business, Says Jesus, Jesus feels, No need here, To justify, To Peter, The calling, That he's given, To him, John might be killed, As well, He's not told that, Is he, This needs to be, The end of competition, And a movement, Towards a complementarity, Amongst the disciples, Because although different, Both Peter and John's callings, Have the same purpose, To glorify God, They're different men, With different work planned, On different paths, And yet they'll still be following, Jesus, In his footsteps, And Jesus will use them, According to their unique gifts, And their circumstances, In their character, And the way, The two of them, Are shown throughout the gospel, We see the unique, Roles that, That are there for them, As we read the gospel, John seems to be the one, With a particular, Intimate knowledge, Of Jesus, He has a certain, Discernment, About the person of Jesus, I think we see a hint of that, Even in this chapter, Because as Jesus appears to them, Who is it that, That notices him first, It's John isn't it, He says to Peter, In verse 7, It's the Lord, John sees, And knows, That it is Jesus, He is the one, Throughout the gospel, Who is physically, Closest to Jesus, He lies next to him, At suppers, He is at the son's side, Literally, And personally, He's the one, Who passes on questions, From disciples like Peter, And he provides, A close up account, Of the life,

And mission, Of Jesus, He's called, The disciple, That Jesus loved, Not because he, He doesn't love, The other disciples, But because of a, Unique calling, Given to him, Of being an eyewitness, Of being closely, Intimate with Jesus, Enough to write, This gospel, And his calling, Is, To strategic, Written, Prophetic witness, He writes, This theological, Masterpiece, The fourth gospel, He writes, His letters, He writes, The book of revelation, And then, Peter's calling, Is slightly different, He's called, To martyrdom here, He does write letters, Of course, But Peter's, Always been the action man, Hasn't he?

[ 23 : 26 ] He's the one, Who dives into the water, To get to Jesus, John recognises him, Peter jumps in, He's the one, Who gets to the tomb, First, He'll be the pastor, But either way, Both of them, Will in their calling, Reflect, And mirror Christ, This is really interesting, This, This insight here, Because John reminds us, In verse 20, Just look there, That John is the one, Who also had leaned back, Against Jesus, During the supper, And said, Lord, Who is it that, That is going to betray you?

He wants, To remind us here, Doesn't he, Of this intimacy, This role that, That John has, With Jesus, That he is at, Jesus' side, He is literally, At God's side, Isn't he?

And that, Mimics Jesus, No one, Has ever seen God, The only God, Who is at, The father's side, Has made him known, He is the one, Who, By being at, The side of God, The son, Knows the one, Who is at, The father's side, He has a unique role, In revealing God, The son, In his ministry, He is a little Jesus, In a way, Isn't he?

Bringing knowledge, Of God, To us, Through his gospel, By being at, God's side, Literally, And then, John's little note, In verse 19, About Peter's death, This was to show, The manner in which, He would die, John is ringing, A massive bell there, Because that, Is the exact, Same phrase, That is used, To describe, Jesus' death, Earlier in the gospel, John 12, When I'm lifted up, From the earth, I'll draw all men, To myself, He said this, To show by, What kind of death, He was going to die, Same phrase, Mirrored in Peter, And Jesus, Peter isn't going, To die a substitutionary, Death,

Is he?

But in some way, His death, Will mirror Christ, He will follow, In his footsteps, And bring God glory,  
You see how, Both men are called, To work, That mirrors, Christ's own work, In revealing God, And  
in dying obedience, Because, It takes, All sorts, Lord, What about this man, This woman, We must  
aspire, Mustn't we, To the godly example, Of others, And it's good to, To look at other Christians, In  
that way, But we ought to beware, As we do that, Because loving Christ, Is all that matters, And  
Jesus knows, That you're doing that, We can so easily, Easily obsess, With others, Can't we, And  
we can keep, That can keep us, From embracing the calling, That Jesus has given us,

[ 26 : 57 ] Wherever we are, Martyrs, There are martyrs, Aren't there, Christian martyrs, In the  
world, And if I were, Preaching to them tonight, Jesus would be saying, To them, Wouldn't he, Don't  
look at those people, In England, And ask what Peter asks, What about them, Lord, We might look  
at, Martyrs as well, In today, And in church history, And wonder, I've got to do that, To prove my  
love to you, Lord, Well, Jesus replies, What is that to you?

We can, On the flip side, Can't we be, Critical of, Christians as well, In other cultures, And in the  
past, Say, We, We wouldn't have done it like that, But we've, Little understanding, Of their situation,  
Of their resources, Of their context, Of their calling, And we can do that, With each other here  
today, We can look at others, Can't we, And we can say, Lord, Lord, Look at what they get to do,  
What about him, What about her?

Jesus says, What is that to you? Follow me, Let's close with Samuel Rutherford, Samuel Rutherford  
wrote, In the loveliness of Christ, The great master gardener, The father of our Lord Jesus Christ, In  
a wonderful providence, With his own hand, Planted me here, Whereby his grace, In this part of his  
vineyard, I grow, And here I will abide, Till the great master of the vineyard, Think fit to transplant  
me, Do you love me?

You follow me, Because it takes all sorts, Let's pray.