

Introduction

In John 21:15-23, we encounter one of the most personal and instructive conversations between Jesus and the Apostle Peter. After His resurrection, Jesus restores Peter and gives him a glimpse of his future. But what follows is a revealing moment that exposes a common human weakness: comparison. When Peter asks about another disciple's destiny, Jesus replies with a simple yet powerful truth: "*What is that to you? You follow me.*"

This passage invites us to reflect on our individual callings, the danger of comparison, and the necessity of faithfully following Christ—regardless of others' paths.

1. Peter's Restoration and Commission (John 21:15-17)

After Peter had denied Jesus three times (John 18:15-27), Jesus graciously restores him with a threefold question:

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (John 21:15-17)

Peter affirms his love each time, and Jesus responds with:

- *"Feed my lambs"*
- *"Tend my sheep"*
- *"Feed my sheep"*

This is not only personal restoration—it is Peter's apostolic recommissioning. Jesus affirms Peter's leadership role in the early church (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-3). It shows that failure does not disqualify a believer from future service when there is repentance and love for Christ.

2. Jesus Foretells Peter's Martyrdom (John 21:18-19)

Jesus follows the restoration with a sobering prophecy:

"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..." (John 21:18)

This expression, *"stretch out your hands,"* was a common idiom

for crucifixion. John explains in verse 19:

"(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)"

Peter would glorify God not just in life but also in death. According to early church tradition (e.g. Origen, Eusebius), Peter was crucified in Rome, upside down, by his own request—deeming himself unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

This reminds us that discipleship involves sacrifice, and that true love for Christ includes a willingness to suffer for His name (cf. Philippians 1:29, Luke 9:23).

3. Peter's Question About John (John 21:20-21)

As soon as Peter hears about his own destiny, he turns and sees John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and asks:

"Lord, what about this man?" (v. 21)

Peter is essentially saying, "*If I must suffer and die, what will happen to him?*" This is a deeply human moment—comparing our journey to another's is a temptation we all face.

4. Jesus' Theological Response: "You Follow Me" (John 21:22)

Jesus replies:

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

In other words: "*Even if I choose a completely different path for John, that is not your concern. Your responsibility is to follow me.*"

Theologically, this response affirms two important truths:

- Divine Sovereignty in calling: God assigns different paths, ministries, and ends to each believer (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:11).
- Personal responsibility in discipleship: We are accountable for how we follow Christ individually, not for how others do (Galatians 6:4-5).

Jesus' sharp response also corrects the false assumption that God's favor is measured by ease or suffering. John might live a long life (as he did), while Peter would face martyrdom—but both lives glorify God in their own ways.

5. The Danger of Comparison in Ministry

Comparison can lead to jealousy, insecurity, and even spiritual burnout. Many believers today struggle with thoughts like:

- *"Why is their ministry growing faster than mine?"*
- *"Why do they have more influence or visibility?"*
- *"Shouldn't I do what they're doing?"*

But Scripture warns us not to compare:

"Let each one test his own work... For each will have to bear his own load." (*Galatians 6:4-5*)

"Not all are apostles, not all are prophets..." (*1 Corinthians 12:29-30*)

Instead of imitation, we are called to faithfulness. As in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), God rewards not based on how much we were given but how faithfully we used what we had.

6. John's Unique Role and the Spread of a Misunderstanding (John 21:23)

John, the author of this Gospel, clarifies:

"So the saying spread among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die..." (v. 23)

Misinterpretation of Jesus' words led to rumors about John's immortality. John himself corrects this. This highlights the importance of careful theological interpretation—taking Jesus' words at face value without reading in assumptions.

John lived a long life, exiled on Patmos, where he received the Revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:9). His path was different, but not less significant than Peter's.

7. Final Application: Stay in Your Lane

The message is clear: God's calling is personal. Whether you lead a large congregation or minister quietly in a village, God values your obedience more than your comparison.

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." (*Colossians 3:23*)

"It is required of stewards that they be found faithful." (1 *Corinthians 4:2*)

Conclusion

Peter's question—"Lord, what about this man?"—is the same question we often ask. But Jesus' answer is timeless:

"What is that to you? You follow me." (John 21:22)

You are not called to walk another's path. You are called to follow Jesus where He leads you. Do not measure your value by someone else's journey. The measure of a life is not comparison, but faithful obedience.

May the Lord give you grace to walk confidently in your calling, faithfully in your assignment, and joyfully in your purpose

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