

John 21:20-25 "Focus, Focus, Focus"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Amen. Thank you all. What a great, great hymn. Just stop and think about some of those words for just a minute. That last verse.

Could we with ink the oceans fill and where the skies of parchment made? Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade?

To write the love of God above would drain the oceans dry. Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

Amazing. It's true, isn't it? It's beyond what we could comprehend. That is the way that John ends his account of Jesus' life here in his gospel.

[1 : 02] The last verse. Now, there were also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

This infinite word. Remember, who was there in the beginning. Who created the world. Who entered into the world to show the glory and the grace of God to desperate, rebellious people. Has now lived and died and risen. And we can't even begin to comprehend or to contain all that he is. All that he does.

John's just marveling, right? We set out two years ago to encounter this Jesus in the pages of John's gospel.

I hope you have. But John wants to give us one more chance through the eyes of Peter. So if this is your first time, hey, we're going to get to see him again. Peter, the failure.

[2 : 11] Who has been restored to Jesus. Restored to leadership in his church. And just now, in this last interaction, called to follow Jesus even to a cross.

Even as we are sent out on God's mission into the world. Focus on Jesus. Don't miss Jesus. It's all about Jesus. John 21 at verse 20.

This is God's word. Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. The one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?

And when Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, Lord, what about this man? Jesus said to him, if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?

You follow me. So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die.

[3 : 15] But if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things and who has written these things.

And we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Let's pray. Oh, Holy Spirit, we're thankful for this book that was written. Amen. We need you to write its truth upon our hearts.

We need you to set our hearts aflame because of the truth of it that is life-changing. We need you to help us see Jesus as he truly is because that will change us.

Do that now as we look to your word, Father, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Sometimes it's hard to focus on and easy to miss even the most amazing things, isn't it?

[4 : 30] When my family goes to a museum or other cool tourist attraction, I want to make sure that we all see the main attraction, the feature exhibit, you know, the sunset across the city from the skyscraper, the crown jewels of England, the masterpiece painting at the museum.

But it usually goes like this wherever we go. Two of us press on through quickly, eager to catch just a glimpse of the thing and get on to the next fun activity, right?

Moving so fast, they can hardly appreciate the grandeur of what's in front of them. And I want to say, slow down. This is what we're here to see, right?

Don't miss it. And two others lag far behind them. They're reading the fine print on every plastic placard in the entire museum.

They're looking at the footnotes to see what's it about. Those things that were only meant to be read if you're stuck in line waiting for the real exhibit, right?

[5 : 45] They're reading all of those. I don't care about that 600-year-old rock. Look over there. There's a crown jewels. Don't get distracted by the details of the construction of this museum.

Come over here and look at the sunset over the city. It's beautiful. And so here I am. I haven't gotten to myself yet. I'm stuck in the middle.

I am just trying to keep every family member in view, sometimes around corners in multiple rooms. I want everybody to be together and I want to make sure everyone enjoys the glorious view because I just want everybody to be happy and to see what I want them to see.

Hold on. Did I see it? Or have I missed it? I don't know which one you are in that scenario. Hopefully you can put yourself in there.

Maybe you're the one losing focus because you're distracted by hurrying off to the next thing most of the time. Maybe you're the one losing focus because you're distracted by lesser concerns that you just get obsessed about.

[6 : 51] Maybe you're the one losing focus because you're distracted by everyone else's distraction. And so you miss out yourself. But John wants none of us to miss the glory of Jesus.

It's a glorious view of him that he's given us for 21 chapters. And Jesus wants none of us distracted from seeing him every single day.

That's been true all the way through this gospel. And it's where our study of John's gospel ends this morning. First notice potential distractions.

Don't let anyone or anything distract you from Jesus. Listen, distractions abound, right? Lots of opportunities.

Distraction is the expertise of our age in many ways. Not just smartphones and busy schedules.

That'll do it. It's our hearts that provide the primary distraction.

[7 : 59] We can be distracted by almost anything. We're demanding, entertain me. Engage me. Don't leave me alone. Remember in this passage, Jesus has just told Peter how he's going to die by crucifixion.

And then as soon as he tells Peter that, Jesus says, follow me, right? To the cross. And so here they are walking along and Peter immediately does what?

What does he do in this next verse? He turns away from Jesus, right? Right after he's been told to follow him. He turns and he talks about the possibility, oh, there's this other guy.

His attention gets drawn to John. He wants to talk about maybe John won't die. Whether it's the worst circumstance, dying, crucifixion.

Whether it's the best circumstance, living forever. Don't be distracted. Follow me is Jesus' call.

[9 : 09] But this has been a constant struggle for Peter, one of Jesus' lead followers, right? All the way since the very first time Jesus said to him, follow me. Peter was distracted then by a lot of fish, by his own failures.

He said, get away from me, Lord. Later when Peter was walking on the water to Jesus, there were storms and wind and chaos all around him and it distracted him from Jesus, right?

He turned away from Jesus and began to fall, losing his focus on the one who sustained him.

Focus, focus, focus.

Focus, so easy to be consumed with our job, our life, our family, our plans, our health, our relationships.

Don't lose your focus on Jesus. In fact, see, the circumstances of our lives, bad or good, a cancer diagnosis, a job promotion, parental heartache, they're not to be distractions from Jesus.

[10 : 25] Those are actually to be circumstances that draw our focus to Jesus. Oh, Jesus, I see how much I need you now. Jesus, I rest in you.

I can pray to you about this. All of these circumstances are yet more opportunities to see Jesus. Jesus. That's generally.

What about specifically in this passage? What specifically distracts Peter? It's comparison, isn't it? That great thief. Thief of joy, of life, of focus.

What about John? John. Peter wonders. What's his story? Will he die like me, Jesus? We don't know Peter's primary concern here.

We can't see his heart, but we do know that Jesus, who sees his heart, redirects his focus. Don't be distracted, Peter. That's not your concern.

[11:28] You follow me. Now, of course, Jesus is not saying that we should not care at all about other people.

That's not the point. But he is saying that comparing our path with theirs is not helpful, and even it could be distracting from our mission.

C.S. Lewis pictures this beautifully in his book, *The Horse and His Boy*. The main character, Shasta, is looking back at the end of a long and difficult journey in which he's escaped an abusive childhood, lions pursuing him, an approaching army, all with his friend Erebus.

They've been traveling together, and now Shasta is talking to a voice, to God, as it were. The voice says, I do not call you unfortunate, said the large voice.

But don't you think it was bad luck to meet so many lions, said Shasta. There was only one lion, said the voice. What on earth do you mean?

[12:40] I've just told you there were at least two the first night, and there was only one. But he was swift of foot. How do you know? I was the lion.

And as Shasta gaped with open mouth and said nothing, the voice continued, I was the lion who forced you to join with Erebus. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead.

I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the horses new strength of fear for the last mile so that you would reach King Loon in time.

And I was the lion you do not remember, who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.

Then it was you who wounded Erebus? It was I. But what for? Child, said the voice.

[13:40] I am telling you your own story, not hers. I tell no one any story but his own. I tell no one any story but his own.

And to be honest, we don't even see or hear all of our stories most of the time, do we? We're not certain what's going on, but it is easy for us to look around and to feel like someone else is living the life that we long for.

Or on the other hand, someone else is facing a trial that we just can't imagine bearing. Why can't I have the friends she has?

God, why did they have another difficult child? It's not fair. I couldn't handle it. It's too much. Why does he get all the breaks?

C.S. Lewis, I tell no one any story but his own. Commentator N.T. Wright, God makes no casting mistakes.

[14:52] Jesus, what is that to you? You follow me. Follow me. I talked with a guy this week who said it's been hard trusting the path that God has him on.

He's 30 and he's not married and he really wants to be. And he's been thinking about that a lot lately because it's been hard for him. And as he's reflected on it, he said, but you know what I've realized is that God has been so good to me beyond what I deserve and in so many ways, he said, I've seen Jesus.

He's regained focus and he's realized that he needed that even more than he needed to be married. Siblings often struggle with comparison in the same family, don't they?

So do siblings at church. Brothers and sisters who sit in the same pews and they worry about who is in with which group of friends.

Why are others called to be elders when I am not? Why do others get away with not being elders while I have to be? No, they don't say that. How come they get to have all the fun with the kids while I'm stuck serving with adults?

[16:17] All sorts of ways we compare. Look, these two church leaders, Peter, he's been portrayed as the man of action and John's the man of reflection. Peter gets to pastor and write a little.

John's called primarily to pastor, to write and pastor a little. Jesus says, follow me. Focus on me.

Then we can all be, as the hymn says, content to fill a little space if thou be glorified. Wherever God puts me.

See, God knows what he's doing. We've got to believe this, right? God knows what he's doing even when we don't. When we don't see what he's doing. He is arranging the parts of his body exactly the way he wants them to be.

Each one of them as he chooses. All of us, a part of the same body, all of us given gifts and roles to build up the same body.

[17 : 25] All deeply loved and died for by Jesus, cared for by Jesus. And we're to focus not on the eyes, not on the hands, not on the feet, but on what?

The head. Even Jesus, he's the one we're here for. Don't be distracted by comparison. Think about what happens when you focus on others.

Doesn't it happen that you're either disappointed in them, they're not doing well, or you're envious of them, they're doing too well? When you focus on yourself, if you do that long enough, you're either gonna become despairing, because I can't get it together, or you're gonna become prideful, because I'm doing so well.

Neither of those is good. When you focus on Jesus, you're satisfied, and you're secure, and you're now able to love others, to serve others.

You're now able to humble yourself, even to forgive yourself, because your focus is on Jesus, and those other things flow out. That's the second point of Jesus' parting words here.

[18 : 51] To state it positively, let Jesus attract your full attention, and your greatest affection. Don't be content this morning with merely avoiding distractions.

How can I keep those away from me? Passionately focus your life on Jesus. There's someone glorious. There's someone majestic.

There's someone worthy of all your gaze, of all your love. There's a feature exhibit. There's a main attraction. Jesus sees when Peter loses track of it, doesn't he?

He sees Peter getting turned around, getting distracted by comparison with John, and he calls him back. You follow me.

There's an emphasis in the way this is written. First, the primary emphasis is on you. You, Peter. You're responsible for my calling to you.

[19 : 50] And then the me is also emphasized. Secondly, he's saying focus on me, not on figuring out the logistics, not on strategizing the best ministry and the best team to put together, not on who will serve best and how we're gonna do it.

You follow me. Now maybe that sounds basic or simplistic. If I were sitting in your seats, I'd be thinking, seriously, is that all you got for the last Sunday?

61 weeks in John and that's all you can come up with is you follow me? I knew that already. We all know that. We all do that.

Or do we? Will you admit how easy it is to be distracted when life gets hard or easy?

You know, when life gets really busy or sometimes when it's boring. When life gets confusing and actually when I think I understand.

[21 : 03] All the time, we are tempted to lose focus on Jesus. Reflect for just a minute. Where would you say your focus is today? Lately?

The last few weeks? How about this summer? As you look ahead, is your focus set already? I want to see if we can have God's Word help us with that a little bit this morning by reflecting on who Jesus has shown us He is.

We said together those seven I Am statements earlier in this service. In John's Gospel, Jesus has showed us who He is. Think of the glory of focusing on this God.

Just listen to Jesus for a minute. Let Him attract your attention and your affection. He says, I am the bread of life.

So when you are dissatisfied, follow me and you'll find your soul fulfilled again. I am the light of the world. So when you are feeling like you are wandering in darkness, discouraged, helpless, focus on me and you will see straight again.

[22 : 22] I am the door so when you feel distant from God and you don't know how to get back to Him, follow me and you will enter back into relationship with the one who made you.

I am the good shepherd. So when you need protection from the attacks of the enemy, from the consequences of your own bad choices, focus on me.

I'll lay down my life for you to bring you home. I am the resurrection and the life. So when you die, follow me and you will live forever as you believe in me.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. So when you are longing for purpose, searching for the right path forward, wondering why you're here, focus on me and you'll find the abundant, free, fulfilling, everlasting life you were made to enjoy.

I am the true vine. So when you feel powerless, disconnected, hopeless, follow me, abide in me, keep following and you'll bear fruit, you'll find strength, you'll have hope.

[23 : 43] Isn't Jesus wonderful? Can you just think about those things he's promising he is and he is in your life? As you consider who he is, even now, does your love for him begin to grow?

Do you see him as more needful and as more vital for your life? This, John says, is what it's all about. This is what you need every morning this week.

You need to know who Jesus is. You need to see him clearly. I want to pile on. Peter's heard Jesus say all these things about who he is. Now, as Jesus says, focus on me.

Just in this passage, think about who this is Peter sees before him. Think about right where he is as Peter hears Jesus call him to follow. Who is this guy saying, Peter, you follow me?

This is the Savior who has gone before the place that he's calling Peter to follow him. Who has died to give Peter life and forgiveness for his failures, hope for his future.

[24 : 45] That's who's calling Peter to follow him. He has risen victorious so that Peter knows that even a death by crucifixion will not be the end of his story. That his Savior has resurrection power and has promised to raise him up on the last day.

That's who's telling Peter, follow me. And then as he listens to Jesus, he's realizing this is the sovereign Savior whose plan for me and for those I love that I sometimes get distracted by focusing on, it's perfect.

His plan can be trusted. Look at this. If it is my will, Jesus says. If it is my will that whatever happened, if it's Jesus' sovereign will, then no matter what you are going through, no one can snatch you out of his hand.

He's got you. I'm the one you can trust, he says. I'm the one you must focus on. I'm the one you can follow. That's who's calling.

Calling you to follow him. But I think it's important to ask one more question. When we follow Jesus, where will he lead us?

[26 : 16] He calls Peter again to follow him. Where? According to John's gospel. Can we know where Jesus will take us? And I would say there's several good answers to that.

Think back with me. First, being really honest. It might be hard. If we follow Jesus, he will most certainly lead us into a world full of trouble that will often reject us and be against us just as it did to him when God so loved the world that he sent his son and even his own did not receive him.

If we follow Jesus, he will lead us to a cross where we must be willing to suffer and even lay down our lives in order to love others. If we follow Jesus, he will certainly lead us to other people who need to know relationship with their God and Father.

He will make Peter and us fishers of men who listen to the lonely woman at the well and offer her living water. Who move toward the sick and the outcasts to bring healing and restoration of body and soul.

It is not all simple and easy where Jesus leads us, is it? It's not. But it's never just hard. Rejection, suffering, challenge.

[27 : 43] He will also lead us invariably and unfailingly to his word which he says cannot be broken. He reminds us that again in verse 24 John's talking about the things that he's written.

If we're going to focus on Jesus, we need to have our eyes regularly focused on his word. Because see, just as Jesus in the gospel of John is faithfully revealing the Father to us as the living word, so John is faithfully revealing Jesus to us in the written word.

We need to see him there. This really is Jesus, John says. This is who he is. Don't miss him. Jesus will always lead us to his spirit.

He promised, right? Chapter 16. Sent to us so that the one who overcomes the world is always with us. We're never overpowered.

We're never helpless. We're never hopeless when God himself is within us. And then Jesus will always lead us to his people who are united in him so that we are never alone as he prays for us in chapter 17.

[29 : 06] Now those three things are really helpful. His word, his spirit, his people. It's really hopeful, but where with all of those around us is Jesus ultimately leading us?

Could you answer that question from the Gospel of John? How has Peter heard Jesus pray in his darkest hour for his failing followers? Where is he going to take them?

Father, I want them to be with me where I am, to see my glory, to taste that you love them just as you love me.

Jesus may take you through dark, low, painful places, but he is making you into part of the sunset. You, his, his crown jewel, his magnificent masterpiece. you are.

[30 : 10] Even though you lose focus at times, you who lose focus, Jesus does not lose his focus on you. He is taking you to glory, to life, to himself.

He loves you so much that he won't let you miss out on that forever. It is beyond our full comprehension where Jesus is taking us, but you can let your imagination run wild because you can't outthink him.

You can't outimagine the glory that he has prepared for those who love him. It's why I don't think this last verse is intended as exaggeration or hyperbole.

It could be, some take it that way. I think it's actually one more way to say, focus on Jesus and even if you do, every moment of every day for the rest of your life, you will never, never plumb the depths.

you will be exploring the wonders of his love, the glories of his grace throughout eternity. See, John's referring not merely to the deeds that Jesus has done on earth in the flesh in 33 years, but the immensity of the infinite word who was there in the beginning through whom all things were made, in whom is life itself.

[31 : 30] and I think what he's saying is, you will be exploring the sunset not from a distance behind a guardrail gazing off at it, but from the inside, so to speak.

An insider experience of his glory and grace and you'll never finish that experience. experience. Don't ever stop being enchanted with Jesus.

He's given you one life to live here. One. And you know what he wants you to do with it? Are you uncertain? Are you confused? Hear him clearly.

You follow me. Nothing else to focus on. You follow me. Practically, that means be zealous for time with Jesus.

Today and every day. It means be eager for Jesus' return. You're daydreaming about it. You're praying towards it. And it means be committed to his mission, not all of your agendas until he comes or takes you home, not knowing when it is that it will end.

[32 : 43] Not being distracted by predictions about it, but being focused on Jesus every day that he gives us to live with him because we're living with the one whom to know is eternal life.

I went longer than I was supposed to, but before I pray and we come to this meal with Jesus, I want to say it to you this way and hopefully not be melodramatic when I say this, okay?

Maybe I'm just getting old. I don't know. But I reflected this week on John's gospel because I've loved it and I've loved meeting Jesus here. But I'm not as young as I used to be and I've realized that it very well could be the last time I preach through all of John's gospel.

I hope that you and I both will read all of it again. But that means it could also be the last time you ever hear John's gospel preached all the way through.

Maybe you'll be thankful for that. So before you leave it, will you remember that while Jesus did many other things not written in this book, these things were written so that you would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that by believing in Him, you would find life in His name.

[34 : 18] In other words, if you've been here much of the last couple of years, you've read what God wrote so that you would know Him by trusting His Son.

He really is an endlessly good and gracious and glorious Savior. And He just wants you to know Him and love Him and follow Him and trust Him.

And He's written to you so you will. don't miss Jesus. Won't you trust Him today? You know what He says? Whoever believes in Him will have everlasting life.

It's the promise of His Word that Jesus gives to you. Let me pray. Jesus, we give You thanks for all that You are and did which we've only touched the outer surface of.

And yet You've shown us all we need to know to know that we can trust You. To know that You love us immensely beyond what we can imagine. To know that You've called us to life in one place and in one relationship and we're never going to find it outside of that.

[35 : 38] So by Your Spirit would You would You enlighten the eyes of our hearts? Would You help us to see You? Would You renew our commitment to live with You and for You?

We ask it in Your name. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org and visit us online with us on top of that. visit us on top of that. For more information For more information visit us on top of that.

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