

Jesus and Peter: Compare and Contrast

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Preacher: Ali Sewell

[0 : 0 0] One of the things I remember from my school days and from exam times, you might remember this or might have some people in the middle of this right now. But I always remember the compare and contrast essay. Compare and contrast these articles, compare and contrast these people, compare and contrast these opinions, all sorts of things.

I've been comparing and contrasting vacuum cleaners on Amazon this week, so it shows what a useful skill that is to build up. But I think this idea of compare and contrast is really helpful in this passage, as that's how John has structured these verses.

If you do have a look down to your Bibles, you'll see in our reading there, there are four different sections, four blocks, four scenes, really, in our passage. And the focus alternates from Jesus in the first scene to Peter, back to Jesus, back to Peter.

And the idea is, I think, these events are kind of interlinked in this way to help us compare and contrast what we see from Jesus and what we see from Peter, as Jesus continues on the path to the cross in these final chapters of John's Gospel.

And John doesn't just do this kind of linking, this overlapping, just for kind of an academic exercise or a bit of interest. He does it to show us this morning what Jesus was doing as he went to the cross.

[1 : 3 0] And he does it to show us why it was so essential that he did that for us. This passage highlights our need, as well as Peter's need, for the cross.

And as well as that invites us to consider what difference the cross makes moving forward, if we trust in what Jesus has done for us. It invites us to see how does that shape the life of the Christian going forward.

So that's the plan. We're going to start with what we see in that contrast with Jesus and Peter, and then really kind of dig into two big applications for us, why we need the cross and how we live in light of the cross.

So that big picture first, we have this compare and contrast between Jesus and Peter, although, as we'll see, that it's very much weighted toward the contrast than any similarities that we see here.

But three particular things, I think, that are highlighted and stand out. The first is this, that Jesus stands alone while Peter stands with the crowd. Jesus stands alone while Peter stands with the crowd.

[2 : 3 9] John is really kind of underscoring here that Jesus goes to the cross himself alone as a substitute in the place of the people.

We saw this last week at the start of chapter 18. Jesus goes to the cross that his people might go free. We saw how Jesus steps forward that his disciples might be saved.

And that truth, that Jesus alone is able to do this. We're reminded of that again here. Excuse me. Verse 14. It was Caiaphas, that's the high priest, who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Perhaps when we read that, we think, oh, Caiaphas sounds like he's a man who knows the gospel. He's speaking about Jesus dying in our place. That's not actually what's happening here. John is reminding us of something he recorded back in chapter 11, where this same Caiaphas basically says, we should kill Jesus in order to protect our position and our authority as Jewish leaders.

It's another kind of example how in John's gospel we get this irony where people speak better than they know. And John uses that here to show us that Jesus, the one, will die for the many.

[3 : 59] That Jesus alone will die. And that Jesus will die alone. That only he is able to accomplish God's salvation plan.

And really that uniqueness, that aloneness, that he is the one, is emphasized here. All the more, as we hear repeated, verses 18, verse 25, how Peter, in contrast, stands with the crowd.

How Peter stands in the relative comfort, warming himself by the fire. I will return to the significance of that in a moment. But firstly, that's that first contrast.

Contrast number one, that Jesus stands alone. The second contrast that we're shown here, then, is Jesus' innocence and integrity. Verse 20, have a look there.

As Jesus is questioned about his disciples and his teaching, he's able to give this answer. I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in the synagogues and the temple where all Jews come together.

[5 : 01] I have said nothing in secret. What we're kind of seeing here is being revealed to us, just how much of a farce, really, this trial is.

Jesus does not have secrets to hide. Unlike this trial, Jesus has not done these things under the cover of darkness. There is not a public face and a private face.

I have spoken clearly and honestly, Jesus is saying. And again, as Jesus is struck unfairly by one of the officers, we read verse 23, Jesus answered him, If what I have said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong.

But if what I have said is right, why do you strike me? Jesus is defiant, we might say, in his innocence and his integrity. John is making the point to us that Jesus does not deserve to be on trial.

Jesus does not deserve to be found guilty. Jesus does not deserve to go to the cross. But he will do all those things as God's perfect sacrifice.

[6 : 08] Again, the righteous, the pure, the innocent one will die in the place of the sinful many. And again, that's strengthened, isn't it? As we then look at Peter's lack of integrity.

We see Peter's dishonesty in denying Jesus, denying he's one of his followers. Peter clearly shown very negatively here. There is a kind of a good character, Jesus doing what is right.

There is Peter doing what is wrong. And yet again, we see it is the innocent one. It is the blameless one. It is Jesus who is on the path to the cross. So we see Jesus stands alone.

We see Jesus stands truly innocent. And thirdly, finally, in these contrasts, we see Jesus' boldness and his strength. Jesus in these scenes is facing both the strength of the Roman authorities, the worldly powers in these soldiers who arrest him and bring him to trial.

He also stands before the ultimate religious authority, the high priest, who had been granted authority over the Jewish people in all religious matters. And as we read this account, we see continuing on from last week's verses, just the boldness and the strength of Jesus.

[7 : 24] Jesus is not cowed by this opposition. He is not pushed off course. He is not fearful. But as he stands accused, he remains resolute, even though he knows fully the consequences of his actions.

Remember back to verse 4 again, Jesus knowing all that would happen to him came forward. Jesus is bold and determined on his path to the cross.

And of course, the spotlight shines all the more brightly on Jesus' boldness when we see it in contrast to Peter's fear and Peter's denial. One writer puts it this way, Jesus stands up to his questioners and denies nothing, while Peter cowers before his questioners and denies everything.

Jesus stands strong in the face of all the various authorities and powers of the day, where Peter buckles under the questioning of a young servant girl.

And so these are the kind of historical events that happened, that John himself, as the disciple of Jesus, was an eyewitness to. But he records, John records and arranges them so brilliantly in this way, so that, as we've just been seeing, that the glory of Christ radiates so clearly, that Jesus stands alone, that Jesus stands innocent, that Jesus stands boldly.

[8 : 51] And I think before we move on, before we think of applications for ourselves, it's really important that we pause, that we linger over this picture that is revealed of Jesus.

And in that, that we recognize that here is someone worth worshipping. Here is something that is worth giving everything for.

Here is someone who fulfills everything that we rightly admire and hold in high esteem. Someone with incredible strength of character and boldness.

Someone with true integrity and uprightness. Someone willing to stand alone against unjust power and authority. And then we remember the incredible thing that he is doing all of that for us.

The closer we get to the cross, the clearer we see the glory of Christ. And John is wanting us again to turn and to keep our focus on him.

[9 : 56] And to see his greatness in this passage. So often we're keen, aren't we, when we hear the Bible taught, to ask that question, well, what am I supposed to go and do? And it's a good question.

And we're going to get to that. But the Bible encourages us first to look to Jesus. First to look and see what he has done. Because that is the very heart of the gospel.

And that is the foundation for everything else. We see here how Jesus Christ, God himself, is someone we can delight in. And someone we can delight to worship.

Someone who is worthy of our worship as he walks the path to the cross. So there we go. That's the first bit. Compare and contrast as John shows us the glory of Christ in comparison to the weakness of Peter.

Well, having spent that time focusing on Jesus, encouraging ourselves to keep on doing that, keep on looking to Jesus. Let's shift our attention now to Peter and see what we can learn from him.

[11 : 00] And really, the really tempting next step to do now is to look at Peter and simply to say straight away, well, don't be like that.

Don't be like Peter. He is the bad example to avoid in this passage. And that's true. We shouldn't be like Peter. We're going to get to that point. We shouldn't model him in this account.

But actually, if we go straight to that step, don't do this. We miss something really vital, which is to say that actually we need Jesus because we are like Peter.

And so the first kind of key application being shown us in this passage is our need for Jesus. If you watch kind of sport on TV or if you ever watch it with me at least, you'll know how easy it is to be really critical of people from a distance or from the comfort of your own couch.

You know, I'm regularly telling like some Premier League footballer how hopeless he is. I mean, I'm pretty sure he's marginally better than I am. Or some Olympic sport I've watched for 10 minutes and I'm suddenly an expert kind of shaking my head.

[12 : 08] It's all making a splash from a 10-meter diving board or something like that. It's easy, isn't it? We're good at looking on and criticizing. And I think it's easy to do that.

And we often do that with people from the Bible as well, not least Jesus' disciples like Peter here. Peter, how could you do that? And that's not to say that Peter isn't portrayed negatively here.

Again, he clearly is. But that's done not so that we would feel better about ourselves. You know, I would never be like that guy. No, I think actually it's done so that we might recognize ourselves.

That whether we are Christians or not this morning, that we might recognize reflected in Peter our own weaknesses and failure. Especially, again, when seen in light of the perfection and the glory of Christ.

And so our first kind of call to action, really, in this passage is to recognize that we need Jesus. Because like Peter, we so easily want to blend in and to go with the crowd rather than standing up for what is true.

[13 : 15] We need Jesus because we are not innocent. Like Peter, our integrity falls short. We want to be people who are the same inside and out.

That's what we look for in other people. We want to have that consistency in our lives. But we recognize that is so often that that is missing. We say what will make life easiest for ourselves at that moment.

We say what will help in this particular circumstance. We need Jesus because we are weak. So often we simply choose the easy option, even when we know that that is not the right thing to do.

And then we look back at that with shame, recognizing our weakness at that point. And the wonder of this passage then, as we see Jesus and Peter held side by side, is that Jesus does not look at Peter and say, you know what, why am I wasting my time going to the cross for someone like that?

But instead, Jesus continues on his determined path to the cross precisely because his people, his disciples, Peter and us, are people like that.

[14 : 30] This passage shows us that we cannot save ourselves. We cannot be good enough. We stumble and fall each day. And so we see in Peter our need for Jesus. And I think it's telling, I think, in this passage that Jesus is on trial here before the religious leaders.

It's the religious leaders who are so offended by what Jesus says here. It's the religious leaders that want him gone. That's because their version of religion had become all about saving themselves, about proving themselves, about validating themselves.

When confronted with their need of a savior, their need of Jesus, they hated that and wanted him gone. And that religious impulse of self-justification is still alive in the human heart, in all of us today.

We see that in various different religions where there are certain steps that you have to take to reach God, that the burden is on you to get there. We can see that creep into the church so easily as well, where the focus becomes, again, more on what we do than what Jesus has done.

Where it's all focused about our moral efforts rather than our need for Jesus. And the gospel is sidelined. Where our attitude to the world starts to be shaped by the language of us and them.

[15 : 57] And where we neglect that all of us, every person inside and outside of the church, has that same need for Jesus. That we never move past that. It's a warning that we have to be so aware of as a church.

That we too can slide into this idea of self-justification. That we can be good enough. And we see it as well, this self-justification, just as much in a secular form as well, where we have to prove that we're on the right side of things by affirming the right causes, by liking the right people, by demonizing the right other people.

Or presenting the right image to our peers on social media or in our conversations. Look how well my life is going. Look how well I'm parenting. You know, I've got it all together.

It's about our strength, about what we've done. Or even when we see people, and we find ourselves doing this as well, being happy to declare our struggles and weaknesses, but even then done in a way that is to demonstrate our integrity, our authenticity.

Revealing only as much as we think it is acceptable. And doing it in a way that's to bring kind of praise or acknowledgement of our honesty by others. And yet actually we know that all of that, all of that is an exhausting way to live, to constantly be having to prove ourselves.

[17 : 26] To be constantly living up to the standards that others set. To be revealing enough, but not too much. And to know that if we mess up, or if people find out what we are really like, the world around us will be so quick to judge our efforts.

And that's where the Bible is such good news. Because it gives us the chance here to look at Peter in all his failure, in all his weakness, in his lowest possible moment, and not to look down on him with disdain.

But to look at him and be able to say, that is me. To be open and honest about that. And yet to see kind of spliced in with this picture of Jesus, with this picture of Peter, this portrait of Jesus, our Savior, deliberately going to the cross.

For people just like that, just like Peter, just like you, just like me. Perhaps this morning, you've not yet trusted in Jesus. And you kind of think, well, he wouldn't really be interested in me.

You know, I've done various things wrong. But the passage, this passage shows that is not the case. And invites you to respond to him this morning. Nothing could be more important than that.

[18 : 49] Or perhaps you're here, and you have trusted in Jesus before. You're a Christian, but you're just feeling exhausted. You're feeling as if you keep on messing up, that you're just so aware of your faults and weaknesses.

Again, this passage gives us that assurance to keep on coming to Jesus. He is not tired of you. But he knows and he cares. He has grace for those who struggle.

A grace, a love, and a forgiveness that we will not find anywhere else. As we look at Peter, we see our need of Jesus. And we see that he has willingly, deliberately, lovingly, met that need for us.

And so there's that great gospel encouragement here for us in the passage. We have a savior in our weakness. And we never move on from. We never move beyond our need for Jesus as that savior.

So there's kind of application number one, really, we see our need for Jesus. Last of this morning, and I think the big second key application from this passage, is our response to Jesus.

[19 : 58] And we're obviously going to carry on through the rest of John's gospel in the weeks to come. But I think it is important this morning to recognize here that for Peter, this is not the end of his story. John himself will record how Jesus reinstates Peter in chapter 21.

If we read on then into the book of Acts, the opening chapters record Peter's incredible boldness, his leadership, his witness standing up for Jesus in the face of questioning, of opposition, of hostility.

We see a transformed Peter. And so while we want in this chapter to see our need for Jesus, we also want to think about our response to Jesus. We need the cross.

But like Peter, we are also transformed by the cross. And so let's think then now about our need for Jesus. I mentioned earlier, we mustn't short circuit this passage and go straight to the point that says, well, don't be like Peter.

That essentially bypasses the cross. You know, we could have said that without Jesus needing to die. And yet having seen our need of Jesus, that his sacrifice in our place is our only hope and will always be our only hope.

[21 : 10] We're now invited, I think, to think, what does it look like to move forward in that hope? And really the big challenge here in this passage, in terms of our response to Jesus, is that question, will we be willing to associate with Jesus as a crucified Savior?

And that is what Peter fails to do, isn't it? That was just as Jesus had foretold, that when it came literally to that, that crux moment, his disciples all dropped away.

Where will we be willing to pledge our allegiance to, as it were? There's a really interesting thing, I think, in these chapters around John's use of the word standing.

And I think this is a deliberate thing, John encouraging us to think, where will we stand? Back up in verse five, we read this last week, as the soldiers come to arrest Jesus, we read, Now Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

Judas standing with the soldiers against Jesus. In our passage this morning, we get the onlookers, those who challenge Peter about his links to Jesus.

[22 : 19] We're told at the end of verse 18, Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. Peter's denial of Jesus has earned in this place, standing in the warmth with the crowd.

That's repeated again in verse 25. But when we get into verse, sorry, into chapter 19, and we'll look at this in a few more weeks, but after the crucifixion, we see verse 25, John records, but standing by the cross of Jesus, with his mother and his mother's sister.

John seems to be making this point, asking this question of his readers, who are we standing with? Where will we stand?

Are we willing to stand with a crucified Savior? Are we willing to identify with him? Will we stand by the cross? Or will we distance ourselves from that and stand with others and stand where it is more comfortable?

I think this is an ongoing challenge for God's people. I think it's a particularly important message for us at this time. We're living in a moment, and this is a really good thing, that it has been noted how interested in church and spiritual things are growing, and there are the numbers and figures that back that up.

[23 : 41] The days of the new atheists. I remember when I was turning 20, the God delusion was the big book that everyone was talking about, that science had killed God.

Anyone who thought otherwise was just an idiot. The fact is we're not in that era anymore. That way of looking at life has been found to be pretty helpless and hopeless.

A recent survey showed that the number of young people, young men in particular, actually attending church is growing, that so many of the trends we assume are true of the church in our nation are not actually true.

And we praise God for that. We hear more as well about the benefits of Christian society, people coming to recognize that so much of what we assume to be self-evidence of positive morality is actually based on a Christian foundation, has that Christian root.

There's been a number of high-profile conversions to Christianity who have mentioned that. Christianity is an acceptable topic of conversation again. Just one example of that, the most listened-to podcast in the world, the Joe Rogan Experience, had an evangelical Christian apologist as a guest at the start of this year.

[24 : 56] Brilliant guy. I just think that would not have happened 12 months ago, certainly not two years ago or more. I mentioned this. It's a really exciting time to be the church.

It's good that we're aware of this, and it's good that we're praying about this. We're prepared and eager to welcome people in as we continue to reach out, that we would be confident that God is at work.

But at the same time, as hopefully things increase, the danger always is that when it comes to the message of Christ on the cross, that we shrink back, that we put front and center, that the benefits to society or the value of the church or the friendship that we have, or we kind of revel in the increasing numbers and we feel things are going well for us, and yet it's essential that we're pointing people to Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross as the number one thing that we all need.

That is the foundation of everything else. That is not something we shrink away from or are ashamed of. We delight in, and we want to share with others, the fruit of the gospel, but we need to keep hold of the root, Jesus on the cross.

We proclaim Christ and him crucified, the apostle Paul writes. We've seen how John in his gospel slows right down here at the cross.

[26 : 24] This is the key. This is the focus. And we want that same attitude. And we get that, as we've seen this morning, by continuing to look at the wonder of Jesus as he goes to the cross, seeing his glory, and in that, recognizing our need for Jesus as he goes to the cross.

When we get both of those two things right, both of those two things, which I think we see in this passage, that's when we're able to proudly stand firm and associate with the message of a crucified Savior.

Not to try and hide that away or pretend that's not important, but to recognize that that is fundamental and that that Savior is glorious as revealed at the cross and know that he did that for us, that he has fulfilled our greatest need.

That is what enables us to keep sharing that message as the key to our hope and the very core of our faith. We see in this passage then the glory of Jesus and we see our need for Jesus.

And as our response to Jesus, we celebrate his work on the cross for us and we stand firmly at the cross as the grounds for our hope. We offer that to others that they too may know and accept and love Christ in light of all that he has done for them.

[27 : 47] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, once again, we thank you for the cross where we see the glory of Christ and we see that he goes forward alone and that he has both the innocence and the strength to be able to suffer and die in our place that we might go free.

Lord, we thank you that in him we have a wonderful Savior and one who is worthy of our praise. And Lord, we thank you that in him we have a Savior that we all need.

Lord, please help us to recognize all the more our weakness, our sinfulness, our frequent lack of integrity. And Lord, as we are brought face to face with those things in ourselves, we pray that they would not drive us to despair but would rather drive us to Jesus.

That we would see our need and accept the offer of forgiveness that he makes. That we would recognize that we are unable to save ourselves. that we are unable to find forgiveness anywhere else.

But that Jesus has done all that we need and we would rejoice in his love for us. And Lord, we do pray that through that we would be willing and unable to stand firm for Jesus as our crucified Savior.

[29 : 17] That we wouldn't shy away from or try and hide what is the very heart of our faith and our hope. but having seen our need would joyfully stand with Christ and him crucified.

And that at the cross we would celebrate that our greatest need has been fulfilled through Jesus' work in our place. And that we would rejoice in that. We would look to share that and we would give you the glory that you deserve because of that.

And pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.