***Eating Is Believing***

**Pentecost #3, John 21: April 25, 2021**

***Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”   
None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.   
Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish . . . .*John 21:12-13**

**What is an epilogue?**

*24 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the sea of Tiberius. It happened this way . . . .*

John 22:1 (Carson’s discussion is especially helpful)

1) How the hero is transformed

2) How the message of the epic quest will be carried on

**Fishermen and their boats**

*. . . . 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

*4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.*

*5 He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”*

*“No,” they answered.*

*6 He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.*

John 21 (see Luke 5:1-11, the first great catch miracle)

1) Going back to fishing is not disobedience (but see John Macarthur for the other view)

2) Once again, Jesus meets the disciples where they are (going back to where they first met!)

3) Where Messiah is there will be great provision

4) In Scripture, the “great catch” is people! (Ezekiel 47; Luke 5:1-11)

**Fish and breakfast**

*7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.*

*10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.”*

*11 Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

John 21:7-14 (see Luke 24:36-43 for the other fish meal with the disciples)

1) Jesus reveals himself to his disciples

2) This is their second fish meal 🡪 ghosts don’t cook breakfast either!

3) Finally, at Pentecost, the “net” doesn’t break

**Three thoughts from Galilee**

1) Fishing is a powerful model for evangelism, so keep the nets mended

*Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.” 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.*

Luke 5:10-11 (see Ezekiel 47 and Spurgeon’s “Power of Christ’s Presence” sermon)

2) Yes, eating with Jesus is sacred!

*And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them . . . .*

Luke 22:19 (see also John 6:11 for how Jesus fed the crowds)

3) This scene helps points us to the core of New Testament preaching

*39 “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

Acts 10:39-43

**Resources for further studies in John’s gospel**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on John at <https://open.life.church/items/179216-john-poster-jpg>

Spurgeon has sermons on this text at [*https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons55.xxii.html*](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons55.xxii.html%20)

J. C. Ryle’s commentary on John at [*http://www.tracts.ukgo.com/ryle\_gospel\_of\_john.htm*](http://www.tracts.ukgo.com/ryle_gospel_of_john.htm)

Deffinbaugh’s sermon at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25*](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25)

I have really appreciated D. A. Carson’s commentary in the Pillar New Testament Commentary series (Eerdmans, 1991) and Earl Palmer’s *The Intimate Gospel* (Word Books, 1978)

The two resources on our union with Christ are John Murray’s *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Eerdmans, 1955) and Rankin Wilbourne’s *Union with Christ* (David C. Cook, 2016). I also recommend Marcus Peter’s short study at [*https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/*](https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/)

John Macarthur’s negative take is at [***https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/SC17-2***](https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/SC17-2)

S. M. Lockridge’s “That’s My King” at [*https://thatsmyking.wordpress.com/words/*](https://thatsmyking.wordpress.com/words/)

Merril Tenney has a helpful paper on the authorship of John’s gospel in a four part *Bibliotheca Sacra* series (1963) at [*faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted\_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/BSac-NT/Tenney-LiteraryJohnPt2-BS.pdf*](faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/BSac-NT/Tenney-LiteraryJohnPt2-BS.pdf)

Robert Mounce’s *The Story of Jesus* at [*http://media.thestoryofjesus.org/TheStoryOfJesus-download.pdf*](http://media.thestoryofjesus.org/TheStoryOfJesus-download.pdf)

Leon Morris has a short essay on the atonement in John’s gospel at [*http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted\_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/CTR-NT/Morris-JohnsAtonement-CTR.pdf*](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/CTR-NT/Morris-JohnsAtonement-CTR.pdf)

# John Poster (JPG)

# What Is This Thing Called Love? (John 21:1-25) Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25*](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25)

### Introduction

This week I happened to look at a series I did on “Highlights in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ” nearly 20 years ago, and there it was, a message on John chapter 21! I don’t “warm up” old messages, but I did find some helpful material from that old message. For one thing, I was in need of a good introduction for this lesson. Frankly, I had forgotten the story I used way back then, but it was so good I’m going to use it again, if you’ll pardon me for doing so.

I have a friend who devised a very clever plan for “getting away” from friends and guests after his wedding ceremony. He and his wife were married in a southern city, which had only one major highway going through town. He and his bride drove slowly from the church, making their way to the edge of town, with no attempt to evade or outrun all their friends who were following behind, honking their horns and just being a general nuisance. The road out of town passed through a tunnel on the outskirts of the city. He had prearranged for a friend to be waiting there. As they approached the tunnel, the friend fell in line, right behind the bride and groom. As soon as the groom’s car entered the tunnel, the friend blocked the tunnel with his car, preventing the others from following any longer.

The newlyweds congratulated themselves for being so shrewd and laughed all the way to their honeymoon hotel, an hour or more down the highway. After a leisurely dinner, they returned to their suite—only to discover that all of their friends were gathered there in their room, waiting for them. Their friends had found them, even though they were some 60 or 70 miles from their hometown! One of them had gone to the trouble of calling every hotel along that highway for many miles to see if my friend had made reservations for that night. These ‘friends’ blessed the newlywed couple with their presence long into the night.

If I were to sum up that situation in one word, it would have to be the word ‘frustrating.’ This newly-married couple never imagined spending their first night of marriage this way, with all their friends gathered in their hotel room. In many ways, “frustrating” also describes what it must have been like for the disciples during that 40-day interval between Jesus’ resurrection and His ascension. With few exceptions,[197](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5636_2262919) the disciples had spent three wonderful years with Jesus. They traveled together, ate together, camped out at night together, and shared a common purse. Their private, relaxing times together were exceedingly few and far between, but at least they were continually in close contact during the time of our Lord’s earthly ministry.

The last few hours our Lord spent with His disciples before His arrest were private and uninterrupted. After the horror of our Lord’s arrest, trials, and crucifixion, it would be tempting to think of this 40-day interval as a time of wonderful fellowship for our Lord and His disciples, but this was not really the case. For one thing, the disciples expected Jesus to immediately commence His kingdom, but it quickly became evident that this wasn’t happening. For another thing, the disciples were not really seeing a great deal of their Lord. After Jesus appeared to them, and they were convinced that He was alive, they were filled with joy. But if the disciples were thinking they would now be spending a lot of time with Jesus once again, they were wrong. Things had changed. This change was first indicated to Mary by our Lord, when He appeared to her after His resurrection:

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said, “**Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father**. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” ([John 20:16-17](javascript:%7b%7d), NIV, emphasis mine).

Jesus informs Mary that things are no longer going to be as they once were. Jesus was not going to be with His disciples on earth much longer, but was returning to His Father, as He had indicated earlier. He promised that after His ascension, He would dwell among them, and in them, through the Holy Spirit, but at the time they had no idea what He meant.

And so the disciples found themselves relating to Jesus in an entirely different way during this 40-day period of time. They were formerly with Him day and night. Now, they only saw Him from time to time. Eight days passed from the time Jesus first appeared to His disciples ([John 20:19-23](javascript:%7b%7d)) to the time of His second appearance ([John 20:26](javascript:%7b%7d)). He appeared to them only a handful of times in those 40 days (see [1 Corinthians 15:5-7](javascript:%7b%7d)). He came and went in such a way that they never knew when to expect Him. And He did not always look exactly the way He once did—there was something different about Him, which sometimes caused them to wonder whether or not it was really Him (see [Mark 16:12](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 24:16, 31](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 21:12](javascript:%7b%7d)). I’m sure the disciples wished for the “good old days,” when they enjoyed much more intimate fellowship with Him. Jesus, however, was “weaning” them from those days, because He would no longer dwell among them as He once had. He was soon to ascend into heaven to be with His Father.

There were other things that made this time difficult. These were perilous days. The tomb of Jesus had been sealed and was under Roman guard, by order of Pilate. When Jesus was raised from the dead, the Jews and the Roman soldiers agreed on a cover-up. They sought to explain the resurrection and the empty tomb by circulating the story that Jesus’ disciples had stolen His body. This would have been a serious crime. The disciples could have been the targets of a manhunt. No wonder they were hiding out in a locked room when Jesus came to them ([John 20:19, 26](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In addition to this, there was really very little the disciples could do during these 40 frustrating days. They were told to wait until they were given power from on high. The Holy Spirit had not yet come, because Pentecost was still a few days away. These men were not yet transformed, nor were they supernaturally empowered to heal the sick, raise the dead, or proclaim the gospel. The kingdom was on hold, there was little for them to do, and Jesus was seldom seen or heard from.

It was not an easy time for the disciples at all. I can imagine that Peter could have gone home, only to find Mrs. Peter standing in the doorway, with her hands on her hips. “Peter,” she might have said sharply, “we’ve got bills to pay and mouths to feed. When are you going back to work? How long are you going to wait around, wondering what to do with yourself?” All of the disciples must have been thinking similar thoughts. They had families to support. They had to do something. They couldn’t just wait around …

Why would we be surprised that it was Peter who decided to do something? Why would we find it unusual for Peter to speak out? This is precisely where the final chapter of John’s Gospel takes up.

### Jesus’ Third Appearance to the Disciples ( 21:1-14)

1 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberius. Now this is how he did so. 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael (who was from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of his were together. 3 Simon Peter told them, “I am going fishing.” “We will go with you,” they replied. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 When it was already very early morning, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus said to them, “Children, you don’t have any fish, do you?” They replied, “No.” 6 He told them, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they threw the net, and were not able to pull it in because of the large number of fish. 7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” So Simon Peter, when he heard that it was the Lord, tucked in his outer garment (for he had nothing on underneath it), and plunged into the sea. 8 Meanwhile the other disciples came with the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from land, only about a hundred yards. 9 When they got out on the beach, they saw a charcoal fire ready with a fish[198](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5648_2268959) placed on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said, “Bring some of the fish you have just now caught.” 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three, but although there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 “Come, have breakfast,” Jesus said. But none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

For the third time in John’s Gospel, our Lord appears to His disciples. This time He reveals Himself to seven of His disciples as they are fishing on the Sea of Tiberias—the Sea of Galilee ([John 6:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). Most of these men were fishermen by trade. When Peter informed them that he was going fishing, they knew he was not planning to go out and do a little fly fishing on the Sea of Galilee, hoping to catch a fish or two. They understood that Peter was going back to work as a fisherman. They all must have had financial obligations they needed to meet. In addition, they needed to eat. And so those who were with Peter agreed to go fishing with him. There seemed to be nothing better to do. I do not find this decision to go fishing something unbefitting for a disciple. It was better for them to be doing something productive than nothing at all.

I do not think it is possible to understand the meaning of the miracle which occurred here on the Sea of Tiberias without recalling the miracle that took place some time earlier, perhaps at this same spot. This earlier miracle is recorded in the Gospel of Luke:

1 Now Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing around him to hear the word of God. 2 He saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land. Then Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” 5 Simon answered, “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing! But at your word I will lower the nets.” 6 When they had done this, they caught a great many fish; and their nets began to break. 7 So they gestured to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they were about to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord!” 9 For Peter and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon’s business partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” 11 So when they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him ([Luke 5:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The first miraculous catch of fish came fairly early in the ministry of our Lord. Jesus was teaching beside the Sea of Galilee, and the crowds were pressing in on Him. There were at least two boats pulled up on shore nearby. One belonged to Peter and his brother Andrew, the other to James and John (and apparently their father—see [Matthew 4:18-22](javascript:%7b%7d)). These men had been out fishing all night, unsuccessfully, and were now washing their nets. Jesus got into Simon Peter’s boat and asked him push out from shore, so that He could use the boat as His speaker’s platform. When Jesus finished teaching, He told Peter to launch out into deeper waters and to lower the nets for a catch. Peter gently protested, informing Jesus that they had just spent the entire night fishing, without success. Nevertheless, Peter did as his Master instructed. As the nets were drawn in, it was evident that they had a huge catch of fish, so large that the nets were beginning to tear. Peter and his brother gestured to their partners, James and John, who came alongside with their boat. They filled both boats so full with the fish that they began to sink. Peter fell at Jesus’ knees (they were still in the boat) and said, “**Go away from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord!**” ([Luke 6:8](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus comforted the men with these words, “**Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people**” (6:9). It would seem that from this point in time, they ceased fishing for their livelihood and followed Jesus wherever He went.[199](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5653_2273762)

In [John 21](javascript:%7b%7d), we read of a very similar miraculous catch of fish. It is my opinion that it took place at virtually the same place, with the same boats, and most of the same fishermen. You will recall that before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that He would go ahead of them to Galilee ([Matthew 28:7](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 14:28](javascript:%7b%7d)). Then, after His resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples to meet Him in Galilee ([Matthew 28:10](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 16:7](javascript:%7b%7d)). The disciples who have gone fishing with Peter may very well be in Galilee because they have done what Jesus instructed them to do—go to Galilee, where He will meet them. This took them out of Jerusalem and Judea, the source of the strongest Jewish opposition. Like most of the disciples, Peter was a Galilean. These were his old “stomping grounds.” If they had been waiting for some time, Peter might well have concluded that they may as well occupy themselves by doing something profitable. And so he announced to his colleagues that he was going fishing.

In my mind’s eye, I can almost see Peter and the others fishing in the same waters where the miracle in [Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d) took place.[200](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5656_2275122) Peter’s boat and net were apparently available nearby. Why not make use of them and go fishing? It is what these men had done most all of their lives. And so they set out to fish through the night.[201](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5657_2275628) On a typical night of fishing, I would suppose they might have caught a few larger fish.[202](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5658_2276306) They would do this by repeatedly spreading their nets out in the water and then drawing the ends of the nets together, entrapping their catch. Each time their nets were drawn in, a handful of fish might be obtained. Over and over again the nets would be played out and then drawn in; sometimes there were fish within, and sometimes not. When the night was over, the fishermen would hope for enough fish to feed themselves and their families, and perhaps enough fish left over to sell.

On this night ([John 21](javascript:%7b%7d)), like that night a couple of years before ([Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d)), these fishermen had cast out their nets and drawn them in repeatedly through the night, with absolutely no success. As morning light was approaching, they decided to give it up. (I wonder what the others thought of Peter’s idea now.) I believe they were approaching the place where Jesus had taught the crowds earlier, the place where their boats were pulled up on shore, and where they washed their nets. Someone was standing on the beach, hardly distinguishable from 100 yards away. He called out to these weary, unsuccessful, fishermen, “**Children, you don’t have any fish, do you?**” (21:5).

I can still remember the way my little brother, Danny Boy (as we then called him—probably no more than 4 or 5 years old at the time), would approach the fishermen as they made their way back to their car after they had finished fishing for the day. He would stand there in his coveralls, with his hands tucked into his pockets and ask the men, “Did ya’ catch anything?” (I wish I could reproduce the exact way he pronounced his words at that age.) His question was hopeful. Very often, the answer was, “Yes,” and the fishermen would gladly take out their catch and show it to Danny. That did not happen here. Jesus’ question was asked in such a way that we could translate it, “You didn’t catch any fish, did you?” I love their terse response: “No.” They really didn’t want to talk about it. Can you blame them? These professional fishermen came back, skunked.

I know this form of question and answer all too well, from painful experience. When I started teaching school, Jeannette and I lived close to a part of Puget Sound, and I was “hooked” on fishing, particularly salmon fishing. A friend had a 16 foot long plywood boat, constructed largely of one-inch thick plywood. It was a heavy boat! Every time I borrowed it, I had to drag it from the boathouse on the beach, over the driftwood, and down to the water’s edge. (I don’t know why, but it seemed as though the tide was always out when I went fishing.) I would fish for a couple of hours before dark, and then I had to winch the boat back into the boathouse. Time after time I came back empty-handed. It got to the point where I knew what Jeannette was going to say when I arrived home: “You didn’t catch anything, did you?” The second question was equally certain: “Why don’t you quit?”

Jesus knew that these men had worked all night and had caught nothing. I am tempted to think that Jesus actually orchestrated things so that these men would not catch anything. Anyway, Jesus let the fishermen know that He knew they had caught nothing. He then instructs them to cast out their nets on the right side of the boat, assuring them that when they do so, they will find some fish. I don’t know why these weary fishermen did it, but for some reason they were willing to make one last effort. When they drew in their nets, they did not contain just a few fish, or even a lot of fish. Their nets were virtually filled with fish.

It was at this point that John seems to have realized what was happening. Instinctively, he knew that the man on the beach was Jesus. And now that he knew, he told Peter as well. That was all it took for Peter. He tucked in his outer garment and plunged into the sea, swimming to shore to see Jesus. Someone has remarked that what we find here is typical of both Peter and John. John was the first to understand; Peter was the first to act.[203](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5664_2280336) We cannot be sure that Peter actually arrived on shore first. One thing does seem certain: Jesus must have personally forgiven and restored Peter on His previous, private meeting with him (see [Luke 24:34](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Corinthians 15:5](javascript:%7b%7d)). Peter certainly shows no reluctance to see Jesus face to face here!

If I were one of the other disciples, I would have been perturbed with Peter for leaving me behind with a full net and an unsecured boat, still several hundred feet from shore. They seem to have learned from the miracle in Luke chapter 5 that it was unwise to try to empty the net full of fish into the boat—since their two boats nearly sank on that occasion. And so they simply drug their bulging nets behind the boat and made their way to shore, with their nets still in the water, teaming with fish.

When the disciples landed on the beach, they observed that Jesus had already prepared a charcoal fire, with fish placed on it, and there was bread as well. Jesus told them to bring some of the fish they had caught, and so Simon went and drew the nets up on shore. John tells us that the nets did not tear as they had begun to do on their first miraculous catch. I think this was especially unusual with the quantity of fish, and given the fact that the fish, still in the nets, were drug up on shore. Nets were not made for this kind of abuse.

Jesus then invites the disciples to join Him for breakfast. We are not actually told that they ate some of their fish for breakfast, and I am inclined to believe that Jesus supplied their entire meal. This was true of the bread, it would seem, and I think it was true as well for the fish. If Jesus had not already prepared a sufficient quantity for all these men (something a little hard to believe), then He could simply have fed them the same way He fed the 5,000, on the other side of the sea. These men had worked hard to provide for themselves, and they had nothing to show for it. Then they come to Jesus, who has more than enough to meet their needs. And in the process, He provides this great catch, enough to supply for their future needs.[204](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5668_2282694) I suspect that Jesus had them bring some of their fish so they could actually see how great the catch was. John tells us it was 153 large fish. Much has been made of the number 153,[205](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5669_2283122) but it may be enough to note that the author knew the exact number of fish caught, and that it was a great quantity. Such details give credibility to one’s testimony, and John certainly provides us with details.

Once again, it would seem as though Jesus did not look exactly as He did before His death and resurrection. Even after the disciples had gotten close enough to get a good look at Jesus, they were still wondering to themselves, “Is this really Him?” They wanted to ask, but no one dared. They knew it was Jesus, but He probably did not look exactly as He had before, and so they just found it hard to believe.

So what does this miraculous catch of fish accomplish? What message was it supposed to send to the disciples, and to us? Let me begin by pointing out that it sets the scene for what follows in verses 15-25. In verses 1-14, Jesus feeds His disciples. In verses 15 and following, Jesus speaks to Peter about feeding His sheep.

I believe there are lessons to be learned from this miracle in the light of its similarity to the great fish harvest of [Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d). Because of the fishing miracle in [Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d), Peter and the other disciples came to see Jesus (and themselves) in a whole new light. There, Peter realizes he is not worthy to be in the same boat with Jesus. In [John 21](javascript:%7b%7d), Peter and the others are once again awed by our Lord and His works. In both texts, these professional fishermen were not able to catch anything on their own, even though they were laboring in the area of their expertise. Jesus taught them that He is the source of their success, He is the One Who, when obeyed, makes men fruitful fishermen. In [Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d), the disciples were called to leave their fishing boats and to become “**fishers of men**” (5:10). I believe that [John 21:1-14](javascript:%7b%7d) is a reaffirmation of that original call. The disciples are all waiting around, wondering what to do with their lives. I believe that by means of this miracle Jesus reiterates and reinforces their original call, which came in [Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d).

There are some interesting differences in these accounts as well—and lessons to be learned from them. The most obvious (and probably the most important) difference is that in [Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d), Jesus was in the boat. In [John 21](javascript:%7b%7d), Jesus is on the shore. You may think I am pressing the limits of this story, but there is a lesson here: “Jesus is able to guide, to provide for, and to watch over His disciples just as well (better?) from a distance, as He is able to care for them “up close and personal.” From 100 yards away, Jesus knew they had caught no fish. From 100 yards away, Jesus could guide them to an abundance of fish. Even before they saw Him, Jesus was prepared to provide for their needs. He had breakfast “on the table,” so to speak, when they arrived on shore. Were the disciples uneasy about Jesus going away, about Jesus leaving them to return to His Father? Such fears are unfounded. He is just as able to care for them when He is in heaven as He was to care for them while He was on earth. I think this was a significant part of the lesson He wanted them to learn.

Having fed His disciples fish and bread, Jesus will now speak to Peter about “feeding His sheep.” Having spoken more about *evangelism* in verses 1-14, Jesus is now about to speak to His disciples about *discipleship*. Let us notice how our Lord builds upon this miracle of the great harvest of fish.

### From Fish to Sheep, From Catching to Caring For (21:15-23)

15 Then when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these do?” He replied, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus told him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 Jesus said a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He replied, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus told him, “Shepherd my sheep.” 17 Jesus said a third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was distressed that Jesus asked him a third time, “Do you love me?” and said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus replied, “Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the solemn truth, when you were young, you tied your clothes around you and went wherever you wanted,[206](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5678_2288348) but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will tie you up and bring you where you do not want to go.” 19 (Now Jesus said this to indicate clearly by what kind of death Peter was going to glorify God.) After he said this, Jesus told Peter, “Follow me.” 20 Peter turned around and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. (This was the disciple who had leaned back against Jesus’ chest at the meal and asked, “Lord, who is the one who is going to betray you?”) 21 So when Peter saw him, he asked Jesus, “Lord, what about him?” 22 Jesus replied, “If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours? You follow me!” 23 So the saying circulated among the brothers and sisters that this disciple was not going to die. But Jesus did not say to him that he was not going to die, but rather, “If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours?”

I am inclined to understand verses 1-14 in terms of evangelism—being fishers of men. But it is not enough to simply bring a lost sinner to faith in Jesus Christ; that person should also be discipled, and thus brought to maturity in Christ. This seems to be implicit in the Great Commission:

18 Then Jesus came up and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” ([Matthew 28:18-20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

As we approach these very familiar verses in John’s Gospel, it seems necessary to make a few introductory comments about this text:

*First, in my opinion, Jesus is not seeking to correct (or even rebuke) Peter here for his three-fold denial.* Jesus personally revealed Himself to Peter, probably before He appeared to the disciples as a group ([1 Corinthians 15:5](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 24:34](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 16:7](javascript:%7b%7d)). I believe it is there that our Lord dealt with Peter’s three-fold denial, and forgave him. In our text, Peter is eager to be with our Lord. I believe this is because Peter’s sins have already been confronted and forgiven, and thus he has already been restored to fellowship with the Master.

*Second, I certainly do not agree with Roman Catholicism’s interpretation and application of this text, which seeks to establish the primacy of Peter as the first pope*. D. A. Carson writes: “[Matthew 16:13-20](javascript:%7b%7d) certainly establishes a unique role for Peter in the founding of the church. … It does not establish him in a position of ruling authority over other apostles. As for [John 21:15-17](javascript:%7b%7d), neither founding pre-eminence nor comparative authority is in view.”[207](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5684_2291472)

*Third, I am not even inclined to see this text as Peter’s restoration to leadership.* There are some scholars who hold that Peter was restored to fellowship in his private interview with Jesus, and that this incident is his public restoration to leadership. I see the emphasis of this passage falling on humble service, not on leadership, per se.

*Fourth, this passage is more about love than about leadership.* Love for Jesus is demonstrated by faithfully caring for His sheep. Let me attempt to illustrate this. The nation is at war, and a son receives notification that he has been drafted into the armed forces. The son ships out, leaving his loving parents behind. He also leaves behind his most prized possession, a 1930 Ford Model A coupe. Do you think that the father of this son will simply allow that car to sit out in the weather, unattended? Do you think he will now use it to haul his trash to the dump? No; the father will wash and wax and tenderly care for that car, because it is the expression of his love for his son, in the son’s absence. *So, too, when we care for the sheep whom our Lord loves, and for whom He gave His life, we show our love for the Shepherd.*

*Fifth, caution should be exercised in making too much of the two different words for “love” which are employed in this text.* The two verbs are *agapao* and *phileo*. The first two times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, the word for love is *agapao*. The third time Jesus asks, He employs the term *phileo*. Every time Peter responds to Jesus’ question, indicating his love, he employs the word *phileo*. The distinctions that some make between these two terms may hold true in some cases, and for some authors. They do not seem to hold true for John, who often uses different terms for the same concept. When commentators do seek to emphasize the distinctions between the two Greek words John uses, they do not agree as to what the meaning and emphasis of these terms are. We should keep in mind that when Jesus spoke to Peter and asked him these three questions, He spoke not in Greek (the language in which the Gospel of John is written), but in Aramaic, the language spoken by the Jews of that day. The change in words may have some significance, but I hardly think it is the key to understanding the passage.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus turned to Simon Peter and asked, “**Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these do?**”[208](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5689_2293995) Our Lord’s addition of the words, “**more than these do**,” really got to the heart of the matter. Our Lord’s prediction of Peter’s denials came in the midst of Peter’s confident boasting that even if all the others denied Jesus, he certainly would not. In other words, Peter was claiming a higher level of devotion than the rest. Jesus is simply asking him to re-evaluate his boastful claim. And this Peter did. Peter could truthfully affirm that he did love Jesus, but he would not go so far as to claim that his love was greater than that of his fellow-disciples. He also speaks of his love in terms of the Savior’s assessment of it: “**Yes, Lord, You know I love You**.” To this our Lord replied, “**Feed My lambs**.”

How Peter wished that Jesus would leave it at that. But Jesus will ask the question two more times, so that this conversation is understood in relation to that occasion when Peter denied his Master three times.[209](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5691_2295353) And so Jesus asks Peter a second time, “**Simon, son of John, do you love Me?**” Peter replies with the identical words he spoke in answer to the first question, “**Yes, Lord, You know I love You**.” Jesus responded, “**Shepherd My sheep**.”

It was when Jesus asked the same question the third time that Peter was deeply grieved, “**Simon, son of John, do you love Me?**” It was not that Jesus changed from *agapao* to *phileo* that troubled Peter. Peter was grieved because Jesus found it necessary to ask virtually the same question three times. I do not like to be asked the same question repeatedly. I conclude that either the person asking the question wasn’t paying attention (this could not be the case with Jesus), or that my answer was not acceptable or credible. The three-fold repetition must have registered with Peter as being related to his three-fold denial. Peter was grieved because he realized that the bold and even arrogant claims he had made proved to be empty. Peter is not distressed with Jesus; he is grieved over his own sin. Jesus is not attempting to shame Peter; he is seeking to reaffirm his call to service. Did Jesus question Peter about his love for Him three times? Then note that three times Jesus instructed Peter to care for His sheep. Does Peter fear he has been cast aside as useless? Jesus tells him to return to His[210](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5693_2297665) work, three times!

Peter really did love Jesus. But Peter needed to understand that his love for the Savior was not as great as he thought, just as his ability to catch fish was not as great as he seemed to think. In loving, and in landing fish, Jesus was supreme. Even in the thing Peter did best (fishing), he could not hold a candle to Jesus, who proved to be far better at fishing than he. Peter sought to prove his love for Jesus by boasting about it, by arguing with his fellow-disciples about it (see [Luke 22:24](javascript:%7b%7d)), and by being the first to draw his sword and lop off an ear, or perhaps even by being the first man into the water and onto the shore. These were not the benchmarks our Lord had established for testing one’s love for Him. The proof of one’s love for God is *sacrificial service*[211](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5695_2298592)—feeding our Lord’s sheep.

The way I understand verses 15-19 is something like this: “Peter, do you really love Me as much as you say? Then prove your love for Me by taking care of My sheep.” Jesus is the “**Good Shepherd**,” Who cares for His sheep (see [John 10](javascript:%7b%7d)). If Peter really loves his Lord, then his passion will be the Lord’s passion. Jesus came to be the “**Good Shepherd**.” If Peter really loves the Lord, he will be a good shepherd, and shepherds shepherd by feeding the lambs, by caring for the weakest and most vulnerable of the flock. Jesus is the “**Good Shepherd**”; He is the Shepherd who came to lay down His life for His sheep. If Peter really loves Jesus, he will care for the Master’s sheep, and he, like the Master, will lay down his life for the sheep. Love manifests itself in service—humble, sacrificial, service.

You become like the people you love. The things they love, you love. If Peter really loves his Lord, Who is the Good Shepherd, then Peter will surely seek to shepherd in the same way. He will seek the lost sheep (evangelism). He will feed and tend the young and vulnerable lambs (discipleship). And, like the Good Shepherd, he will lay down his life for the sheep. That is why the Lord moves so quickly and easily from verses 15-17 to verses 18 and 19. Peter had assured his Lord that he was willing to die for Him ([Matthew 26:35](javascript:%7b%7d)), and so he will. But he will not die in the manner that he once supposed—seeking to keep His Master from being arrested and crucified. Peter will die, as the Savior did, as a good shepherd, and for the sake of the gospel.

Notice that Jesus does much more than predict Peter’s death. John wishes us to understand that Jesus went so far as to predict the way in which Peter would die: “**(Now Jesus said this to indicate clearly by what kind of death Peter was going to glorify God.)**” (verse 19). Peter’s previous effort to resist the arrest of Jesus was contrary to the gospel, and this is why Jesus rebuked him and abruptly ordered him to stop resisting His arrest. The death which Peter will experience is a death that will glorify God. Jesus also indicates that Peter will die in his old age, and thus he is informed that his death is not imminent. But his death for the Savior’s sake is certain: “I tell you the solemn truth, when you were young, you tied your clothes around you and went wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will tie you up and bring you where you do not want to go” (verse 18). Some see in these words only a vague and general reference to the manner of Peter’s death, but this does not square with John’s explanation in verse 19, which seems to be a more specific prophecy. I agree with those who see here a prophecy that Peter truly will follow Jesus, by dying on a Roman cross:

More important is the way *stretch out your hands* was understood in the ancient world: it widely referred to crucifixion (Haenchen, 2. 226-227). … Bauer (p. 232) proposed long ago that this ‘stretching’ took place when a condemned prisoner was tied to his cross-member … and forced to carry his ‘cross’ to the place of execution. The cross-member would be placed on the prisoner’s neck and shoulders, his arms tied to it, and *then* he would be led away to death.[212](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5700_2302164)

The words, “**Follow Me**,” constitute the first calling of the disciples ([Matthew 4:19](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 1:17](javascript:%7b%7d); [John 1:43](javascript:%7b%7d)). As time passed, these words took on a much deeper meaning. Following Jesus meant putting Jesus above family ([Matthew 8:22](javascript:%7b%7d)). It meant a whole new way of life, where former practices would be unacceptable ([Matthew 9:9](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 2:14](javascript:%7b%7d)). Before long, Jesus let His disciples know that following Him meant taking up one’s cross ([Matthew 16:24](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 8:34](javascript:%7b%7d)). (At this point in time, our Lord’s reference to “taking up one’s cross” was, at best, understood metaphorically.) For the rich young ruler, it meant giving up his possessions ([Matthew 19:21](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 20:21](javascript:%7b%7d)). And now, for Peter, it means not only carrying on the Master’s work, but taking up a very literal cross. It would seem that at every point where following Jesus is more precisely defined, another challenge to follow Him is given. So it is in our text.

I fear that Christians today understand these two words, “Follow me,” in a most shallow and superficial way. When Paul writes, “**For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain**” ([Philippians 1:21](javascript:%7b%7d)), we interpret his words in a somewhat hedonistic fashion. We suppose that Paul means living as a Christian is glorious, trouble-free, and fulfilling. It is, to put it plainly, “the good life.” In other words, we get to live it up here, and then when we die, it gets even better. There is a certain sense in which this is true. But we must understand Paul’s words in the light of what Jesus is telling Peter here, in our text, about following Him. To follow Christ is to walk in His steps, to live as He lived, to serve others as He did, and to lay down your life for the sheep, like Him. In Philippians chapter 1, Paul is therefore saying, “For me, to live is to live just as Christ did, taking up my cross daily, laying down my life for His sheep.”

Peter got the message. He was willing to lay down his life for the Savior. But why was Jesus singling him out? What about the rest? What about John? At some point, it appears that Jesus and Peter have gone off by themselves, apart from the others. Verse 20 seems to indicate that Jesus and Peter are walking by themselves, with John following behind, at a distance. Peter turns around and sees John, some distance away. He and John had been closely associated in the fishing business, and even as disciples. Later, they will work very closely together as apostles, as we see in the Book of Acts. Peter could not resist asking Jesus about John’s fate. If Peter had to die to follow Jesus, was this also true of John?

When I was growing up, I had two sisters and one brother. I was especially competitive with my older sister. Whenever we had pie, you had better believe that she and I were eyeing each piece, to make sure that the other didn’t get a bigger piece than we did. We had such a keenly developed sense of weight and size that we could have worked for the Federal Bureau of Standards. We did not wish for our rival sibling to get more than what we got. We expected complete equality. Peter seems to have the same attitude toward suffering. If he had to suffer, then surely John should be expected to suffer in just the same way, for the same period of time.

How easy it is for us to stand back, far removed in space and time, and criticize Peter for his foolish words. Let us remember that Peter does not have the depth of field that we have. He has not yet come to grasp the full impact of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. He has not yet experienced the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, Who will come shortly, at Pentecost. Peter cannot yet look upon dying for Christ as a high calling, as a privilege. He views it only as a sacrifice, and thus he wishes to be sure that every other disciple pays the same price.

It occurred to me (later than I would wish to admit) that by the time John was writing this Gospel, Peter was probably already dead. If this is the case, then what is John’s purpose in writing about this incident? It is clearly not for Peter’s benefit. John tells us his reason for writing about this. It was to clear up the misconception some had that John would not die before the coming of our Lord. Jesus did not say that John would be alive at His return. He simply told Peter that if it was His will that he (Peter) die, and that John remain alive until His return, that was of no concern to Peter—it was none of his business. Death, like everything else, falls within the boundaries of our Lord’s sovereign control of all things. If death is God’s business, His *sovereign* business, then it is not Peter’s business to raise questions about John’s death.[213](https://bible.org/seriespage/what-thing-called-love-john-211-25#P5707_2306935)

Peter was guilty of giving too much attention to John, when our Lord had narrowed the focus of the discussion to Peter’s love, and Peter’s service. Jesus further indicated to Peter that he would glorify his Master by his death, a death that was similar to His death, a death by crucifixion. Peter had fixed his attention on John. From John’s words here, we know that others erred in the same way Peter had. It was a popular misconception that Jesus promised John that he would not die until His return. It was only that—a popular misconception—and John corrects it here.

As I have been studying this final chapter in John’s Gospel, I re-read 1 Peter and was impressed with the way [John 21](javascript:%7b%7d) and 1 Peter were so similar in their themes. Peter certainly “got the message” Jesus was giving him here. But I also had to remind myself that [John 21](javascript:%7b%7d) was not written by Peter; it was written by John! Then it struck me—if I didn’t constantly remind myself of the fact, I would tend to forget that John wrote the Gospel of John. John is writing this chapter, and he is even a character in this closing scene, but he is completely in the background. I believe this is just the way John wanted it.

In fact, this is the way it is throughout the Gospel of John. John does not refer to himself by name, but rather as “**the one Jesus loved**.” Notice that John never refers to himself as “the one who loved Jesus.” Of course he loved Jesus, but then he had heard Peter boast the same thing. Better to focus on the great, unfailing love our Lord has for us, than our feeble, fickle love for Him. Good decision, John! And keep in mind that of all the Gospel authors, only Matthew and John were one of the twelve. Only John was one of the inner three—Peter, James, and John—who witnessed some things to which the other nine were not privy. You would think, would you not, that John would be more than eager to write about some of those events in our Lord’s life, where he was one of the privileged few to be present, and to witness such great things? There was the transfiguration of our Lord, for example ([Matthew 17:1](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 9:2](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 9:29](javascript:%7b%7d)), the raising of the synagogue ruler’s dead daughter ([Mark 5:37](javascript:%7b%7d)), and the prayer of our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane ([Mark 14:33](javascript:%7b%7d)). In each case, only the inner three were present, as stated in the Synoptic Gospels. And yet none of these incidents is even mentioned by John. John refuses to place himself in the spotlight. What an amazing man he is! Peter may be overly concerned about John (as he is), and so may those others who wrongly supposed that he would not die, but John himself is not so taken with himself. John keeps the focus on our Lord, and on the truths He spoke. Our eyes should not be on ourselves, but on Christ. Our focus should not be on what others are doing for Christ, or what God is doing for them. Our focus should be on Him, and on our love for Him, as shown by our loving service to His flock.

This is the “Great Commission” of John’s Gospel. It is certainly different from the Great Commission of Matthew’s Gospel. But when you stop to think about it, the point of both Gospels is the same. Matthew emphasizes the authority of our Lord, and the Lord’s command to make disciples. *John focuses on our love for the Lord, and the privilege we have to show our love for Him by caring for those He loves, in a way that is consistent with His sacrificial death at Calvary.*

One more thing should be said about the “**love**” which our Lord (and John) emphasizes in this closing chapter of John. We would do well to consider where John was when he penned this Gospel. The place of writing is not certain, but it is likely that it was Ephesus, which was apparently John’s home in his later years. Is it not interesting to think that when John writes his epistles, he places such emphasis on love? Is it not noteworthy that in the Book of Revelation, our Lord’s words to the church at Ephesus indicate that their great deficiency was that of love? And is it not noteworthy that when Paul wrote to Timothy, who was staying in Ephesus, he stated that the goal of his instruction was love ([1 Timothy 1:5](javascript:%7b%7d))? What a fitting way to end the Gospel of John, not by stressing the believer’s duty (which is very real, and very important), but by stressing the *believer’s love and sacrificial service*, the visible demonstration of that love.

### John’s Closing Words (21:24-25)

24 This is the disciple who testifies about these things and has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. 25 There are many other things that Jesus did. If every one of them were written down, I suppose the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

This past few months, there has been a great deal of inquiry into the life and leadership of our President. The body of evidence against him is known as the “Starr Report.” Literally truckloads of documents and exhibits went into this report. Thousands of pages were written about this narrow window of time in the President’s life. How much more—and how much bigger and better—the “report” would be of all that our Lord did in His earthly ministry! When John tells his readers that “**the whole world would not have room for the books that could be written**,” he is hardly exaggerating. John has been very selective in what he has chosen to present as evidence in favor of his conclusion that Jesus is, indeed, the Son of God and the Savior of the world. And in his final words, John testifies that the words of this book are “**the gospel truth**.” It is not for lack of evidence that men are eternally lost. John has now set the evidence before his readers, and he urges each of us to draw the conclusions this evidence merits.

The verdict is clear. You should believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah—the Christ—and that by His sinless life and sacrificial death, your sins may be forgiven. And having believed the verdict, you should not only be overcome with His love for you, but you should be compelled by your love for Him, to serve Him as you shepherd His lambs. The evidence abounds; the verdict is clear. The question that remains is this: Given this evidence, how will you respond to Jesus Christ?

197 Such as the times when Jesus sent them out in pairs (e.g., [Mark 6:7](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.; [Luke 10:1](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.).

198 The word for “**fish**” here has no article, so it could be read, “**a fish**” as the NET Bible has rendered it. This need not be the case, however, and thus most translations do not render it “**a fish**,” as though there were only one fish—just enough for Jesus—but “**fish**”—enough for all the men to eat.

199 It is my understanding that [Matthew 4:18](javascript:%7b%7d)ff. describes an earlier incident, when these disciples left their boats for a short time. It would seem that in [Luke 5](javascript:%7b%7d) these men left their boats for good, or so it appeared, until the events of [John 21](javascript:%7b%7d).

200 I would not be so bold as to claim that I am a fisherman, but as I was growing up, my parents purchased an old fishing resort, which we ran for several years. I can tell you one thing: If you tell a fisherman where someone else made a big catch, he will almost certainly go try his luck in that same place.

201 I should say here that just after teaching this lesson, my wife and I were able to travel to Israel, where we spent one night in a cottage at the edge of the Sea of Galilee. There, from the shore, we watched the lights of the fishing boats as they worked in the darkness. And in the morning we watched them transferring their catch to shore. Some of the fish were as small as herring, while there were a few “large” fish in the range of ten pounds. When we crossed from the eastern shore to the west, we may well have been near the spot that Jesus was waiting for His disciples on shore.

202 The boat we saw unloading its small fish had only two large fish set aside on the seat.

203 William Hendriksen remarks, “Peter is the man of action. He generally acts before John does. John generally understands before Peter does.” William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-1954), II, p. 479.

204 What could one do with 153 large fish? I can guess. First, you cook some up for eating for the next day or two. Then, you take what you know you won’t eat and sell it. This was how Peter and his partners made their living for a number of years.

205 Hendriksen, in an interesting footnote, summarizes some of the fanciful interpretations of the number 153, the exact count of the fish caught that morning: “Among the strange and, for the most part, allegorical interpretations of this item of information I have found the following: a. The fish were not counted until the shore had been reached, in order to teach us that the exact number of the elect remains unknown until they have reached the shore of heaven. b. The ancients counted one hundred fifty-three varieties of fish! c. There is here a veiled reference to [Matt. 13:47, 48](javascript:%7b%7d), and an indication that all kinds of people are going to be saved. d. The reference is to an important date in Church History, namely, 153 A.D. e. The total represents the sum of all the numbers from 1 to 17. Well, what of it? f. In Hebrew characters the numerical equivalent of Simon Iona is one hundred fifty-three. g. The number one hundred fifty-three represents 100 for the Gentiles, 50 for the Jews, and 3 for the Trinity.” Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, II, pp. 483-484, fn. 300.

206 Could our Lord be picking up on what Peter had just done, as recorded in verse 7? “**Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ So Simon Peter, when he heard that it was the Lord, tucked in his outer garment (for he had nothing on underneath it), and plunged into the sea.**” The proximity of these two statements in verses 7 and 18 could be coincidental, but I see fewer and fewer coincidences in the Bible.

207 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 678.

208 There is some discussion over what Jesus means here. The verse could be translated (and understood) in several ways. (1) “Peter, do you love me more than these fish, more than this boat and the nets, and the things which represent your life of a fisherman?” (2) “Peter, do you love Me more than you love these men?” (3) “Peter, do you love me more than these men do?” The NET Bible has opted for the third rendering, and I would agree.

209 “The circumstances must have reminded Peter of the scene of his denial. And if the circumstances as such did not remind him of this, what was about to happen was bound to do so. Note the following resemblances: 1. It was at a charcoal fire that Peter denied his Master (18:18). It is here at another charcoal fire (21:9) that he is asked to confess (his love for) his Master. 2. Three times Peter had denied his Master (18:17, 25, 27). Three times he must now own him as his Lord, whom he loves (21:15-17). 3. The prediction with reference to the denial had been introduced with the solemn double Amen (13:38; see on 1:51). The prediction which immediately followed Peter’s confession was introduced similarly (21:18). But it has been shown that the resemblance is even more pointed. In reverse order the same three ideas—1. following, 2. a cross, 3. denying—occur here in 21:15-19 as in 13:36-38.” William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, II , p. 486.

210 My capitalization of this word is not a mistake. Peter’s work (like that of all the disciples) is to carry on the Master’s work.

211 John has much more to say on this point in his first epistle. A search in my concordance program shows that “**love**” appears in John’s Gospel 57 times, far more often than in all the Synoptic Gospels combined (Matthew, 13; Mark, 6; Luke, 16 = 35 times). Love appears 46 times in the Epistle of First John.

212 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), p. 679.

213 I’m sure I need to clarify. God’s sovereignty does not exclude our involvement. Salvation is God’s sovereign work, but we should surely be involved ([Romans 10:14-15](javascript:%7b%7d)). But one who is sovereign is not obliged to explain His actions, nor is it appropriate for the subject to challenge the sovereign by demanding an explanation (see [Romans 9:19-21](javascript:%7b%7d)).

# John Macarthur’s negative take on Peter’s fishing [*https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/SC17-2*](https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/SC17-2)

Peter did enough things to lose his ordination papers. If he had presented his testimony as an application to The Master’s Seminary he likely would have been rejected. Occasionally speaks for the devil, occasionally pulls Jesus aside and tells Him what to do; and when it gets tough, he denies, and denies, and denies that he ever knows the Lord, and then swears. Oh, that’s great stuff for a minister.

The thud takes place in the first three words of verse 1: “After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas call Didymus the twin, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee,” – who would be James and John – “two other disciples,” – Philip and Andrew. What you’ve got here is all the people who were in the fishing business. These are all the Galilean fishermen; and you can throw in Thomas. Pretty startling here.

“Simon Peter said to them, ‘I’m going fishing.’” You say, “Well, everybody in the ministry needs recreation.” No. This is not about grabbing a rod and a hook on a sunny day and enjoying recreation. The Lord had told them, [Matthew 28:16](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matt%2028.16), “Go to Galilee, to a mountain that I tell you, and wait for Me there for further orders. I’ll be there; you wait. I’ll give the commission and you’ll know what’s next.”

In a predictable, impulsive, disappointing move, Peter decides to go back to his former career. And he is a leader; and like a bunch of rubber ducks, all the rest of the fishermen go after him. “I’m going fishing.”

In the original there’s a finality in that statement. This is not recreation, this is going back to his old life. How do we know that? “They went out,” – verse 3 says – “they got into the boat,” – not a boat, and certainly not standing on the shore throwing a hook in the water. “They went back to the boat,” – definite article. They were back in their own area and they went back to their own boat, Peter’s boat perhaps. This is a boat big enough for all of them. This is not a recreational boat, this is a fishing boat. And they took nets. And you don’t use nets for recreational fishing. And in verse 7 it says, “Peter stripped down to a loincloth.” He went back to work. Verse 8 says, “They were a hundred yards out.” They weren’t just wanting to enjoy a nibble or two.

Why does Peter do this? Why does he say, “I’m going back to fishing”? Hasn’t he seen the risen Christ? Yes. Yes. Why is he going back to fishing? I think the answer’s pretty simple: he had absolutely no confidence in himself. He was a proven failure. One minute he could be serving the Lord, and the next minute the devil. He could say, “I’ll follow You even to death.” And then when all he had to do was confess Christ, he would deny Him, and deny Him, and deny Him, and deny Him to irrelevant people in the dark. He had overestimated his wisdom, pompous way, he bragged about his strength. He had underestimated the power of temptation. He openly declared that he could handle any severe threat and never waver in his loyalty to Jesus. That foolish boasting led him to blatant betrayal.

At that part of the story we don’t know if he’s any different than Judas, full of self-doubt, sense of serious overwhelming weakness, a history of failure, lack of trust in Himself, inadequate: “I can’t do this. I can’t do this ministry, but I can fish. Let’s go back to fishing.”

## The Power of Christ's Presence (No. 3146)

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"Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter, It is the Lord."   
[John 21:7](https://www.ccel.org/study/John_21:7-21:7).

I AM going to speak, on this occasion, to my Brothers and Sisters who are workers for Christ. When our Lord met His Apostles by the lake and provided for them that memorable meal, He did not think it out of place to say to Peter, "Feed My lambs; feed My sheep." These practical exhortations were regarded by Him as quite in keeping with holy fellowship and so, though we are coming to the Communion Table at the close of this service, I feel that I am only right in speaking upon practical matters to you, my fellow laborers and fellow soldiers in the work and warfare of Christ. And I pray that God will, through me, speak to all here who love our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You know that we read in the Gospels according to Luke and John, of two miraculous draughts of fishes. [See Sermon #443, Volume 8—THE TWO DRAUGHTS OF FISHES.] The one that is recorded in this Chapter from which our text is taken was, in several respects, similar to that which was worked at an earlier period of our Lord's history.

Before He called His Apostles, He worked the miracle of giving them a great haul of fish after they had toiled all the night and had taken nothing. And then, after He had died upon the Cross and risen from the grave, He repeated the miracle in almost identical fashion. I think there was a great lesson which our Savior intended His disciples to learn from that repetition. The miracle was a picture—and He wanted them to look upon it and catch the idea it was meant to convey—and as they had probably not all caught it the first time, He held the picture up before them again, that they might have another opportunity of learning the lesson which He had intended it to teach them.

You notice that in both instances they had toiled—they had toiled all the night—but they had toiled in vain. The night was the best season for fishing, as it still is. They had toiled in the place where they had often caught fish before, for they were experienced fishermen, apt at their craft. Yet after using all the means that had been successful at other times, they were unsuccessful, for they had taken nothing. They had toiled perseveringly, too, for it was not only at night that they had toiled, but all the night. From the time when they pushed forth from the shore, in the moonlight, until the morning star warned them of the dawning of the new day, they had toiled. Yet they had taken nothing.

This teaches us that we may work for Christ and try to win souls for Him—and do that work at the best time, in the best way and even persevere in doing it—and yet be unsuccessful. We must be unsuccessful if, like the disciples, we are laboring without the Master's Presence. In both instances, the turning-point was when the Master came. On the first occasion, He borrowed Peter's boat and preached a sermon from it to the crowd upon the shore. And then He said to Peter, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." In the second case, He bade the disciples, "cast the net on the right side of the ship." But in both instances it was the appearance of Jesus that filled the net and filled it so miraculously that the despairing toilers of the night realized that Someone who was more than man had spoken to them— and they fell down to worship Him as Divine. So whenever Jesus comes to His workers, however unsuccessful they may have been, they are sure to succeed when He is there! Yes, and to succeed beyond their own expectations—just as the disciples were surprised that by the same hands which all night had taken nothing, 153 great fishes should be taken—and out of the same nets which were empty all the night, (save here and there a piece of tangled weed to mock their hopes), there should come so many great fishes upon which they and others might be feasted to their full! The Apostles could not do anything without their Lord and neither can we—so the main point for us to remember is that we need Jesus Christ to

come into our midst—and this point I shall try to drive home with all my might, praying God the Holy Spirit to stir up the hearts of His people so that they may have a great longing to be useful in the winning of souls and realize that this can only be achieved by those who enjoy true fellowship with Christ!

I. I want, first, to show THE DISSIMILARITY AND THE SIMILARITY OF OUR POSITION TO THAT OF THE APOSTLES UPON THIS OCCASION.

First, there was a dissimilarity in which the advantage is altogether on our side. The Apostle Peter and his brethren had been fishing unsuccessfully, but they had not been commanded to fish. They may or may not have been right in fishing at that time, but at any rate, they were doing it on their own account. Peter said, "I am going fishing." It was his own work, done entirely in accordance with his own will—Christ had not bidden him go fishing. But in our case, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, we have our Lord's commission, "Go you into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." We have received this Divine commission, so that when we preach the Gospel, we are not fishing as amateurs or self-sent volunteers, but as those who are sent by the Most High to do His bidding. When He commissions anyone, there is a sort of implied guarantee that He will give him success. At any rate, He will not send His servant upon a fool's errand, but by some means or other, He who gives the authority will be sure to give the power that is needed to go with it. "Wisdom is justified of all her children." You, dear Brothers and Sisters, in trying to serve God, each of you in your proper sphere, have done what you were sent to do, for Jesus has said to you as He said to His disciples, "As My Father has sent Me, even so send I you." Remember that passage almost at the end of the Revelation, "Let him that hears, say, Come." Having heard the Gospel, you have tried to say, "Come," to the people and you have not gone beyond your commission in doing so, for you were commanded to do it! Every Believer is a priest—under the Christian dispensation there is no other priesthood save that of our Lord Jesus Christ and that which is common to every Believer in Him. So when you, having believed on Him, have gone to speak of Him to others, you have only exercised that royal priesthood which is rightly yours, for He "has made us kings and priests unto God." So, first, the Apostles went fishing without having any commission to fish and, therefore, they were unsuccessful. But we have an advantage over them because in the Gospel fishery, every true child of God who casts the net is commissioned by his Master to do so!

The disciples also had not their Master with them. All the night when they were casting the net and drawing it in, and finding nothing in it, they were by themselves. But that is not the case with us. As a Church we can say that we have had the Master's Presence with us these many years. Oftentimes in our assemblies we have been as sure of His Presence as we can ever be sure of anything! Our hearts have been rejoiced, purified and sanctified by gazing upon Him by faith. There have been Prayer Meetings in which I hope all of us have felt bowed down and humbled like Peter was when the Master was in his boat. And there have been times of solemn rejoicing over converted sinners in which the Lord Jesus has been manifestly in our midst! His promise, "Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world," has been most graciously fulfilled in our experience and we, therefore, bless the Savior that we have not to wait for Him to come to us, for He has long been with us and has never left us! These many years the simple preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified has filled this House of Prayer as it is tonight. People know that there is nothing to be heard here but the old, old story "of the Crucified Savior, yet let the weather be as rigorous as it may, still will the crowds come to hear the Word of the Lord—and in this we do rejoice and evermore will rejoice! In this respect, also, we have the advantage over the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee.

And so we have in another point—because the Master was not with them, they caught nothing—but it cannot be said of us that we have taken nothing. I do not know that it would be right for us to try to compute how many souls have professed to have found the Savior during the years in which we have worked together, but I believe, Brothers, we may say this to the Glory of God and to the honor of the simple Gospel that we have preached—the number who have joined this Church, alone, can only be spoken of by thousands. And if we were to speak of tens of thousands, yes, and many tens of thousands who here and elsewhere have found the Savior under the Word preached by us, we would not exaggerate in the least. We put the crown upon the head of our Master, but what joy we feel that it has been so! Suppose that He had left us? Vain would it have been for us to preach the Word, even with earnestness, for earnestness, alone, will not convert souls. There must be the Presence of Jesus to bless men—and it has been with us, year after year, even unto this day, glory be to His holy name! [The years referred to number approximately 20.]

In these points, then, our case is dissimilar to that of the Apostles when they were toiling all the night and had taken nothing.

But we are precisely like the Apostles in certain other points, the first of which is that we would have taken nothing if the Master had not helped us. No child would have come from the Sunday school to say, "I love the Savior and wish to confess my faith in Him and to unite with the Church here." No young woman would have come out of that large and blessed Bible class if the Lord had not put the right words into the lips of the Sister who speaks for Him there. No young man would have been converted in our senior classes if the Spirit of God had not gone with the conductors. And from this pulpit no Word of Life would have been spoken if it had not been first given to us by God and then sent home to the hearts of our hearers by the Holy Spirit. We would have "taken nothing" without our Lord!

And even now, Brothers and Sisters, our success is wonderfully like the non-success of the Apostles, for we have scarcely taken anything in comparison with what still needs to be taken! Even when we speak of tens of thousands converted, what are they in comparison with the millions all around us in this vast city? When God gives us an increase of a hundred or a 120 in a month, we are glad and thankful, but large as those numbers are, what are they compared with the perishing myriads of London alone? Why should we not have 3,000 converts in a day as on the day of Pentecost? Why is it that our Churches are not multiplied till they cover this city in every part? Why does not the old Church of Christ, (for such we are), the old Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, come more to the front instead of lingering in the background? It is because we have not yet the fullness of the Master's power as we must have it—and desire to have it to the praise of His Glory! Christ's Presence, if He would but come among us in the fullness of His strength, would do so much more for us than anything that we have ever seen—that we would be as much astounded by the increase as the Apostles were by the two great draughts of fishes! Christ had but to will it and the fish came swimming in shoals to the net—and He has but to will it and souls will be converted by millions to Himself and His Gospel! He had but to give His disciples the directions to where to cast the net and the same net that had been empty would become full. And He has but to teach His ministers how to preach, and touch their lips with a burning coal off the altar to fire them with a Pentecostal enthu-siasm—and they would speak in a way in which as yet they have never spoken and with a power they have never yet experienced! Such days are promised and they will surely come. We are not straitened in God. We are straitened in ourselves. If we have not those glorious days of ingathering, it is because some sin of ours still keeps the Master's Glory from us. Oh, let us turn to Him and may He graciously turn to us!—

"Let our mutual love be fervent,  
Make us prevalent in prayers!  
Let each one esteemed Your servant  
Shun the world's bewitching snares,  
Lord, revive us,  
All our help must come from You!"

II. Now, secondly, I have to speak upon THE MEANS WHICH WE ARE TO USE SO AS TO GAIN OUR MASTER'S PRESENCE. I have tried to show you that all our success must come from Him and all that He gives us must be ascribed to Him. So how can we secure His Presence? We have it in a measure—how can we have it more fully?

Well, let us always remember that He comes just where He wills to come. There is absolute Sovereignty about the work of Christ in the Kingdom of His Grace. As the wind blows where it wishes, so does the Spirit of God work wherever He pleases. I do not think that we can always account for the great success of one preacher and the non-success of another by anything that we can see. We have to fall back upon the Sovereignty of God and say, "God wills it and, therefore, it is." He will have us know that Sovereignty is His Divine prerogative. He has the key of David—He opens and no man shuts. He shuts and no man opens. If He wills it, the rain shall descend steadily to make fat the fields. But if He wills it, He can restrain the dew of Heaven until the most fertile Church shall become barren as the mountains of Gilboa! He exercises His power not according to ourwill, but according to His own will—we must never forget that.

At the same time, what course should we take in order to secure His Presence? I reply, first, that we had better go on with our work for Him. If we want Christ to bless us and we are doing work for Him, we had better keep on steadily doing it. These disciples of His had been fishing all night. Perhaps if they had not fished at night Christ would not have given them fish in the daytime. He does not often come to bless idlers—He acts Sovereignly, as I have said, but He generally gives His blessing to those Churches that do the most for Him. I have always found that an earnest Gospel ministry and a prayerfully united Church will have God's blessing when others will not have it. Go on, Sunday school teachers, go on, tract distributors! Go on, Evangelists—go on, all of you who are laboring for Christ—keep, each one, to his own service and even if it has been night with you and you have taken nothing, still keep on at your toil! Probably the best way to bring the Master to you is to labor for Him with all your might.

Sometimes, however, it will be necessary for us to wash or mend our nets. In the miracle recorded by Luke, we find that the fishermen, after toiling all night, were washing their nets—and either on that occasion, or on a similar one, some of them were mending their nets. Every Church needs to do that and every Church member, every Christian worker needs to do that. The preacher will do well to adopt another style—to study more diligently and to make himself more proficient in the knowledge of the Word. Sunday school teachers must more carefully study the lessons for their classes and go to their scholars better prepared for their work. Your nets will often need washing and mending if you are to be fishers of men—and all of you will be more likely to get the Master's blessing if you pay more attention to the means you are using for doing good in His service! Christ does not want slovenly work, nor is He likely to bless those who think that any kind of service will do for Him. I have heard of a preacher who thought that whatever came first into his head was good enough for his people. On one occasion, he informed one of his officers, at the end of his sermon, that he had never thought of it before he entered the pulpit. And the good Elder replied, "I thought so while listening to you. I thought that if you had considered it beforehand, you would never have said what you did." We all need to wash and mend our nets—I mean that we all need to do Christ's work in the best possible way—and that is the way in which we are most likely to be privileged with His Presence.

On that first occasion, the fishermen had been listening to Christ's words, for they had, at His request, turned their boat into a pulpit in which He sat down and taught the people who stood on the shore. Was there any connection between that incident and the great haul of fish? I think there was and that if they had not granted Christ's request, and listened to His sermon, He would not have blessed them with that multitude of fish. At all events, I know that a worker will always be all the better for waiting a while and sitting as a learner at Christ's feet—reading the Word for Himself, or listening to the Truth as it is preached by some God-sent minister. The message may strike a keynote in your heart which shall so influence your whole life that, henceforth, you shall be in a different condition and more likely to be blessed of the Most High.

Do you ask, "What is there that will bring Christ to a Church and keep Him there?" I reply, in a word, prayer. There is no force in nature that is equal to the power of prayer! The law of gravitation holds the planets in their orbits and links the sun to all the spheres that circle round him, but prayer has before now made gravitation, itself, cease to exert its energy! "Sun, stand you still upon Gibeon," said Joshua—who had first spoken to the Lord about the matter— "and you, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon"—and sun and moon stood still! We speak that which, to many nowadays, only causes ridicule, but to our minds it seems ridiculous to doubt that God listens to the voice of men. When men are made in the image of God—twice-made and so made His children—surely their believing prayers shall move the heart of their heavenly Father! You remember what Christ said to His disciples, in His Sermon on the Mount? "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" Of course He will listen to the voices of those whom He so dearly loves! You know, Beloved, that there is power in prayer. When Believers meet together and unitedly cry, "Lord, revive Your work. Put more power into the ministry. Make the hearts of Your people to be more full of love and zeal. Save the ungodly. Awaken the unconcerned!"—It will be done. It is not with us merely a matter of hope that earnest prayer will bring blessing to the Church and to the world—it is a matter of fact it must be so! The laws of Nature may be suspended, but laws that appertain to God's own Character for truth and faithfulness cannot be suspended. He would not be God if He did not answer prayer! His own promises bind Him to do so. O you that doubt Him, try Him! If any of you question the power of prayer, see what has already been done by it. As for you who are the servants of the living God and who have access to His Mercy Seat, you have but to ask and to receive—you have but to seek and to find—you have but to knock and the door shall be opened to you! Brothers and Sisters in Christ, join one another in praying Christ to come into our midst! Do pray for a blessing, pray mightily for it—and rest not day nor night till that blessing comes!

We must, however, add to prayer the waiting for that blessing that we seek After Christ had ascended to Heaven, His disciples went to an upper room and waited there till the Holy Spirit was given to them on the day of Pentecost. They did not sit there thinking that perhaps the promised blessing might come, or might not come, but there they waited till they heard the "sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty wind" and the "cloven tongues, like as of fire, sat upon each of them." So let us come together in our assemblies expecting the blessing which the Lord has promised, for the blessing will certainly come if we believingly expect it. "Open your mouth wide," says God, "and I will fill it!" Oh, for the capacity to believe God, for assuredly God will never dishonor our faith!

And then, to our expectation, we must add the opening of our own hearts to receive the blessing. We want the Savior to bless us and He says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me." He is ready to bless you, Beloved—are you ready to be blessed by Him? O you that love Him, fling wide the doors of your heart and ask Him to come in! He has bought you with His heart's blood—will you not give Him your heart's best love? He is Himself your Beloved, your Husband, your All-in-All, so treat Him not as a stranger. Let Him not stand and knock any longer, but open wide the door and bid Him come in! Is it your will, dear Brothers and Sisters, to receive Him? Do you really want Him? Do you long for more of Him? You will have to be very prayerful and very careful if He does come to you, for He is a jealous lover—and when He dwells in the heart, He looks with severe eyes upon anything contrary to His will that is done by His own dear ones—just as a king will tolerate in a stranger what he would not endure from a courtier. I am afraid we sometimes pray for sanctification and do not really wish for it—and I am also afraid that we sometimes ask for a great blessing and do not really wish for it. Do you believe that Christ can come to us and bless us? Are you living as if you expected Him to come to you? If so, when He comes you will be overawed by the majesty of His Presence—and you will say with John, "It is the Lord." As we hear of blessing in the Sunday school, we shall say, "It is the Lord." As we hear of the work of Grace in the Bible classes, we shall say, "It is the Lord." And at every Church Meeting, as we hear the stories of those who have been brought to believe in Jesus, we shall say, "It is the Lord," for no one else could have worked so blessed a work in our midst!

I wish I knew how to put this subject before you so that every believing heart would be affected by it to the highest possible degree—but I do not—and therefore, as we are coming to the Communion Table, I will try to use the sacred feast to stir up you who are serving Christ to pray for more of His Presence. You have here before you the memorials of His love to you. He gave His body to be broken for you, His heart to be pierced for you. Has Christ done all this for you and will you not do much for Him? You are saved, your sins are covered, you are His dear child—then will you not spend and be spent for Him? If the Master were to come and stand here tonight instead of me—and show you His pierced hands and feet and then were to call you, His own people, up, one by one and put such questions as these to you, (I will give you the questions directly)—I wonder how you would feel? You would come up these stairs dazzled with His beauty and overwhelmed with His love as He gazed upon you! And then He would say to each one of you, "My blood-bought one, what are you doing for Me? Are you feeding My sheep? Are you feeding My lambs?" I think I see you blush and hear you reply, "My dear Master, I have been with some of Your lambs this afternoon." "But did you really feed them?" "I spent a happy hour with them." "Well but did you feed them?" "I endeavored to do so, good Master, but I am ashamed to say that I did not feed them as I should have done." "But did you feed them as My lambs, and as I would have fed them? Did you love them? Did you speak affectionately to them? Did you tell them about Me? Did you try to bring them to Me? Did you pray over them? Did you send them away feeling that their teacher longed that they should all know the Savior?"

Well, the Master is not here in bodily Presence and I will not put such questions to you, but I would like you to put them to yourselves and to think that you hear the Master putting them to you, even as of old He said, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?" I think I hear Him call up some Brother and say to Him, "You who are redeemed by My precious blood, what have you done for Me?" I think I see you blush as He says to you again, "What have you done for Me?" At last you say, "I am a member of the Church." "But what have you done for Me?" "I sometimes put something into the offering box." "But what have you done for Me?" He shows His hands, lays bare His side and says, "I suffered this for you—what have you done for Me?" I fear that there are some members of this Church who would not like to be put to such a test as that! And for my own part, I would desire to say to the Master, "Give me a few more years in which to serve You better and give me more Grace that I may be more diligent in the service that You have allotted to me." And I pray you, beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, if you feel that you must present the same prayer, make this your solemn resolution that, by His Spirit's help, you will lay yourselves out—body, soul and spirit—for His dear sake.

But, alas, there are some of you who do not love Him at all! Some of you to whom the Christ of God is quite a stranger. Oh, that your hearts were changed! For remember that He will soon come in His Glory and all His holy angels with Him! And you who will not now kiss the silver scepter of Mercy that He holds out to you in the preaching of the Gospel, must then feel the weight of that iron rod of Justice with which He will break the ungodly and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessels! Be wise, therefore, and trust the Savior now! The Lord grant that you may do so and then, having trusted Him for yourself, may you serve Him with all your heart and soul as long as you live on this earth—and then go to join that great multitude which no man can number of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues who stand before the Throne of God and before the Lamb—forever ascribing their salvation to His Grace!

Have you ever heard the story of the poor man, in deep distress of mind, who one night dreamed a dream? He found himself outside the gates of Heaven and he sat down and wept, for he longed to enter. Presently he heard sweet music and saw a company of people approaching with palm branches in their hands. He asked who they were and one of them said that they were the noble army of martyrs coming to take their thrones. Then he wept much and said, "I cannot enter with you." While he sat mourning, he heard the trumpet sound, again, and another company came along singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." He said to them, "Who are you?" They replied, "We are the goodly fellowship of the Prophets and Apostles." And he wept again, for he said, "I cannot enter with you." Presently another company came, chanting the praises of the Grace of God. And he said, "Who are you?" They answered, "We are the preachers of the Word, and the deacons and elders of the Church." Again he said, "I cannot enter with you." He sat down and wept till, by-and-by, he saw a larger company coming, marching like an exceedingly great army, and singing sweetly as they came. In the very front rank was the woman that was a sinner, with her rich voice leading the song. And near her was the thief who, at the last, had prayed, "Lord, remember me." They came along right jubilantly and he asked them, "Who are you?" And they answered, "We are the company of great sinners, saved by great mercy." At once he said, "I can go in with you!"

And, Brothers and Sisters, that is the company to which you and I belong! And when we enter Heaven, they will welcome us just as heartily as they did the martyrs, the Prophets and the Apostles! Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—and when sinners repent, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, and joy in the heart of God, Himself, because they have sought His pardoning mercy! If any of you are not saved, it is not because there is any lack of mercy in the heart of God! If you perish, it is not for want of an open door set before you! So come in while you may!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: JOHN21.

Verse 1. After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed He Himself.May every one of you, my fellow disciples, realize that Jesus is showing Himself to you! He is only to be seen in His own Light. He must show Himself to us, or else we shall never see Him.

2. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas calledDidymus, andNathanael of Cana in Galilee and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples. He had told them to go into Galilee and gave them the promise, "There shall you see Me." So now they were by the Galilean Lake. They were keeping their appointment with Christ and as He always keeps His appointment with His people, He was there to meet them as He had promised.

3. Simon Peter said unto them, I am going fishing. They said unto him, We will go with you. Their Master had told them to wait, but they could not wait. Surely when they were in Galilee by His command, they might have trusted Him to supply their needs, but their faith was slack, so Peter said, "I am going fishing," and the others were much of the same mind—waiting had become weary work, as it often does with our faint hearts—so they said, "We will go with you."

3. They went forth, and entered immediately into a ship; and that night they caught nothing. As is generally the case with us in our will-work and will-worship. When we are not guided of God, but go entirely according to our own mind and will it will be thus with us, also. Men attempt some business speculation without asking guidance of God and they make a miserable failure of it, so that it might be written of them as of the disciples, "That night they caught nothing."

4. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. They were thinking of fishing, so they saw boats, nets and the sea. If they had been thinking of Jesus, they would have looked for Him—and when He came, they would have known Him.

5. Then Jesus said unto them, Children, have you any meat?" Have you anything to eat?"

5. They answered Him, No. But that was not His fault.

6. And He said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it in for the multitude of fishes. He testified His Presence by crowning their exertions with His blessing. And soon they had a great catch of great fishes—a great contrast to their night of fruitless toil.

7. 8. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked), and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in the little ship, (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fishe. We often come very slowly to Christ because we will drag that net with fishes. We have such a deal of care, anxiety, and trouble when we need not have any at all—and so we come slowly, "dragging the net with fishes."

9. As soon, then, as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Why did they want to go fishing on their own account? Christ had all that they needed ready for them—there was the fire and there were the fish cooking on it, ready for their breakfast. It was the Lord Jesus Christ's business to provide for them and He did so.

10, 11. Jesus said unto them, Bring of the fish which you have now caught Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three and for all there were so many, yet the net was not broken. And there lay those 153 big fishes on the beach. Christ had no need of them but perhaps He condescended to use some of them for that morning meal, as He said to Peter, "Bring of the fish which you have now caught."

12. Jesus said unto them, Come and dine. [See Sermon #2072, Volume 35—BREAKFAST WITH JESUS.] Or, "Come and break your fast after your long night's toil." How they must have opened their eyes to see the fish ready cooked for them to eat!

12. And none of the disciples dared ask Him, Who are You? knowing that it was the Lord. "It was the Lord"—"the Lord" who had asked them if they had any food, "the Lord" who had filled the net which had previously been empty, "the Lord" who had given them His own fish from His own fire that they might have breakfast with Him! O good Master, if we have been toiling all week and have caught nothing, call us now to come and eat of that which You have, Yourself, prepared!

13-15. Jesus then came and took bread, and gave them some, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after that He was risen from the dead. So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me more than these?"More than this lot of fish, these boats, these nets? You gave them all up for Me once, but now you have taken to them again—do you really love Me better than your fishing and your fish?"

15. He said unto Him, Yes, Lord; You know that Ilove You. He said unto him, FeedMylambs. [See Sermon #1684, Volume 28—"FEED MY LAMBS"—A SUNDAY SCHOOL SERMON.] "Do not go after fish any more, but attend to My business—'feed My lambs.' The proof of your greater love to Me than to all worldly things will be found in your doing of the work which I have committed to your charge."

16. He said to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me?[See Sermons #117, Volume 3—do you love ME? And #1281, Volume 22—"DO YOU LOVE ME?"] He said unto Him, Yes, Lord; You know that I love You. He said unto him, Feed My sheep. "Quit the sea. I am giving you no more business there—come now and be a pastor to My blood-bought sheep."

17. He said unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that Ilove You. [See

Sermon #2669, Volume 46—COMFORT FROM CHRIST'S OMNISCIENCE.] Thrice

he had denied his Lord, so thrice he must be questioned concerning his love to the Lord whom he said he did not even know. And then for the third time he was re-commissioned by his Lord.

17-19. Jesus said unto hiim, Feed My sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto you, When you were young, you gird yourself, and walked where you willed: but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and carry you where you would not. This spoke He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And When He had spoken this, He said unto him, Follow Me. Peter's death was to glorify God, so he might well be content, painful though it was to be.

20, 21. Then Peter, turning about, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved [See Sermon #1539, Volume 26—"the disciple whom Jesus LOVED".] following; which also leaned on His breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrays you? Peter seeing him said to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Our Lord never answered such a foolish, inquisitive question as this! And therefore—

22. Jesus said unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me. That is how Christ would answer any similar questions that we might put to Him. We need not concern ourselves so much about what is to happen to others until we have made our own calling and election sure. "What is that to you? You follow Me."

23. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you? This is only one of many instances in which Christ's words have been twisted and made to mean something quite different from what He intended.

24. 25. This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written, every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.