

John Chapter Twenty-One

Read **John 21:1-4** – Jesus at Galilee

v.1 “AFTER THESE THINGS JESUS SHEWED HIMSELF AGAIN TO THE DISCIPLES AT THE SEA OF TIBERIAS; AND ON THIS WISE SHEWED HE *himself*.”

What is the more common name for the Sea of Tiberias? It is the Sea of Galilee, the same place that Jesus had called many of his apostles in the beginning. In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ resurrection an angel tells the women that came to the tomb that Sunday morning to tell his disciples to go to Galilee and that he would come to them there:

Matthew 28:6-7 “HE IS NOT HERE: FOR HE IS RISEN, AS HE SAID. COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY. AND GO QUICKLY, AND TELL HIS DISCIPLES THAT HE IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD; AND, BEHOLD, HE GOETH BEFORE YOU INTO GALILEE; THERE SHALL YE SEE HIM: LO, I HAVE TOLD YOU.”

It is also noted that Galilee is about as far from Jerusalem that they could get to spend the few days that came between Jesus’ resurrection and Pentecost. It was a place that they would most likely not be bothered by any of the Jewish rulers that might be looking for them.

v.2 “THERE WERE TOGETHER SIMON PETER, AND THOMAS CALLED DIDYMUS, AND NATHANAEL OF CANA IN GALILEE, AND THE *sons* OF ZEBEDEE, AND TWO OTHER OF HIS DISCIPLES.”

It is not at all unusual for these men to return to their profession while waiting for Jesus to appear to them or for him to provide further instructions regarding their duties in the Kingdom. John calls three of the apostles by name, two more who are the sons of Zebedee and then says that there were two other disciples that he does not name. Seven disciples in all.

v.3 “SIMON PETER SAITH UNTO THEM, I GO A FISHING. THEY SAY UNTO HIM, WE ALSO GO WITH THEE. THEY WENT FORTH, AND ENTERED INTO A SHIP IMMEDIATELY; AND THAT NIGHT THEY CAUGHT NOTHING.”

The Apostle Peter is a leader, one that they look up to and who they follow readily. When he says let’s go fishing they are ready to go. They are basically in limbo waiting for something to happen, and or Jesus to meet them and probably need some means of self-support. They fished all night but didn’t catch anything. Since they were apparently fishing with a net, they didn’t have to wait for a fish to bite and they should have been taking fish.

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v.4 “BUT WHEN THE MORNING WAS NOW COME, JESUS STOOD ON THE SHORE: BUT THE DISCIPLES KNEW NOT THAT IT WAS JESUS.”

When they return to shore after a long night, his disciples didn't know him. Some would speculate that the reason was that it was early in the morning, not yet daylight; others, that he transformed himself in some way so that he wasn't recognized. But there is no indication of anything special being done, they were not expecting him, they wouldn't have looked for him and under those circumstances it is easy to understand that they might not recognize him just as Mary didn't recognize him in the garden.

John 20:15 “JESUS SAITH UNTO HER, WOMAN, WHY WEEPEST THOU? WHOM SEEKEST THOU? SHE, SUPPOSING HIM TO BE THE GARDENER, SAITH UNTO HIM, SIR, IF THOU HAST BORNE HIM HENCE, TELL ME WHERE THOU HAST LAID HIM, AND I WILL TAKE HIM AWAY.”

Read **John 21:5-14** – The Great Draught of Fishes

v.5 “THEN JESUS SAITH UNTO THEM, CHILDREN, HAVE YE ANY MEAT? THEY ANSWERED HIM, NO.”

When Jesus comes upon his disciples he asks them whether they have any meat or not, but since they have not caught anything they don't have. Luke records that at the same time he shows them his hands and feet so that they realize that they are talking to the Christ. Luke also records that they, probably from something prepared to sustain them through the night, they offer him a piece of broiled fish and a piece of honeycomb.

v.6 “AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, CAST THE NET ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE SHIP, AND YE SHALL FIND. THEY CAST THEREFORE, AND NOW THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO DRAW IT FOR THE MULTITUDE OF FISHES.”

Now we're not told which side of the boat that they had been fishing from all night, but we do know that Jesus is very specific in his instructions for a reason. And we can also know that due to the providence of God they had not caught anything all night and as soon as they follow the instructions that Jesus' gave them that they were successful in catching fish. This isn't the only time that Jesus has come upon them when they were fishing, had caught nothing but as soon as they followed His direction they were rewarded with more abundance than they could handle. The other example is recorded by Luke:

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Luke 5:4-6 “NOW WHEN HE HAD LEFT SPEAKING, HE SAID UNTO SIMON, LAUNCH OUT INTO THE DEEP, AND LET DOWN YOUR NETS FOR A DRAUGHT. AND SIMON ANSWERING SAID UNTO HIM, MASTER, WE HAVE TOILED ALL THE NIGHT, AND HAVE TAKEN NOTHING: NEVERTHELESS AT THY WORD I WILL LET DOWN THE NET. AND WHEN THEY HAD THIS DONE, THEY INCLOSED A GREAT MULTITUDE OF FISHES: AND THEIR NET BRAKE.”

v.7 “THEREFORE THAT DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED SAITH 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.”

“THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED”, John describes himself in the third person by that means several times during this account of the Gospel. He recognizes Jesus and tells Peter who it is. As Peter normally does he reacts immediately, but with presence of mind enough to gird himself with his outer garments.

The commentators that I read agree here that Peter wasn't totally naked but had cast off his outer garment in order to work and was probably naked from his waist up. This, of course, would free the upper body to do the work needed in raising and lowering nets and/or handling the boat. The “FISHER'S COAT” was an outer garment, made of course material, inexpensive and readily available, made for hard use as would be any work clothing.

v.8 “AND THE OTHER DISCIPLES CAME IN A LITTLE SHIP; (FOR THEY WERE NOT FAR FROM LAND, BUT AS IT WERE TWO HUNDRED CUBITS,) DRAGGING THE NET WITH FISHES.”

John writes that they other disciples were in a little ship, probably much like the picture of one that we looked at during an earlier lesson. They were about 200 cubits from shore, or about 350 feet, and they make their way to Peter and dragging the net full of fishes with them.

v.9 “AS SOON THEN AS THEY WERE COME TO LAND, THEY SAW A FIRE OF COALS THERE, AND FISH LAID THEREON, AND BREAD.”

We have no idea where they fire came from but there was the means readily available to prepare the fish that they had just caught. One of the things that it does point out is that Jesus continued to sustain his physical body during the time between his resurrection and his ascension back to the father. It also appears that he could appear and disappear at will because he appeared to his disciples in a room with closed doors, yet his body carried the marks of the nails and the spear from his crucifixion.

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v.10 “JESUS SAITH UNTO THEM, BRING OF THE FISH WHICH YE HAVE NOW CAUGHT.”

Jesus tells them to bring the fish that they have just caught. As David Lipscomb points out this entire scene would have no meaning or purpose without Jesus having a purpose behind his actions. He is providing for his disciples and he will provide for them through thick and thin, through trouble and trial, through the persecutions that would come to them in the years to come. In exchange, as we will see in his discussion with Peter, he will require that they will need to provide their faithful labor in his kingdom.

v.11 “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 WAS NOT THE NET BROKEN.”

The Apostle Peter goes and draws and draws in the net. We're told that it held 153 fish, not many for modern day nets but a good catch for someone that hasn't caught anything all night and enough that the net could have broken as it had before.

v.12 “JESUS SAITH UNTO THEM, COME *and* DINE. AND NONE OF THE DISCIPLES DURST ASK HIM, WHO ART THOU? KNOWING THAT IT WAS THE LORD.”

Jesus invites them to come and eat. Now they can testify that they did indeed eat with him after his resurrection and serve as eye witnesses of, not only that event, but his return to some form of his prior activities. We find this testimony by Peter in his teaching in the household of Cornelius:

Acts 10:41 “NOT TO ALL THE PEOPLE, BUT UNTO WITNESSES CHOSEN BEFORE GOD, EVEN TO US, WHO DID EAT AND DRINK WITH HIM AFTER HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD.”

v.13 “JESUS THEN COMETH, AND TAKETH BREAD, AND GIVETH THEM, AND FISH LIKEWISE.”

Jesus takes bread and fish and serves them just as any host would do.

v.14 “THIS IS NOW THE THIRD TIME THAT JESUS SHEWED HIMSELF TO HIS DISCIPLES, AFTER THAT HE WAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD.”

Jesus appeared to the eleven on the night after he rose from the dead. He appeared to them again on the night of the eighth day following:

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John 20:26 “AND AFTER EIGHT DAYS AGAIN HIS DISCIPLES WERE WITHIN, AND THOMAS WITH THEM: *then* CAME JESUS, THE DOORS BEING SHUT, AND STOOD IN THE MIDST, AND SAID, PEACE *be* UNTO YOU.”

This is now the third time that he has appeared unto them; providing them with living proof of his resurrection, the warranty that God will raise all of us in due time.

Read **John 21:15-23** – Jesus’ Charge to Peter

v.15 “SO WHEN THEY HAD DINED, JESUS SAITH TO SIMON PETER, SIMON, *son* OF JONAS, LOVEST THOU ME MORE THAN THESE? HE SAITH UNTO HIM, YEA, LORD; THOU KNOWEST THAT I LOVE THEE. HE SAITH UNTO HIM, FEED MY LAMBS.”

When they had finished breaking the fast of the night, Jesus has business with Simon Peter. Peter the self-confident one has always stepped forward to speak or act before the others and had declared that he would go to the death for Jesus but in reality he was the first to deny him. At his appearance before Caiaphas:

John 18:27 “PETER THEN DENIED AGAIN: AND IMMEDIATELY THE COCK CREW.”

So Peter had made his boast and failed to carry out even the beginning of that which he claimed that he would do. Jesus now seems to be testing him, reminding him, and doing so in a way that would strengthen Peter’s determination to do what was necessary. This is also a means of humbling the Apostle, helping him to remember that his feet were of clay just as is those of all men.

Jesus asks Peter, apparently referring to the food, the fish, Peter’s profession as a fisherman, asking “LOVEST THOU ME MORE THAN THESE”. The role that Peter was to play in the beginnings of the church was important and would task his love and devotion to Jesus and to God beyond anything that he could have imagined.

Peter simply replies that Jesus knew that he loved him, making no pretense of a love or dedication greater or higher than any of the other apostles.

Jesus says “FEED MY LAMBS” using a word that means to provide whatever nutrients that they need to maintain their general health and well-being. That word will change in subsequent verses as Jesus carries forth his purpose. His reference to “LAMBS” seems to indicate a particular concern for the newborn Christians, those young in the faith that would require special attention to their growth and maturity. This would be expected to be of concern, especially at the very beginning of the church’s existence where Peter would be a major factor in its well-being.

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v.16 “HE SAITH TO HIM AGAIN THE SECOND TIME, SIMON, **son** OF JONAS, LOVEST THOU ME? HE SAITH UNTO HIM, YEA, LORD; THOU KNOWEST THAT I LOVE THEE. HE SAITH UNTO HIM, FEED MY SHEEP.”

Most of the sermons I have heard that relate to these verses emphasize the difference between the words translated love. But perhaps just as significant is the difference in the words translated lambs, sheep, and feed. As we noted in verse 15 Jesus uses a word translated feed that relates to nutrients, the proper feeding of the lambs of God who are young or young in the faith. In verse 16 the word changes to one with a broader definition. “FEED MY SHEEP” relates to older, more mature Christians and the word translated “FEED” is a word that is translated “TEND” in some other versions. This word has the sense of “governing, caring for, guiding, and protecting” those that are in the sheepfold of God. It reflects the kind of vigilance which a shepherd needs to guide his flock, to make provision for it against their wants and dangers. It is similar to that used by Paul when he spoke to the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:28 “TAKE HEED THEREFORE UNTO YOURSELVES, AND TO ALL THE FLOCK, OVER THE WHICH THE HOLY GHOST HATH MADE YOU OVERSEERS, TO FEED THE CHURCH OF GOD, WHICH HE HATH PURCHASED WITH HIS OWN BLOOD.”

It reflect the same kind of guidance that the Jews required and Peter told them in his general epistle:

I Peter 2:25 “FOR YE WERE AS SHEEP GOING ASTRAY; BUT ARE NOW RETURNED UNTO THE SHEPHERD AND BISHOP OF YOUR SOULS.”

v.17 “HE SAITH UNTO HIM THE THIRD TIME, SIMON, **son** OF JONAS, LOVEST THOU ME? PETER WAS GRIEVED BECAUSE HE SAID UNTO HIM THE THIRD TIME, LOVEST THOU ME? AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, LORD, THOU KNOWEST ALL THINGS; THOU KNOWEST THAT I LOVE THEE. JESUS SAITH UNTO HIM, FEED MY SHEEP.”

Jesus asked Peter if he loved him the same number of times that Peter had denied him. I’m sure this wasn’t by chance. In order for Peter to be forgiven he had to completely repent and it is the third time that Jesus asks Peter that before we are told that Peter was grieved, Peter is finally pierced to the heart. After the third time Peter throws himself on the mercy of God, saying “THOU KNOWEST ALL THINGS, THOU KNOWEST THAT I LOVE THEE.” So for the third time Christ charges him to act as a shepherd, to take care of his sheep. Three times Peter denied him, three times Christ questions his love, three times he encourages him to accept and exercise the responsibilities that he will carry out as an apostle. Peter was a better man as a result, better prepared for his life’s work. Then Jesus provides Peter with a prophecy:

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v.18 “VERILY, VERILY, I SAY UNTO THEE, WHEN THOU WAST YOUNG, THOU GIRDEST THYSELF, AND WALKEDST WHITHER THOU WoulDEST: BUT WHEN THOU SHALT BE OLD, THOU SHALT STRETCH FORTH THY HANDS, AND ANOTHER SHALL GIRD THEE, AND CARRY **thee** WHITHER THOU WoulDEST NOT.”

Jesus likens Peter to a young man who, full of himself, confident, walking wherever he chooses, perhaps daring the world to stop him. Peter had denied his Lord to save his own life, in his eyes he had failed, now Jesus restores his confidence because he has a great work to do in His Kingdom. He would eventually be girded, not with a girdle or belt, but with bonds and led where he would not rather go. Eventually to his death in his service to God. What occurred in Jerusalem that Luke records is but one example. Speaking of Herod:

Acts 12:3-5 “AND BECAUSE HE SAW IT PLEASED THE JEWS, HE PROCEEDED FURTHER TO TAKE PETER ALSO. (THEN WERE THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD.) AND WHEN HE HAD APPREHENDED HIM, HE PUT HIM IN PRISON, AND DELIVERED HIM TO FOUR QUATERNIONS OF SOLDIERS TO KEEP HIM; INTENDING AFTER EASTER TO BRING HIM FORTH TO THE PEOPLE. PETER THEREFORE WAS KEPT IN PRISON: BUT PRAYER WAS MADE WITHOUT CEASING OF THE CHURCH UNTO GOD FOR HIM.”

v.19 “THIS SPAKE HE, SIGNIFYING BY WHAT DEATH HE SHOULD GLORIFY GOD. AND WHEN HE HAD SPOKEN THIS, HE SAITH UNTO HIM, FOLLOW ME.”

Jesus is telling Peter that through his death he would glorify God and Peter speaking about this warning in his second epistle:

II Peter 1:14 “KNOWING THAT SHORTLY I MUST PUT OFF **this** MY TABERNACLE, EVEN AS OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST HATH SHEWED ME.”

And then Jesus encourages Peter again to “FOLLOW ME”. Follow the way of righteousness that will garner him a home in heaven; the same goal that we all are working toward.

v.20 “THEN PETER, TURNING ABOUT, SEETH THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED FOLLOWING; WHICH ALSO LEANED ON HIS BREST AT SUPPER, AND SAID, LORD, WHICH IS HE THAT BETRAYETH THEE?”

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Jesus and Peter are apparently carrying on a conversation that is somewhat private though the group is still probably gathered around the fire by which they cooked their meal. Peter looks at the Apostle John who describes himself here as “THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED”, the one who “LEANED ON HIS BREAST AT SUPPER” and the one that asked Jesus “WHICH IS HE THAT BETRAYETH THEE”. Then Peter asks this question.

v.21 “PETER SEEING HIM SAITH TO JESUS, LORD, AND WHAT *shall* THIS MAN *do?*”

Now Peter asks about the Apostle John “WHAT SHALL THIS MAN DO?” and probably does not get the answer that he expected.

v.22 “JESUS SAITH UNTO HIM, IF I WILL THAT HE TARRY TILL I COME, WHAT *is that* TO THEE? FOLLOW THOU ME.”

Jesus says that even if should will that John live until he returns again to earth “WHAT *is that* TO THEE?” This isn’t your concern, that’s none of your business, that is something that you need not worry about. Carry out the purpose that I will give you, do the work in the Kingdom, unlock the doors of the kingdom, using the keys that I will provide to you; follow me, follow my way walk the narrow road that leads to everlasting life.

v. 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 THEE?”

As is common among men what Jesus said was misconstrued and it was reported to the brethren that John would not die until Jesus came again. But John corrects that misunderstanding here (though he lived to a ripe old age, writing this book at about he age of 90 years) reminding everyone what Jesus really said; that if Jesus determined that John should never die then that is none of Peter’s concern.

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Read **John 21:24-25** – John's Conclusion.

v.24 "THIS IS THE DISCIPLE WHICH TESTIFIETH OF THESE THINGS, AND WROTE THESE THINGS: AND WE KNOW THAT HIS TESTIMONY IS TRUE."

John testifies that his record is true. He speaks from the position of being an eye witness. Just as he wrote about the crucifixion that he is writing here from the position of seeing what is occurring and writing exactly what he is seeing:

John 19:35 "AND HE THAT SAW *it* BARE RECORD, AND HIS RECORD IS TRUE: AND HE KNOWETH THAT HE SAITH TRUE, THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE."

v.25 "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."

Many other things which Jesus did to the extent that all the books in the world could not hold them, but these were written, these were recorded, most by John as an eye witness for this purpose:

John 20:30-31 "AND MANY OTHER SIGNS TRULY DID JESUS IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS DISCIPLES, WHICH ARE NOT WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK. BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN, THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD; AND THAT BELIEVING YE MIGHT HAVE LIFE THROUGH HIS NAME."

"THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST", the Messiah, the one promised as the "SEED OF WOMAN" to Eve in the garden of Eden and prophesied throughout the ages. That through our belief in Him we "MIGHT HAVE LIFE", eternal life with the Father in heaven, the ultimate goal of every one of us.