



Jesus, the Master of Our Service

Lesson 29 John 21:1-25

REVIEW

1. In our last lesson, we studied the miracle of Christ's resurrection, which was the final exclamation point to the Gospel.
2. We also studied three post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ and John's stated purpose for his gospel account, which was that readers of his gospel would know that Jesus is the Christ, and they would have life in His name by believing.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. In this lesson, we will study the final post-resurrection appearance of Jesus Christ.
2. In this appearance, we will study the great catch of fish, Jesus' invitation to the disciples and the subsequent meal they shared with Him, and His conversation with Peter.
3. We will finish our study of the Gospel of John with John's concluding thoughts related to the life and ministry of Christ. We will see how these thoughts relate to his stated purpose in John 20:30-31.

THE FOURTH APPEARANCE OF CHRIST (21:1-23)

A. The great catch of fish - 21:1-11

21:1 "After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. **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. **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. **4** But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. **5** Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. **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. **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. **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. **9** As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. **10** Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. **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."

1. Setting - 21:1

- a. Sea of Tiberias
 - i. In Galilee
 - ii. Also called the Sea of Galilee
- b. "After these things". Some time had passed between the events of John 20:26-29 (Jerusalem to Galilee)
- c. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared on numerous occasions to His apostles (Acts 1:1-3). This is the fourth post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in John's gospel, but the third to His disciples only. - 21:14

2. The fishing trip initiated - 21:2-3a
 - a. Peter initiated the trip - 21:3
 - b. The other disciples followed - 21:2-3
 - i. Thomas
 - ii. Nathanael of Cana
 - iii. The sons of Zebedee (James and John)
 - iv. Two other of His disciples
3. Their failed attempts - 21:1,3b-5
 - a. *"That night they caught nothing"* - 21:3b
 - b. Jesus questioned their success, *"Children, have ye any meat?"* - 21:5
 - i. *"Children"* is "used here alone by Jesus in addressing his disciples. It is an expression [of familiarity] like 'my boys.'" ¹
 - ii. John uses the same word in 1 John 2:13, 18
 - c. Their honest answer, *"No"* - 21:5
4. The peculiar instructions of the "stranger" - 21:6a
 - a. Peculiar because they are coming from a perceived stranger - 21:4
 - b. Peculiar because they are experienced fishermen - Mark 1:16-20
 - c. Peculiar because of the nature of the instructions - 21:6a
 - i. *"Cast the net on the right side"*
 - ii. *"Ye shall find"*
5. Their success - 21:6b, 10-11
 - a. They did what Jesus instructed them to do, *"They cast therefore"* - 21:6b
 - b. *"They were not able to draw [the net] for the multitude of fishes"*
 - c. The net was *"full of great fishes"* - 21:11
 - d. 153 fish. There are four proposed explanations of this number
 - i. Cyril of Alexandria. The number represents God and the church.
 - a) 100 is the number of the fullness of the Gentiles - Matthew 18:12
 - b) 50 represented the remnant of Israel
 - c) 3 signified the Trinity
 - ii. Augustine
 - a) 10 was the number of the law
 - b) 7 was the number of grace
 - c) 10 + 7 = 17
 - d) The sum of all numbers from 1 to 17 is 153
 - iii. Jerome. Ancient belief that there were 153 basic kinds of fish in the sea.
 - iv. Pastor Robby of Houston. There were 153 fish in the net.

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament*, Vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932), 319.

6. The disciples' recognition of the Savior - 21:7-8

- a. Seeing the miracle, John declared to Peter, "*It is the Lord*" - 21:7
- b. Hearing John's declaration, Peter jumped in the water to swim to Jesus
- c. The other disciples came ashore dragging their nets - 21:8

B. The meal with the Master - 21:9, 12-14

21:9 "As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. **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. **13** Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. **14** This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead."

1. The preparation - 21:9

- a. Jesus knew their need. They had fished all night and had not caught anything.
- b. He prepared the meal for them

2. The invitation - 21:12

- a. "*Come*", the meal is prepared
- b. "*Dine*" means eat
- c. "What a delightful breakfast of fresh broiled fish...with the hush of joyful surprise in the presence of the Risen Lord."²

3. The satisfaction - 21:13

- a. Met their physical need, "*Bread, ... and fish*"
- b. Met their spiritual need, "*Jesus ... giveth them*". This is the third time that the Lord's presence ministered to their needs.

C. The conversation with Peter - 21:15-23

1. Jesus tests Peter's love - 21:15-17

21:15 "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. **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. **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."

- a. Jesus' first question, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?*" - 21:15
 - i. He was speaking specifically to Peter
 - ii. "*Lovest*" is "*agapaō*", which means "to love dearly."³ It is a term of deep love.
 - iii. Possible interpretations of this question⁴
 - a) Do you love me more than you love these disciples?
 - b) Do you love me more than you love this bread and fish?
 - c) Do you love me more than you love fishing (the boats, nets, his livelihood)?

² Ibid., 320.

³ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 25, ref. 25.

⁴ Elmer Towns, *The Gospel of John: Believe and Live* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2002), 217-218.

- d) Do you love me more than these other disciples love me? Probably the true sense because of
 - 1) Peter's confident assertion in John 13:37
 - 2) Peter's declaration of superior loyalty to Christ - **Matthew 26:33; Mark 14:29**
 - 3) Peter's comparison in John 21:21
 - 4) The nature of Peter's death - **21:18**
- b. Peter's first response, "*Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee*" - **21:15**
 - i. "*Lord*" means "he to whom a person or thing belongs"⁵
 - ii. "*Thou knowest*" means "to perceive, to see"⁶
 - iii. "*That I love thee*"
 - a) Peter replies with "*phileō*", which means "I am fond of thee"⁷
 - b) This word expresses love, but not complete commitment to Christ
 - c) Peter expresses love, but not in a comparative manner as before
- c. Jesus' first instruction, "*Feed my lambs*"
 - i. "*Feed*". "The word here...means the care afforded by furnishing nutriment for the flock."⁸
 - ii. "*My lambs*" means "young converts to the faith"⁹
- d. Jesus' second question, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?*" - **21:16**
 - i. The comparative clause is removed
 - ii. Jesus uses "*agapaō*" again
- e. Peter's second response, "*Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.*" It is the same response as verse 15.
- f. Jesus' second instruction, "*Feed my sheep*"
 - i. "*Feed*". "Denotes rather the care, guidance and protection which a shepherd extends to his flock."¹⁰
 - ii. "*My sheep*". "These are more mature than the lambs in the previous commission."¹¹
- g. Jesus' third question, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?*" - **21:17**
 - i. Jesus uses "*phileō*"
 - ii. The question seems to push Peter to understand the need for elevating his love and commitment level
- h. Peter's third response
 - i. He was cut to the heart, "*Grieved*"
 - ii. "*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee*". Peter replies with "*phileō*" for the third time.
- i. Jesus' third instruction, "*Feed my sheep*". This is the same as verse 16.

⁵ Thayer, ref. 2962, 365.

⁶ Ibid., ref. 1492, 172.

⁷ Towns., 218

⁸ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, Luke and John (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005), 382.

⁹ Towns, 218.

¹⁰ Barnes, 382.

¹¹ Towns, 218.

2. Jesus foretells Peter's death - 21:18-19

21:18 "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. **19** This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me."

- a. Church tradition tells us that Peter was crucified, but requested to be crucified upside down, as he was not worthy to suffer in the same manner as his Lord.
- b. Jesus instructed him, "*Follow me*"

3. Peter questions the Lord. He questions: - 21:20-21

21:20 "Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? **21** Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?"

- a. The Lord's plan for John
- b. The fairness of the Lord's plan

4. Jesus answers Peter - 21:22-23

21:22 "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou 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 thee?"

- a. God's responsibility, "*If I will that he tarry till I come*"
- b. Peter's responsibilities
 - i. Don't worry about God's responsibility
 - ii. Simply follow Christ
- c. Jesus' words were misquoted in the early church - 21:23

THE CONCLUSION (21:24-25)

21:24 "This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. **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."

A. John's testimony - 21:24

B. John's style (selective) - 21:25

C. John's perception of Christ's ministry

1. Its magnitude, "*The world itself could not contain the books that should be written*"
2. Its message, "*Many other things which Jesus did*"
3. Its perfection, "*Amen*"

LIFE LESSONS

1. Believe and have life!
2. Follow Christ's instructions for your life and watch God do what you could never do!
3. Follow Christ!