

For the past several months we've been considering the historical events that serve as the foundation of the Christian faith. In chapters 18-19 we saw our Savior's humiliation—His arrest and trials before the Jews and Romans (18), and His physical abuse, mockery, and crucifixion (19).

In chapter 20 we saw our Savior's resurrection, and His various appearances, first to Mary Magdalene (on Sunday morning), the disciples (Sunday evening), and then the disciples again (the following Lord's Day).

Chapter 21 contains our Savior's third appearance to His disciples (vv1-14), His restoration of Peter (vv15-19), and His concluding statements (vv20-25).

Let me say by way of summary, that the primary purpose of verses 1-14 is to provide an additional proof of Christ's resurrection, v14—"This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead." Given the importance of the resurrection, our Savior left no doubt about His bodily resurrection from the dead.

And yet, as we shall see, within this account our Savior intended to teach His beloved disciples important truths about ministry, truths that have a practical relevance for us today. Thus, I want to examine the passage under three headings, and then suggest that within it, our Savior provides five practical lessons for His beloved and needy disciples.

- I. The Disciples Go Fishing—vv1-3
- II. The Disciples Meet Their Lord—vv4-8
- III. The Disciples Dine with Their Lord—vv9-14

I. The Disciples Go Fishing—vv1-3

1. V1—"After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (Sea of Galilee), and this is the way He showed Himself."
2. Everything that follows, through verse 14, is the way in which our Savior showed Himself to His beloved disciples.
3. Verse 14—"This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead."
4. How much time elapsed between that second Lord's Day when Jesus revealed Himself to Thomas, and the events of chapter 21, we are not told.
5. Obviously, there was enough time for the disciples to leave Jerusalem and return to Galilee, where the Sea of Tiberias was located.
6. John says there were seven disciples—"Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee (James and John), and two other disciples (likely Philip and Andrew).
7. It appears these seven disciples were all from Galilee and they were all fisherman before Jesus called them as disciples.
8. Now, sometimes you may hear preachers or commentators suggest that the disciples were foolish to return to fishing.
9. But I don't think that is fully true—the disciples had met the resurrected Christ twice, and now he had left again.
10. Remember, this passage takes place between Jesus' resurrection and ascension—somewhere in those 40 days.
11. During these 40 days our Savior appears to numerous people, as a visible proof of His physical bodily resurrection.
12. This is something of a transitional period for the disciples. After our Savior returns to heaven He sends the Spirit.
13. After the Day of Pentecost, the disciples would be empowered to take the gospel to the four corners of the world.

14. But what were they to do in the meantime? Brethren, I think we can understand why they returned to Galilee and fishing.
15. They returned to what was familiar. This is what they did before they were called as disciples. This is all they knew.
16. Furthermore, they returned to what was necessary. These men had physical needs. They needed to eat. They were hungry.
17. Now, don't get me wrong. It's evident that they were frustrated. They were confused. They may have been discouraged.
18. But ultimately, the disciples returned to Galilee because Christ had told them to, promising to meet them there.
19. Matt.28:10—"Then Jesus said to them, (the ladies at the tomb), Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."
20. And so, the disciples after they saw Christ the first two Lord's Days after His resurrection, returned to Galilee.
21. And apparently, they returned to Galilee waiting to see Christ, and then after a period of time, Peter decides to go fishing (and the other disciples follow him).
22. Now, this point is important because it underscores the fact, that the events in this passage, are orchestrated by our Lord.
23. He ultimately wanted them to return to Galilee and go fishing, because the Sea of Galilee would serve as a classroom wherein He would give them some final lessons.

II. The Disciples Meet Their Lord—vv4-8

1. V4—"But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus."
2. It's possible they were not able to recognize Him because of the distance, but it's more likely He hindered their sight.
3. If you remember, this seems to have been our Savior's practice with others, to conceal His true identity for a season.
4. V5—"Then Jesus said to them, Children, have you any food? They answered Him, No."—He obviously knew they had no food.
5. His point in asking them was to remind them they had no fish—though they labored all night they had nothing.
6. V6—"And He said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish."
7. This of course, brethren, was nothing less than a miracle—Christ directed a large amount of fish to the right side of the boat.
8. The One who commands the wind and the waves, has total dominion over everything in the sky, on land, and in the sea.
9. V7—"Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it) and plunged into the sea."
10. After the miracle of catching a multitude of fish, John has his eyes opened to the identity of the Man on the shore.
11. "It is the Lord"—who else can command the fish—who else can perform such a miracle, but our Lord and Master!
12. Following this, Peter's eyes are also opened, and in keeping with his character, he plunged himself into the sea.
13. John says that Peter put on his outer garment, likely out of respect to His Lord—he wanted to be properly dressed.
14. The remaining six disciples, came to shore in the boat, dragging the net with one hundred and fifty-three large fish.
15. Before we come to our final heading, let me pause at this point, and suggest three simple and practical observations.

16. Obs.1— The Lord uses ordinary people to build His church—I take this from the fact that many of the apostles were fishermen.
17. Our Savior chose, converted, commissioned, and empowered, regular and ordinary people to change the world.
18. O brethren, what a great truth—the Lord often uses ordinary and common people to do extraordinary and uncommon work.
19. 1Cor.1:26-27—"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty."
20. Obs.2— The Lord uses needy people to build His church—I want you to remember what these men have done.
21. John first of all mentions Simon Peter and Thomas (v2), who just days earlier were both fearful and unbelieving.
22. These are the kinds of people the Lord uses—men and women who are needy, often fearful, and at times unbelieving.
23. O dear brethren, we must constantly remind ourselves, that the Lord uses weak and frail people to complete His purposes.
24. The Lord did not reject Thomas because of His doubts, nor did He reject Peter because of his cowardly behavior.
25. No—He patiently restored both and used them as pillars in His temple, so that all of the glory is given to Him.
26. Obs.3— The Lord uses a variety of people to build His church—here I am thinking of the different character of the disciples.
27. Though John was first to see it was Christ, Peter jumps out of the boat to swim to Him, and the others row to Him.
28. All of them responded similar, in that they all were glad to see Him, and yet they all acted in very different ways.
29. Brethren, this is the beauty of the church—Christ takes people with differing personalities and puts them in the same church.
30. Everyone possesses a unique set of strengths and weaknesses, and together, we collectively make a single body.

III. The Disciples Dine with Their Lord—vv9-14

1. V9—"Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.'" v12—"Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat breakfast.'
2. Here we behold our Savior's compassion for the physical needs of His disciples—they were tired and very hungry.
3. And thus, our Savior used some of His own fish and bread, in addition to what they just caught, and made them breakfast.
4. V13—"Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish"—He Himself fed them.
5. From v12 we learn, that though they knew it was the Lord, they were afraid to ask Him—"Who are You" (v12b).
6. Apparently, it seems while they knew who He was, there was yet a measure of uncertainty among some of them.
7. Remember, they had been fishing all night and just witnessed a mighty miracle—they were no doubt still processing these things.
8. John ends in v14, by reminding his readers that this was "the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead."
9. He met with them that first Lord's Day evening, the second Lord's Day, and now again, at the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee).

10. Here I want to remind you that our Savior never did any miracle without having a spiritual purpose behind it.
11. As we were reminded last week, our Savior's miracles are called "signs" because they pointed to several truths.
12. Here in our passage, we find the final miracle our Savior performed before returning to heaven in His ascension.
13. J.C. Ryle—"It is impossible to deny that all Christ's miracles were meant, more or less, to teach great spiritual truths, under allegories and figures; and the passage before us in a miracle."
14. And thus, I want to answer the question—What were the lessons our Savior sought to teach His disciples through this final miracle?
15. Now, let me say before I suggest these lessons, though they directly concern the apostles, they have application to all Christians.
16. Lesson 1—The disciples were called to be fishers of men—half of the disciples were fishermen by profession.
17. I suggest this was for two reasons—first, it underscored the humble nature of Christ's people—not many are noble.
18. Secondly, the imagery of fishermen beautifully illustrates the nature of gospel ministry—it is fishing for men.
19. Matt.4:19—"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men"—He took fishermen and made them fishers of men.
20. Now, this necessarily implies, there are important similarities between being a fisherman and fishing for men.
21. Let me simply suggest two: (1) men by nature are like fish, in that they live in this world like fish live in water.
22. Just as it's natural for a fish to live in the water, so it's natural for a sinner to live in the darkness of this world.
23. (2) Preachers like fishermen, must go after sinners with the gospel—fishermen pursue fish, fish do not pursue fishermen.
24. It's for this reason, though Christ gave His disciples fish, they were responsible to cast the net and drag it to shore.
25. Lesson 2—The disciples can do nothing without Christ—the disciples desperately needed to be reminded of this truth.
26. Jn.21:3—"Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We are going with you also.' They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing."
27. For all of the effort and hard-work, they caught nothing—not a single fish—and remember these are fishermen by trade.
28. Now, let me ask you this question—Why didn't they catch a single fish? To fish all night without a single fish is not common.
29. Well, the answer I trust is obvious. They didn't catch anything because the Lord didn't want them to catch anything.
30. This was a part of the lesson—remember, our Lord is using this opportunity to teach them an important principle of ministry and the Christian life.
31. Left to our own resources, strength, ability, and skill we are not able to catch a single fish nor do a single work.
32. Simply put, left to ourselves, we can labor all night long, and yet, regardless of our efforts, have nothing to show for it.
33. Our Savior allowed them to labor all night long, tiring themselves out, for the purpose of teaching them their weakness.
34. A.W. Pink—"These beloved disciples had to be taught in their own experience, as we all have to be, the truth which the Lord had uttered just before His death – 'Without Me, you can do nothing' (15:5); not a little, but nothing."
35. O brethren, we are all prone to look to our own abilities and strength instead of looking to Christ and His grace.

36. The disciples had abilities when it came to fishing—they were experts—perhaps we could say—they were professionals.
37. And thus, they no doubt had to be humbled at what happened—they labored all night and never caught a single fish.
38. But remember the main point here—the disciples needed to know they could not save one sinner by themselves.
39. For all of our fishing (or evangelizing), we are unable to catch a single person, and we all need to be reminded this.
40. But you know what? It's not only preachers and evangelists that need to learn this lesson—all Christians need to learn it.
41. Left to ourselves, we are not able to resist a single temptation, mortify a single lust, or defend ourselves from Satan's fiery darts.
42. Let me suggest, this is in part why our Sovereign Savior, allows us to be temporarily overtaken with a particular sin (this is why He allows seasons of bareness).
43. He desires to teach us this all-important lesson—left to ourselves we can fish all night, and not catch a single fish.
44. Lesson 3—The disciples can bear much fruit with Christ—they needed to be reminded, that He had risen from the dead.
45. He was not sending them out into the world to be fishers of men, without His promised presence by His Spirit.
46. Jn.21:6—"And He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish."
47. Dear brethren, we can hardly overstate the extent that the Lord used these very men to further His kingdom on earth.
48. If you remember, in Peter's first sermon following Pentecost, three thousand souls were converted and baptized.
49. That is a very large net of fish captured with one net—and then, they would go on to do greater works than Christ.
50. Furthermore, if you remember, our Savior told His disciples they would do works far greater than His—that is, they would catch far more fish than He did.
51. Our Savior saw relatively few converts under His ministry, but, after He sent the Spirit, He brought in many converts through the ministry of the apostles.
52. Thus, I suggest this was one lesson our Savior was teaching His disciples—He would be with them and enable them to gather in many sinners.
53. Now, what does this promise say to us, God's people 2000 years later—well, surely it tells us something similar.
54. Christ promises to be with His church and build His church through their efforts—He will build His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail.
55. Does this mean there will always be nets full of fish? Does Christ promise that every ministry will always be fruitful?
56. No, I don't think so! But it does mean, the Lord will enable His church to be built, if that's one at a time, 10 at a time, or 3000 at a time!
57. I suggest, in many ways, this is a primary point of this passage—to describe the relationship of the resurrected Christ to His people.
58. In fact, this passage describes what Christ is now doing in heaven, on behalf of His needy and beloved people.
59. Think of it like this—just as the disciples were in a boat laboring in the Sea of Galilee, so Christ's church now labors in the midst of this world.
60. And just as Christ stood on the shore of the Sea guiding their labor, so He now stands on the shores of heaven watching and assisting His people.
61. Dear brethren, just because our Savior is no longer among us bodily, does not mean He is no longer among us (He's on the shore even now, watching over, guiding us by His Spirit and word).

62. Lesson 4—The disciples have need of fellowship with Christ—they not only needed to work for Christ but dine with Christ.
63. Jn.21:12—"Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat breakfast'"—this is one of many invitations Jesus gave during His ministry.
64. Matt.11:28—"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden" Jn.7:37—"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink."
65. Simply put—Christians need to do more than merely work FOR Christ, but they must fellowship WITH Christ.
66. This relates to the previous lesson—one way the Lord strengthens us for work, is by nourishing us through fellowship.
67. O my dear young Christian friend! Do not overlook the obvious teaching and emphasis of the Holy Scriptures.
68. The Christian faith is not merely or even primarily about working for Christ but fellowshiping in and with Christ.
69. This is what the imagery of "dining" means—in Eastern culture, to dine with someone was to fellowship with them.
70. Rev.3:20—"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."
71. Dear Christian friends, listen to this important truth—Christ not only desires us to work for Him but dine with Him.
72. It's very possible to work hard for Christ and yet spend little time dining, fellowshiping, or communing with Christ.
73. Rev.2:2—"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary."
74. Rev.2:4—"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love"—that is, they no longer loved Christ as they once did.
75. It's very possible to make sermons for Christ, to work hard for Christ, and yet enjoy precious little fellowship with Christ.
76. This of course is not only a danger for pastors but parents—raising children is not easy work but takes much effort.
77. O dear brethren, let us not ignore our beloved Savior as He speaks to us from the shores of heaven—let us say with John—"It is the Lord"—let us run to Him with Peter!
78. Lesson 5—The disciples would one day be rewarded by Christ—that is, after they finished their labor they would dine with Him in the new heavens and earth.
79. I suggest this lesson by looking at the broader picture—after a long night of laboring, morning comes when all work ceases.
80. There is a sense in which it's now time for us to work. The work is long and at times difficult, but Christ is with us.
81. And eventually, morning will come, and Christ will say to us, "Put down your nets for your work and labor are finished"—"Come and eat breakfast."
82. Dear Christian, now is not the time to rest, it's the time to fish—it's the time to labor and work for our beloved Master.
83. But a time is coming when we shall hear His voice and see His face—a time is coming when we shall work no more.
84. A time when we shall feast with Him on the shores of the new heavens and new earth—a time when we shall be with Him forever. Amen.