

An Object Lesson for Ministry *John 21:1-14*

INTRO:

Several years ago when my children were very young, we went to a Dairy Queen for a treat. I don't remember what everyone else got, but Hannah got a child's dish of vanilla soft serve and a little flat plastic spoon to try to eat it with. She did real well until the soft serve got down into the cup. Then it became a challenge for her three year old fingers and her three-year old coordination to dig the ice cream out of the bottom of the cup. Seeing her obvious struggle, Kathy reached over to help her and said, "Here let mommy help you." Hannah pulled the cup away and said, "No, I do it myself!" Almost instantly, the Lord hit me with what I had just seen. How many times has He said to us, "Here, let your heavenly Father help you with that" only to have us pull the situation or difficulty away and say, "No, Lord, I do it myself!"

While this tendency may be most visible when we are three years old, we still struggle with the desire to do everything ourselves even when we grow older and should know better. Pastors and spiritual leaders are especially vulnerable to this tendency. Listen to Moses' little speech right before he and struck the rock the second time in the desert. **Numbers 20:10** records;

"And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?'"

Because this tendency existed in Peter and the other Apostles, the Lord Jesus caused the circumstances recorded in **John 21** to happen. John recorded them for us, so that we too might learn from this object lesson for ministry. Our study of this text will fall under two heads:

I. I Do It Myself (v. 1-3)

II. Without Me Ye Can Do Nothing (v. 4-14)

I. I Do It Myself (v. 1-3)

A. ***"After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius, and in this way He showed Himself: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. 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." (vs.1-3)***

John introduced this account by saying that the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples in this way.

1. Much of what the Lord did in the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension was not recorded for us, In **Acts 1:1-3** we read;

“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

While He was seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, He did not live with them nor walk with them as He did before He died.

2. We read in Matthew 28 how the disciples were commanded to meet the Lord Jesus in Galilee. Here in John 21 we learn Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two other unnamed disciples had obeyed the command and were impatiently waiting for the Lord Jesus to appear to them as the account opens.

B. Peter, the apostle with the itchy tunic, is the most impatient of all. Suddenly, he makes a pronouncement. “I go fishing.”

1. Many dispute what this statement meant. Did John include it to explain why we find the apostles in a boat when Jesus reveals Himself?

2. Perhaps, Peter was announcing his determination to go back to his old profession. After all, one can be a Christian and be a fisherman can't he? The question Jesus put to Peter in **verse 15** supports this thought.

“Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’”

Who or what are the ‘these?’ It could be these people, or these fishing nets and boats, or it could mean this profession, this camaraderie, this old life.

3. Peter thought about everything that he heard and experienced in the days preceding this moment and concluded that being a preacher and an Apostle was too much for him. He was going to go back to the occupation that he knew best. Maybe He couldn't preach, but one thing he could do and do well was fish.

4. Peter decided to do something that he didn't needed the Lord's help to do well Just when the Lord was about to say, ***“Here, Peter, let me help you put your life back together after this failure. Let me infuse you with power and use you for My glory.”*** Peter pulled his life away, thrusting out his jaw, and said, ***“No, Lord, I do it myself.”*** Because Peter was a natural leader, the others followed right along behind him. We

must be careful with the decisions we make. Decisions we make impact the lives of others around us. No man is an island. No man stands alone!

C. What did Peter learn when he tried to do it himself? (v.3b)

“They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.”

Not even a minnow did they have to show for their entire night's labor. One thing Peter could not do by himself was fish.

II. Without Me Ye Can Do Nothing (v. 4-14)

A. God, who made fishes and seas, determined Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and the two others caught no fish. Their frustration was for a purpose. **Verses 4 and 5** say, ***“But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Children, have you any food?’ They answered Him, ‘No.’ 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.”***

1. Morning dawned and they were slowly making their way back to shore. The favorite fishing holes had let them down. Every trick of the trade that Peter tried failed. When they arrived near the shore, someone called to them. They were not really sure who He was because they were about a hundred yards away from Jesus.

2. He asked, ***“Children, you don't have any food, do you?”*** Jesus spoke in Aramaic, when John recorded this in Greek, he wanted us to know that the answer to the question was not in doubt. Jesus knew the answer was no and He wanted them to know He knew. Jesus did not ask this question to find out information, but to make them admit their failure in doing things themselves.

3. Jesus discussed this very subject on the road to Gethsemane. **John 15:4-5** records it. ***“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”***

Isn't it amazing what it takes for us to learn this lesson? This is the negative side of the point of this little object lesson!

B. Our Lord also demonstrated the positive side of the coin. **Philippians 4:13**

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Back in our text in **verse 6** we read,

“And [Jesus] 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.”

Without Him they could do nothing. They couldn't do what they had done so easily all of their lives. Without Him they could not catch fish. What could they do with Him? They could do exactly what the Lord wanted them to do.

C. Suddenly the events of **Luke 5** begin playing in John's head. Once before Peter had thought, if there was anything he could do it was fish. Peter, James and John fished all night and caught nary a fish. Jesus came by and borrowed their boat for a pulpit. Then He paid rent by telling them to let down their nets and they caught a huge amount of fish. Probably remembering this, John said to Peter, ***“It is the Lord.” (v.7)***

D. When the disciples get the boat to shore, what do they see? Fish already cooking on the fire and bread! Jesus had made breakfast. Yet, what does Jesus do when they come in? **(v. 10)** He wants to use some of the fish they just caught.

1. Jesus wanted to bless them by letting them have a part in the breakfast He was making. He used some of their fish! The Lord wants to use us! He wants to bless our efforts by working in and through us! But He does not need us! He just wants to use us!

2. The Lord does not ask us to be talented, gifted, perfect, or even wise. All He asks us to do is be obedient. If we are, we will find that He will bless us and use us for His glory!