

John Chapter 21

Verses 21:1-25 form the epilogue or appendix of John's Gospel. While (chapter 20:30-31), constitutes the conclusion of the body of the fourth Gospel, so the information here at the end of his work provide a balance to His prologue (in 1:1-18). The epilogue essentially ties up 5 loose ends that were unanswered (in chapter 20).

- (1) Will Jesus no longer directly provide for His own? (20:17). This question is answered in (verses 1-14).
- (2) What happen to Peter? Peter had denied Christ 3 times and fled. The last time Peter was seen was (in 20:6-8), where both he and John saw the empty tomb but only John believed (20:8). This question is answered (in verses 15-17).
- (3) What about the future of the disciples now that they are without their Master? This question is answered (in verses 18-19).
- (4) Was John going to die? Jesus answered this question (in verses 20-23).
- (5) Why weren't other things that Jesus did recorded by John? John gives the answer to that (in verses 24-25).

John 21:1 "After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed he himself."

The sea of Tiberius is an alternate name for the Sea of Galilee, found only in John (see 6:1).

In this manifestation "made Himself real" to the disciples, Jesus is revealing to the disciples His Godhood.

This was the home of many of these disciples before Jesus called them to follow Him. Many of them were fishermen here on this sea. When Jesus was crucified, some of them went back to their nets and began fishing again.

John 21:2 "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."

In all lists of the apostles, Simon Peter is named first, indicating his general leadership of the group (Matthew 10:2).

Peter, James, and John had previously been fishermen. It appears the disciples were just waiting for Jesus to tell them what to do.

I don't believe this account is something that happened immediately after Jesus appeared to Thomas. John just put it in here, because of its importance.

John 21:3 “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.”

Peter had gotten tired of waiting and goes fishing. The other disciples decide to go with him. Probably their families and the servants had been running these fishing boats after Peter, Andrew, James, and John had left to follow Jesus.

We see here, that this night they caught no fish. Perhaps, this has to do with the almost futile effort they made until they received the baptism of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost.

"I go a fishing". The most reasonable explanation for Peter and the others to go to Galilee in order to fish was that they went in obedience to the Lord's command to meet Him in Galilee (Matthew 28:16). Peter and the others occupied themselves with fishing, which was their former livelihood, while they awaited Jesus' appearance.

Peter in particular (even though he denied Jesus in fear), would later feel privileged to be crucified like his Lord. Perhaps, the darkness symbolizes the darkened world before the light of Jesus comes.

John 21:4 “But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.”

This could be another instance in which the Lord kept His disciples from recognizing him (20:14-15; Luke 24:16).

John 21:5 “Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.”

The eyes had deceived them; they did not realize that this was Jesus. They should have known when Jesus called them children, but they thought this just to be an inquiring stranger.

John 21:6 “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.”

We see here many symbols. First, Jesus had told them before that He would make them fishers of men. The right side is symbolic of those who believe, and the left side is those who refuse salvation. The sheep (saved), are on the right.

Multitude is a word that is used extensively in the Bible when describing the large numbers who are dressed in white robes because they are saved. Abraham's seed was to be so large a multitude it could not be numbered.

We see here also, that Jesus is teaching them how to fish. The gospel message must fall on willing ears before it will be accepted. The Holy Spirit prepares the heart to receive, and then when you bring the message God's way, a multitude will be saved.

John 21:7 “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.”

John immediately recognized that the stranger was the risen Lord, for only He had such supernatural knowledge and power (verse 6). Peter was wearing no outer garment. He swam the hundred yards to shore.

This disciple is John who tells Peter. This being naked has a spiritual meaning. Peter felt as if he had no covering, because he had denied Jesus. He now knows the Lord is still interested in him.

John 21:8 “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.”

The "little ship" is a small skiff attached to the main fishing vessel.

Two hundred cubits is about three hundred feet. They were bringing their catch with them.

John 21:9 “As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.”

Apparently, the Lord created this breakfast as He had created food for the multitudes (6:1-13).

We see here Jesus Christ the Savior of the world providing for the needs of these He has called. This is a simple meal, but sufficient to take care of their needs. Jesus has set a table before each of us; it is therefore our obligation to eat of that table.

You can bring the gospel message over and over, but until the people partake of it themselves, they will go away hungry.

John 21:10 “Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.”

We must go back to where Jesus had told them that He would make them fishers of men, before we can get the full impact of what the spiritual meaning is here. Jesus is, in a sense, telling them that they must bring the catch into the kingdom.

John 21:11 “Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, a hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.”

John's recording of the precise number reinforces the fact that he was an eyewitness author of the events he recorded (1 John 1:1-4). Jesus' action here in providing the fish also indicated that He would still provide for his disciples needs (Philippians 4:19; Matthew 6:25-33).

The fact that Peter brought the net in shows that God has established Peter to bring Gentiles into the kingdom. Many times, the sea is symbolic of people. To me this again, tells these disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel". When you throw out the net (preach), many are saved.

The fact that this one hundred and fifty-three is a specific number lets us know that it has great spiritual significance. This Scripture does not say they caught one hundred and fifty-three different kinds of fish, so we know that this was not an impossibility.

We also, know that on another occasion, they caught so many that the net broke and they did not bother to count them.

We can gather from these two things, that the number one hundred and fifty-three symbolizes a spiritual truth. At that time, there were one hundred and fifty-three different types of fish known in their world.

My own personal belief, and the belief of a very dear friend in Christ who has taught the Bible for over sixty years, is that this one hundred and fifty-three symbolizes the fact that people of all nations and kindreds shall be represented in heaven.

The gospel net is thrown to whosoever will regardless of their nationality.

Revelation 14:6 "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

We can easily see that God is interested in all people. I say again, that these one hundred and fifty-three fish probably indicate that God wants His disciples to preach to all people. The net being so full, but still able to hold them, just means there is room in heaven for all. You must remember that just a short time earlier, they were preaching to just the Hebrews.

John 21:12 "Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord."

This invitation that Jesus gives these disciples is open today, Come and dine.

Matthew 4:4 we read "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

There is a song called "COME AND DINE" in most hymnals. In this song, Jesus invites His chosen few to come and dine. It speaks of the manna He fed them in the wilderness, it speaks of the few fishes and bread feeding the multitude, and then it speaks of that heavenly food that never runs out.

The spiritual meaning of all of this is to come and feast on the Word of God. It never runs out. There is plenty to go around and more.

Notice here, that His disciples did not recognize Jesus from His outward appearance, but they knew Him when He spoke to them. They knew it was their Lord. This tells us that what is inside is much more important than the outward appearance. He is in His glorified body. He has changed to the eyes, but He is the same Lord.

John 21:13 “Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.”

Jesus feeds the hungry every time. We should feed upon His Word, and we will be filled. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

Here is one last note on this lesson above to all the ministers. We may be like Noah who preached all those years and never had a convert, but all we can do is preach (fish): God gives the increase.

One more thing we need to look at is these disciples not recognizing Jesus from sight, but only when He spoke to them. When we look at Jesus with our physical eyes, we do not recognize Him for who He is. When He moves upon our heart and we see Him in the Spirit, He is very clear to us.

John Chapter 21 Questions

1. On what sea did Jesus show Himself to the disciples?
2. Give two other names for this sea?
3. Which of the disciples were there?
4. In verse 3, what did Simon Peter say to the rest?
5. How many fish had the disciples caught that night?
6. When morning came, where was Jesus?
7. What question did Jesus ask the disciples when He called to them on the sea?
8. Who did they think Jesus to be at first?
9. What did Jesus tell them to do that they had not done previously?
10. Why could they hardly bring in the net?
11. What had Jesus told these disciples previously that He would make them?
12. Who is the unnamed disciple in verse 7, probably?

13. What did Peter do before swimming to shore?
14. Approximately how far is two hundred cubits?
15. When the disciples got to shore, what did they see?
16. Jesus has set a table before us, what is our obligation to do?
17. Who pulled the net to land?
18. What is throwing out the net symbolic of?
19. What does the one hundred and fifty-three tell us?
20. What does this full net that does not break mean?
21. What does Jesus invite them to do?
22. In Matthew 4:4, we are told to do what?
23. What two foods did Jesus feed them?
24. What note to the ministers will encourage those who seem to have no converts?