

“MEETING JESUS AT THE BEACH”

John 21:1-14

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INTRODUCTION

John has already shown us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we might have life in His name (20:30-31). After completing his treatise, he determined that he still needed to add some additional information showing us how Jesus took care of organizing and providing for His followers before ascending into Heaven. **It is certain that John wrote this chapter and added it before he ever published the first 20 chapters.**

Jesus once again manifested Himself to His followers (v. 1; see Acts 1:3). In the order of the appearances as we have them, this is number 7; but as John shows us here in v. 14, it is the third manifestation to the group of disciples (20:19-23; 26-29).

In sharing this account with us, John shows us that Jesus concluded His preparation of His Galilean disciples as He had begun it as recorded in Luke 5—with a miraculous catch of a multitude of fish.

Jesus taught His disciples some important lessons here.

1. The Place—Sea of Tiberias (Galilee)
2. The Persons—seven of them v. 2
3. The Practice—fishing (v. 3)

Why the fishing expedition?

This whole scenario seems spontaneous. “There is no plan, no settled aim”

- May have been the need for some money.
- Some suggest that their thoughts were beginning to turn to their former occupation now that Jesus was no longer permanently with them.
- I think that a more likely scenario was that they had time on their hands and wished to do something they enjoyed and that could be profitable.
- **What was wrong with them fishing?** See Paul’s example of this kind of work—II Thes. 3:8; Acts 18:3; Jesus warned of financial difficulties (Lk. 22:36).
- It may be true that they here evidence some “lack of purpose”—but Jesus has not yet finished commissioning them! Let’s give them a break!
- Note that Jesus in no way rebukes them for their activity!
- Rather, Jesus uses it to confirm their future commission!
- They were waiting to have their meeting with Jesus on a mountain in Galilee (p. 318).
- **It is true that Peter may not yet have been fully reassured of his place in the Lord’s work after His three-fold denial—despite the Lord’s appearance to Him. Surely, vv. 15ff help to clarify that. However, that Peter was not so despondent and that he had not so given up on the Lord’s work ought to be clear to anyone who examines the evidence in this text—he jumps out of the boat then pulls the net to shore! Is this the behavior of one totally despondent and who had given up?**

Caught nothing: It was common for fishermen to do their work after sunset and before sunrise. Such is still the custom today.

- They were experienced fishermen (most of them).
- They chose the best time to fish.
- They toiled and struggled all night.
- I disagree with Hend. that here God manifests His “**displeasure with them for having neglected Kingdom-work.**” (p. 479).
- Rather, the Lord was showing them their helplessness to work for Him in their own strength without His power.

4. The mysterious Person (v. 4)—Why did they not know Him?

- Possibly a morning mist or haze (Hend. 480)—yet this does not explain the failure to discern His voice.
- Not simply because they were too far away—they were only 100 yards.
- Once again, part of the factor is the nature and appearance of Jesus’ resurrected body.
- There may also have been some divine interference in their normal recognition processes as in other resurrection passages—Emmaus. At least until the time was right.
- Hend. mentions “unbelief”; *I don’t think that is the right word; **spiritual dullness** may be better! Moreover, they were preoccupied with their work.*

5. The Question (v. 5)

Although the disciples may have originally thought such, Jesus was not asking because He wanted some food; rather He wished them to focus on their own failed efforts. As if He were saying, “You have caught nothing at all, now, have you? Without Me you can do nothing.” And, “You have nothing to eat, I will prepare breakfast for you” (v. 9).

6. The Promise (v. 6)

It would have been more likely, under other circumstances, for these men to respond:

- Why should we listen to a stranger?
- We are the fishermen here.
- You are too far away, and in the early morning hour.
- They don’t ever argue about toiling all night like they had done in Lk. 5

Jesus wanted them to learn to put their faith for their work and ministry in Him.

7. The responses (vv. 7-8)—differences between Peter and John

Note that Peter got dressed in order to swim to shore!

8. The Preparing breakfast (9-11)—153 fish; net not torn

Suggestions Concerning 153

- Some say that the number represents the total number of kinds of fish known to the ancients; thus, the Gospel is to have universal appeal.
- Others say that 153 is the sum of numbers from 1-17; thus it is the sum of 10 (10 commandments—thus the law) and 7 (the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit).
- Others say that 153 dots “can be arranged in an equilateral triangle with 17 dots along each side.”
- Some see the number as representing the numerical values of the name “Peter” (76) and “fish” (77) in Greek=153.

- Others see a reference to the Trinity: 3 x 50 + 3.
- Some missionary minded people: 100=Gentiles; 50=Israel; 3=trinity.
- Hend. adds these next: Not counted till at shore for exact number of elect are unknown until in Heaven.
- A reference to Mt. 13:47-48—all kinds of people will be saved. (The number?)

SUCH SPECULATIONS ARE UNWORTHY OF THE BIBLICAL INTERPRETER!

- There were 153 of them. This was the **actual number**—not some special symbolism!
- John once again shows his exactness in giving details; such also gives additional credibility to his account. Cf. his numbers of water pots (2:6), or loaves and fish, the men, and the baskets (6:9-13).
- Temple say, “It is perverse to seek a hidden meaning in the number; it is recorded because it was found to be the number when the count was made” (p. 866).
- Since the fish would be shared, it was necessary to count the fish.
- Moreover, **“fishermen . . . have always loved to preserve the details of unusual catches.”**

Nets not torn:

- “It was in the power of the risen Lord that the net did not break.”
- Our resources with Christ are not fully expended and worn out!
- I would add that the broken nets in Luke 5 signified the end of their human fishing occupation; here there are involved in spiritual fishing and their nets will not be broken.

9. Providing for the disciples (12-13)—no mention of multiplication; not the Lord’s Supper

- Some think that Jesus merely wanted them here to display their fish—not eat them. After all, no mention is made later of eating them. Hend. says they were to get rid of the small ones and keep the big fish; **again this seems in error. Verse 11 says nothing of small fish, only 153 large fish. Besides, are we supposed to throw away the “small fry” [his word] souls? [Westcott correctly points out that the word for “fish” here (οψαριον is “fish for food”.**
- Some suggest that Jesus here miraculously fed them, as He had fed the multitude in chapter 6.
- But, we must not read into the text a miraculous feeding, when Jesus asks for fish and then two verses later calls everyone for breakfast.
- Jesus will not be catching all their fish for them; they must henceforth work hard in the spiritual endeavors as they had done this night.
- Then they will be able to enjoy the fruit of their labors. Both their fishing and their refreshment were partly their labors and the Lords (Plummer, 350).

CONCLUSION

He is risen, and He has manifested Himself repeatedly to His followers, given them instructions, and sent them forth. **You can do my work in my power only! I will abundantly bless you.**