
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 21.1-14. Before Jesus appeared to the apostles in the locked room [20.19-31], he instructed some women disciples to tell the apostles to go to Galilee [Matthew 28.9-10]. Apparently they did not go, since Jesus appeared to them in Jerusalem that same evening and again a week later. But eventually they went, and so here we find seven of them together at the Sea of Galilee [also known at this time as the Sea of Tiberias, after a new city the Romans had built on the shore]. The author, John, was there, one of the sons of Zebedee. Perhaps they were at Peter's house in Capernaum. Some commentators suggest Peter and the others were ignoring their mission or abandoning their faith by retreating into Galilee, but if they were there at Jesus' command and waiting for him to show up, why shouldn't they go fishing? They had to eat anyway. So they fished, but they caught nothing. [The form of Jesus' question in 21.5 makes clear he expects their negative answer; this is not brought out well in ESV, NLT, NKJV]. It is unclear whether this is another case of Jesus not being recognized until he chose to reveal himself [perhaps, given the verbs in 21.1, 4]; or whether it was still semi-dark "by the time early morning was developing" and so they could not make out clearly the man standing about a football field distance away from them. We should not look for symbolism in Jesus telling them to throw the net over a certain side: he told them to throw it where he knew the fish would be in that moment. We also should not look for symbolism in the number of fish they caught: John gave us the number just to show it was an astonishing haul; a fact which probably is the reason they counted at all; though we do learn from this that Peter was very strong!

When John recognized Jesus, Peter jumped into the water. Peter might have been stripped to his loin cloth, so he threw on his outer robe and tied it around him before jumping in. It sounds strange to dress before swimming, but the water might have been shallow enough to wade most of the way, and Peter might have felt embarrassed about greeting Jesus in his underwear. As each came ashore, they saw that Jesus had a fire going and some fish and bread ready for breakfast. The Greek suggests "a fish"; could this be a mini-miracle reflecting his miraculous feeding of thousands with a few fish, to reinforce that he is the same Jesus they knew? He could feed them as they got their own fish cleaned for cooking. These apostles had seen the resurrected Christ before – this was his third appearance to groups of the apostles [though he had appeared other times to other disciples] – so they knew this was him, that he was risen from the dead, but they were so uneasy and confused about all this, they still longed to ask whether this was really him, though they dared not. We have to keep in mind their shock and trauma from recent events.

Reflect: Probably because they were fishing to eat, Jesus had fish and bread ready for them on shore. What does this tell you about his interest in meeting practical needs of his followers? Despite seeing Jesus the disciples struggled with doubts and questions. Does this seem to bother Jesus? How should we deal with our own doubts and questions, so we can press on in following Jesus today?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 21.15-17. If you have been in church long, you probably have heard somebody say something about the different Greek words for love in this passage. Ignore what you have heard. The author, John, frequently shifts between words that are synonyms or at least similar, and in this passage alone he did it also for verbs meaning "to know," and "to feed" / "tend," and also with words for sheep/lambs. Furthermore, at this point in history, the different words for "to love" had become somewhat synonymous in speech and writing, blurring the distinctions they had carried in an earlier era. And, in this gospel, both words for loving are used interchangeably for how Jesus loved John, Jesus loved Lazarus, and God the Father loves the Son. So the wordplay is not the point here.

What was Jesus asking? whether Peter loved Jesus more than he loved the others? whether Peter loved Jesus more than the others loved Jesus? whether Peter loved Jesus more than he loved his fishing gear? There would not be much point in asking Peter if he loved Jesus more than he loved his stuff or even more than he loved his friends. In the first case, there is no thematic tie to the narrative; in the second, why single out Peter? But there would be a point in asking Peter if he loved Jesus more than anyone else did. The night before the crucifixion, Peter had boasted of the depth of his devotion to Jesus, that it exceeded that of the others [13.37; see also Matthew 26.33 or Mark 14.29], yet that very night he would publically disown Jesus three times [18.17-27]. Jesus seeks not only to

build Peter back up in this relationship, to ensure he knows he is forgiven, but also to build Peter back up in credibility among the other apostles. As Peter had denied Jesus three times, Jesus required his confession of love three times. Peter does not feel bold enough to reassert his love and devotion the way he had before, and he avoids directly answering the question, but he appeals to Jesus' knowledge of his love. Jesus accepts this, and gives him a commission: to tend [or shepherd] Jesus' sheep. Jesus gave Peter an activity, not a title or office, and notice the sheep belong to Jesus, not Peter. These things are good for pastor/elders to keep in mind today too.

Reflect: David often screwed up, but he had a heart for God, so God made him the great king whose throne would last forever. Peter screwed up pretty badly too, but he also had a heart for God and Jesus, so Jesus would use him to help establish the church and the core doctrinal beliefs. What does this say about how God might want to use you? Do you think God is holding your mistakes against you or preparing to bless you as you follow Jesus now?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 21.15-19. The commission Jesus gave Peter extends into this prophecy. Peter not only would shepherd believers in the early church, he would follow Christ into a martyr's death, crucified by the Romans [the verb in 21.18 means "to gird" or "to tie" something (usually clothing), not "to dress" as in many translations]. People fight over whether it ever happened that someone was tied to the crossbeam before being marched to the vertical post, but that is not the point: Jesus might not be talking about sequential events at all or the leading could be to death, not up the hill to the cross; the point is that Peter – who disowned Christ before – would be so devoted in the future that he would be willing to die the same death for the sake of Christ and his gospel mission. By the time John wrote this gospel, Peter had already been crucified, about thirty years after this scene.

Reflect: Jesus told Peter to follow him. This was an invitation to walk along the beach for a private conversation, but also to follow the teachings and example of Jesus, to carry on the gospel mission in Jesus' name [Matthew 4.19]. Jesus gives the same command to all his disciples today also [Matthew 28.18-20 applies to us]. In what ways are you strong in following the teachings and example of Jesus? In what ways do you need to grow in this? Pray about it...

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 21.20-24. John's description of himself reminds us of his intimacy with Jesus [and thus also of his reliability as a witness] and of his intimacy with Peter, who signaled to him to ask that question of Jesus [13.23-25]. John apparently was following Jesus and Peter along the beach. Jesus' answer was misreported over the years, to mean that John would not die before Jesus returned. This would have been a problem, because when John died before Jesus came back, that would have shaken people's faith. It is a common problem that people suffer under a deception and then have their faith weakened when their false expectations are not met. So John put the record straight here. Jesus basically told Peter it was none of his business what the plan was for John, that in any case Peter needed to focus on following Jesus himself. Since we now know that John was the apostle who lived longest and died a natural death, we can see from this that not everyone is called to martyrdom, or even to serve Jesus in the same way. We all are called to pursue the gospel mission, to be part of the church ministry and community, but diversity in how we follow Jesus is a good thing, not something against which we judge one another.

Reflect: What do you appreciate or admire in the ways people you know follow Jesus? Are some of these ways that you should emulate? Are some distinct for those people, not what you should pursue [at least as much]?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 20.30-31; 21.24-25. John chose specifics from Jesus' time here, to give his testimony about who Jesus is and what he accomplished in his crucifixion and resurrection. He – and perhaps he was writing about the apostolic church too when he said "we" – knew these things about Jesus in this gospel to be true. It might sound like John is ending his book with a hyperbole [exaggeration to make a point], but what he said makes sense: as scholar D. A. Carson wrote, Jesus in this gospel is revealed as the Son of God, the Messiah-savior, the incarnate Word, the one through whom the universe was created; if all his deeds were adequately described, the world would be an inadequate library. John closed by noting his own work is but a small part of the honors due to Jesus.

Reflect: We can't know Jesus completely, but what do you know about his character? How well do you know him?