



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

The Resurrected Christ Reveals Himself to His Disciples in Galilee

John 21:1-14

November 26, 2006

- I. **The Timing of Christ's Manifestation**
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❖ BACKGROUND

- ❑ Many modern-day scholars do not believe that John 21 is part of the original Fourth Gospel. The reason for this is because John 20:30-31 appears to be the conclusion. However, it is my firm belief that John 21 is original it should be taught as the Word of God.

- ❑ John begins this chapter with the words 'After these things...'

 - These words mark the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread – the week-long Feast that began with Passover and included the Feast of Firstfruits [Resurrection Sunday]. During these Feasts, the disciples were in Jerusalem, in accordance with the Law; however, now that the Feasts are over, the disciples have gone home, back to Galilee in the north.

- ❑ John, then, says, 'Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples...'

 - First, the word, 'again' notes that, what will follow is a 'manifestation' of the risen Christ, in the same manner as the previous appearances of Christ before His disciples.

- John writes, 'Jesus *manifested* Himself...'
- The word 'manifested' [*phanero*, φανερωω, reveal] literally means 'reveal.'
 - In other words, what is to follow is a 'revelatory act.'
 - This means that the miracle which Jesus is about to perform will **reveal** His nature – that He is the Christ, the Son of God.
 - However, these post-resurrection appearances of Christ are not referred to as 'signs' (although they perform the same function as 'signs'), because the 'signs' of Christ are limited to the acts He performed during His earthly ministry.
 - This also demonstrates why we say there is no new revelation today. For, in the Scriptures [which are **sufficient**] – the Written Word, we have all that we need for salvation, teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness [2 Timothy 3:16]. Further, the Written Word is a direct reflection of Jesus Christ – the Living Word, who is the perfect revelation of the Father.
 - NOTE: Although there is no new *revelation*; God has given us the Holy Spirit [who 'leads us into all truth'], for the *illumination* of God's **completed revelation**.
- John says that the following revelation of Jesus Christ occurred at 'the Sea of Tiberias...'
- The 'Sea of Tiberias' is another name for the 'Sea of Galilee.'
- In Verse 2, then, John lists those that will be present during this 'manifestation' of Christ – seven total disciples: (1) Peter; (2) Thomas; (3) Nathanael; (4) James; (5) John [James and John are the sons of Zebedee]; (6) and (7) 'two others of the disciples.'
- NOTE: Some scholars and theologians throughout the centuries have sought to attribute a certain degree of symbolism to the number seven; however, such an effort seems to be a forced attempt to make the text mean something it was never intended to mean. The truth is, simply, that there were seven disciples present.

I. The Timing of Christ's Manifestation

- John writes that the disciples 'were together' (Verse 2) and Simon Peter said, 'I am going fishing' (Verse 2) and the others said, 'We will also come with you' (Verse 2).
 - What is clear from this text is that the disciples have returned to their former occupations that they had prior to becoming disciples of Christ three years earlier.
 - Here, as in the other post-resurrection 'manifestations' of Christ, the disciples are not seeking Jesus. They are going back to their own ways of life and tending to their own personal needs. It is in this context that Christ 'reveals' or 'manifests' Himself to them.
 - To the modern reader that may appear incredible, indeed, unthinkable, that the disciples, after witnessing and speaking with the Risen Christ, would simply go back to their former occupations, as if nothing ever happened.
 - Yet, at least two factors must be taken into consideration:
 - First, the disciples still had to live and make a living. Beasley-Murray writes, 'Even though Jesus be crucified and risen from the dead, the disciples must still eat!'
 - Secondly, though, is that the disciples are not yet filled with the Holy Spirit. Pentecost has not yet come; therefore, the disciples are not yet Holy Spirit-indwelt.
 - However, it is even more amazing today, that so many 'professing' Christians have 'encounters' with Christ; yet, almost immediately afterwards, simply fall back into the 'old' patterns of life, demonstrating no real change in their actions or work. Such reality only demonstrates the truthfulness of Jesus' words in Mark 4, where he tells of the Parable of the Sower and Soils.
- Then, John states, 'They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.'
 - It was common for fishermen in ancient days to fish at night. The reason for this was that the fish caught at night could be sold fresh in the morning.
 - Yet, the emphasis in this Verse is that **they fished all night and caught nothing!** As John Calvin correctly states:

God permitted them to toil to no purpose during the whole *night*, in order to prove the truth of the miracle; for if they had *caught any thing* what followed immediately afterwards would not have so clearly manifested the power of Christ, but when, after having toiled ineffectually during the whole night, they are suddenly favored with a large take of fishes,

they have good reason for acknowledging the goodness of the Lord. In the same manner, also, God often tries believers, that he may lead them the more highly to value his blessing. If we were always prosperous, whenever we put our hand to labor, scarcely any man would attribute to the blessing of God the success of his exertions, all would boast of their industry, and would kiss their hands.

- ❑ As believers today, we must all come to the same point where the disciples are: realizing that without Christ, we can do **NOTHING!** This truth harkens back to John 15:5, 'I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me **you can do nothing.**'
- ❑ Even more, we must realize that we, as fallen sinners, are in desperate need for a Savior. We were once dead in our sins; now we are alive. **ONLY THEN** can we begin to understand the nature of God's grace towards us.

When we were outside of Christ – we had **NO ABILITY** to accomplish anything that pleased God. We, like the disciples could do **NOTHING**, and were in desperate need for a Savior. It was then, that Christ, in His grace, revealed Himself to us, through His Written Word, and Saved us!

- ❑ The implications of this truth are **PROFOUND**. When we realize the depth of our sinfulness, our depravity, our inability, we can only stand in complete and utter amazement at the grace of God.
- ❑ Also, this truth also transforms our evangelism; for the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is only good when we realize what we truly deserve!
- ❑ This is also how the Scriptures themselves are structured. For, it is the Law that condemns us and leads us to Christ. So, too, as we proclaim the Gospel, we should proclaim the Law of God first, that every sinner may know their just condemnation under that Law, and then, by God's grace, turn to Christ.

II. The Command of Christ

- ❑ As day began to break, and the disciples were still on the Sea, 'Jesus stood on the beach' and revealed Himself to His disciples.
- ❑ However, as John states, the disciples did not recognize Him.
 - This could have been because it was still early in the morning, and, as it was still somewhat dark, they could not recognize the face of the man standing on the shore.
- ❑ Jesus, then, said to the disciples, 'Children, you do not have any fish, do you?' The disciples answered, 'No.'

- The word ‘Children’ [Greek: *paidia*, *παιδια*] is a word that can mean the same as ‘lads’ or ‘boys.’ It is, to some degree, a diminutive term of endearment.
- Obviously, Jesus knew that His disciples had no fish; however, He is, in His providence, leading them to the point in which He will powerfully reveal Himself to them.
- After the disciples responded to Him, saying, ‘No.’ Jesus said, ‘Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.’
 - This scene demonstrates a powerful truth concerning the perspective of Almighty God. From our own perspective, we live day-to-day, experience life’s ups and downs successively as they come our way.
 - However, unlike us, God is not limited by time and space. In fact, He transcends it. This is why only God can be our anchor, that to which we cling, for He transcends the changing of time and events – for He is the Sovereign of all time. Thus, when we face the sufferings that come in life, we must cry out to the one whose perspective is infinitely greater than ours.
 - **In this scene, it is clear that Christ, as the Sovereign Creator and Sustainer, knows exactly where the fish are, because He created them and put them there!**
- Even though the disciples did not recognize Jesus, His command would likely not have been surprising to them. H.V. Morton, in his book *In the Steps of the Master*, writes, ‘It happens very often that the man with the hand-net must rely on the advice of someone on shore, who tells him to cast either to the left or right, because in the clear water he can often see a shoal of fish invisible to the man in the water.’

III. The Catch of the Disciples

- Therefore, the disciples simply do what Jesus says. As a result, ‘...they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.’
 - As Leon Morris wrote, ‘Some commentators draw attention to passages in classical authors showing that the right side is the fortunate side, but it is difficult to understand what relevance this has to the New Testament. **Obedience to Christ, not luck, is the important thing.** Jesus’ instruction is clear, and there appears to have been no discussion. The fishermen simply did as he told them.’
 - Even though before they cast their nets they did not recognize Jesus, this scene reveals yet another truth concerning the headship of Christ in our lives – His commands to us are simple and we are simply called to obey – this is the mark of true discipleship!

- Furthermore, this scene is also reflective of the grace of God in our lives. For He does not simply give us what we need and no more, he gives us ‘grace upon grace.’ This is a physical demonstration of a spiritual reality.

As Ephesians 3:20-21 states, ‘Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.’

- Immediately after the disciples observed the huge catch, ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ (presumably John) said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’
- Then, John tells the reader that ‘when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea.’
 - Notice the emphasis John gives to ‘hearing.’ John (and the other disciples as well) heard the voice of Jesus [for, the sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd (John 10)], telling them where to cast the nets. Once they did as Jesus said, the catch of fish authenticated and confirmed the voice as that of Christ, for this was clearly an act of God. This led John to say to Peter, ‘It is the Lord.’
 - Then, Peter, upon *hearing* John’s proclamation, immediately girded himself and jumped into the water to embrace Jesus.
- After Peter jumped into the water, heading toward Jesus, John states that the other disciples ‘came in the little boat,’ as they were only about one hundred yards from shore.
- Jesus, then, told the disciples, once on shore, ‘Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.’
- At this, ‘Simon Peter went up and drew the net to the land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.’
 - Throughout the history of the Church, scholars and theologians have proposed various theories as to the significance of 153.
 - For example, Augustine noted that $17 = 10 + 7$, the 10 representing the 10 commandments and the 7 the sevenfold Spirit of God (Revelation 1:4).
 - Others have proposed that $7 = 3 + 4$, the number of the Trinity and the number of the New Jerusalem, the city built foursquare.
 - Still others have said that $153 = 3 * 50 + 3$ (the double 3 pointing to the Trinity).

- Quite possibly the most popular theory embraced by theologians throughout the centuries was first proposed by Jerome. He viewed this scene as a fulfillment of Ezekiel 47, where water flows from the Temple to the Dead Sea, which begins to support life.

‘It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and the others become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. And it will come about that fisherman will stand beside it...there will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish will be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many.’
Ezekiel 47:9-10

- The fulfillment of Ezekiel 47 seems the most likely (to me); however, John’s main point in the story seems to be simply that there were many fish. It is not surprising that John gives the number, as the fish may have been divided among the fisherman (creating a need for the fish to be counted); or, it may be that there were so many that the fisherman decided to count them. (“Can you believe it? I wonder how many there are?”)

□ John also notes that Peter (and the other disciples) **drew** the net to land.

- The word for “draw” here is the Greek word *helkousay* [ελκουση] which is translated, most accurately, **drag**.

- This word occurs eight (8) times in the New Testament: John 6:44; 12:32; 18:10; 21:6; 21:11; Acts 16:19; 21:30; and James 2:6.

John 21:6 states, “And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will find a catch.’ They cast therefore, and then they were not able to **haul** it in because of the great number of fish.”

John 21:11 states, “Simon Peter went up, and **drew** the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.”

Acts 16:19 states, “But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and **dragged** them into the market place before the authorities,”

James 2:6 states, “But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not he rich who oppress you and personally **drag** you into court?”

- This is the same Greek word that is used in John 6:44: ‘No one can come to Me **unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up on the last day.’

Therefore, the scene with Peter and the disciples 'drawing' the net out of the water is a picture of the **effectual calling** of God through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

- As theologian David P. Henreckson states:

'In the Greek, the verb for *draw*s is much stronger than most translations put it. Literally, it means *drags*. Unregenerate man does not want, and in fact hates the things of God. But when God decides to claim someone for His own, that regenerate person all of a sudden wants, and in fact loves the things of God (John 3:5-6).'

- However, not only do Peter and the disciples *draw* the net it, full of many large fish, but John informs the reader 'the net was not torn.'
- 'This is a beautiful picture of the effectiveness of the effectual calling of God. As the Lord Jesus Christ states in John 6:37,39: 'All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out...This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing...'
- 'This would signify that the Church's resources, with Christ in its midst, are never overstrained.'
Strachan
- 'There is quite possibly an allusion here to Luke 5:1-11, where 'the nets began to break.' However, here in John 21, after the death and resurrection of Christ, 'the net was not torn.'

IV. The Communion of the Disciples with Christ

- John states, in Versed 9-10, 12, 13, 'So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish which you have now caught...Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast...''
- It is quite powerful to see how Jesus, even in His resurrected 'state' cares for the basic needs of His disciples.
- Here, just as He did before His arrest, trials and crucifixion [during the Last Supper], Jesus shares a meal with His disciples.

'Jesus makes the usual meal of bread and fish, which the disciples have so often shared with him, into a resurrection meal, not only by sitting down with them as the Risen One, but also by involving them in it as those who share in his resurrection power and as those who will continue his work on earth.'

Hermann Ridderbos

- The significance of sharing a meal in the Mediterranean culture is worth noting.

- I once heard a Missionary to this area say that, even today, you address an individual formally (*usted*) until you have shared a meal with him or her. Only then is it proper to address that individual in the informal tone (*tú*).
- The point here is that Jesus is sharing a meal with His disciples; He is communing with Him.
- John adds an interesting note of an eyewitness. He states that ‘None of the disciples ventured to question Him, ‘Who are You?’ knowing that it was the Lord.’
 - It is my opinion that the disciples were so astonished, so dumbfounded at the turn of recent events, that they simply could not ask Christ, ‘Is it really You?’ for they know it *had* to be Christ; for who else could it be?
- This scene demonstrates one of the most ignored truths of Christianity: that, as the Westminster Catechism rightly states, ‘The chief end of Man is the Glorify God and enjoy Him forever!’
 - It is difficult to say what most Christians would say is the ‘chief end’ of man. Possibly, evangelism; however, this is only one aspect of a greater reality. We are called to glorify God through our obedience, and in so doing, **enjoy Him through eternal communion**. For this is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3)!

Yet, as John has demonstrated in this scene, this communion with God is only possibly because Christ lived, died, was resurrected, and ascended! Thus, the communion Jesus has with His disciples was but a foretaste of what was to come...on the basis of Christ's finished work!