

“The Mission” John 21 Shane Hatfield 6/27/21

I want you to see that God accomplishes His glorious mission through ordinary people and ordinary means. If you're looking at this miracle and it sounds familiar, that's because there is a miracle that is very similar described in Luke 5. In both of these miracles, the disciples fish all night, but they catch nothing. So, Jesus commands them to try again. He says, 'Throw your nets on the other side of the boat.' They obey Jesus and then they catch this miraculous number of fish. Not only that, but in both miracles Jesus' Lordship is revealed by a profession of faith by one of the disciples. Then, Jesus leads the disciples to follow Him. So then, we have to ask ourselves, what is the point of these miracles and why are they so similar?

I think the key to understanding these miracles is seeing what Jesus says and does after them. After the first miracle, Jesus told the disciples, He said, "Do not be afraid, for I will make you fishers of men." After that, the disciples followed Jesus. They left everything. They followed Jesus. As Jesus went and He taught, He healed, He did His miracles, and He gathered men to Himself to follow Him. Jesus went out as a fisher of men. And He took these disciples, who were fishermen, and they went out with Him. Well now, Jesus is about to ascend to heaven, and what happens after this second miracle we see the disciples in Acts, they follow the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides them as they go out and they proclaim the gospel, and they gather thousands and thousands of people into the kingdom of God so that they might experience eternal life.

So, these miraculous catches serve as transition points for the disciples. At first, they transitioned from fishermen to disciple fisherman, they're learning how to fish through Jesus, and then here, they transition from these disciple fishermen into later where they'll be apostle fishermen, and they go out and they lay the foundation for the early church doing God's glorious mission of bringing eternal life to people through the ordinary means of grace. As we kind of break down the rest of this passage tonight, that's what I want you to see. I want you to see how God uses ordinary people and ordinary means of grace to accomplish this mission.

The first thing we see is that God uses ordinary disciples. At the beginning, you see that it lists off the names of the disciples who were there. It says that Simon Peter, Thomas called the twin, Nathaniel of Canaan and Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were there together, right? We know one of those disciples was John, but there's at least one disciple there that's not named. He's not famous. I'm guessing he's probably not one of the twelve, maybe he was another disciple from the area that was a part of their group. But I love the fact that this unnamed disciple is a part of this miraculous catch, and I think that's what this shows us, that everybody, all of Jesus' disciples, every member of the church from the youngest infant to the oldest elder in the church, can all be a part of God's glorious mission of bringing people into salvation. There are no unimportant people in the body of Christ. There is nobody in here that doesn't have a gift, a talent, a resource that they could use to help people believe and know the gospel.

So, God uses these ordinary disciples, but it's not their power. They fished all night and didn't catch anything! Jesus was the one who gave them directions. Jesus was the one who gave them the power. All they did was humbly submit themselves to Jesus' word. They humbly obeyed Him. They humbly trusted Him, and He used them to bring in this miraculous catch of fish. Not only did He use them to do that, but He actually gives them credit. I love it here in verse 10, it says, "Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish that you have just caught." Like, they didn't catch anything! They fished all night and didn't catch a thing! Right? It's kind of like whenever you go fishing with your kids, and you cast it out there for them and they're holding

the bobber and they're doing the fishing, but you're right there with them and the bobber goes under and you pull it and you've got your hand on there, and they've got their hand on there and you help them reel it in, reel it in, they get it to the bank and you pick it up and you say, 'Look at that fish that you just caught!' Right? Jesus was guiding and empowering them to catch these fish, and Jesus is giving them credit, and the Father uses our humble obedience to His word to gather people into His kingdom, and He just delights for us to be a part of it.

Shari had this fun idea to have our kids each cook a meal this summer and Frances was the first one up. So, Frances and Shari planned out the meal, they bought all the stuff online, they went and got the stuff, they paid for it with our money. Shari and Frances were cooking chicken piccata, and so, Frances and Shari worked on the piccata sauce and everything in the kitchen, and I was out on the patio grilling the chicken and Frances would run in the kitchen and help Shari and she would run out and help me with the chicken and then we brought it all together and put it all out on the table and we all sat down to eat as a family, and Frances said, 'Look everybody! Look at this meal I made for you!' And we said, 'Yes! Thank you so much Frances for making this wonderful meal!' We delighted that Frances participated with us in serving each other.

That's how our heavenly Father looks at us whenever we participate in His mission of bringing people into salvation. He delights in us. He enjoys us, and He loves to give us the credit and make us be a part of it. That's the first thing we see: that God uses ordinary disciples to achieve His glorious mission.

The second thing we see is that God uses this ordinary proclamation of the gospel, just an ordinary proclamation of the word to bring people into His kingdom. What happens? This miraculous fish comes in and John realizes it's Jesus, and He says, "It's the Lord!" Now, if you go back and read John 20 and 21, you see this really interesting dynamic between Jesus and Peter where Peter is always the first one to act, but John is the first one to believe. In both situations, at the tomb and in the boat, John is the first one that believed that Jesus is resurrected. And right here, John says, "It's the Lord!" And what does Peter do? He jumps in the water and he starts swimming to Jesus. What did God do? God used John's ordinary profession of faith in the Lord to draw Peter to Him.

That's the same thing God does for us even now. He uses the ordinary proclamation of the gospel, the ordinary profession of faith in Christ to reveal that Jesus is Lord and to draw people to Him. One of the commentaries I read on this passage said that in general, research shows that even though we have in America, in the western world, in first world countries, we have the best technology. We have the best methods. We have the best research. We have the best science. Churches really only reach very few outsiders with the gospel, every single year. In contrast, in third world countries where they don't have the technology, the fancy methods, all the philosophies, all the gadgets, all these things, in these third world developing countries we're seeing more and more people come to Christ every year, and we're seeing the church explode. Why? Because they're doing it through the straightforward, ordinary relationships with people, and the straightforward presentation of the gospel. They're not relying on methods and know-how and technology. They're building relationships with people. They're sharing the gospel. They're living in community, and God is using them. He's using them greatly.

We have seen that same thing here in our church. I was talking with a member this week, and somebody else had told me that he became a Christian because of this member, so I sat down with this member and I was like, 'Hey, this guy told me he became a Christian because of you. Tell me about that story!' And he said, 'Yeah, I would have never thought that God would have used me in that way, but we work together, and so, because we were at work, we were going on

trips together, so we spent a lot of time in the car together. So, we talked. We developed a friendship, and then, one Easter I invited him to church and the guy said, 'Well, you're going to hate this about me, but I don't really go to church.' And the guy said, 'Well, I don't care, you're still my friend. I just wanted to invite you.' He kept up that relationship, he maintained that friendship, that started a conversation about the gospel and over time that guy eventually came to church with his family, he eventually professed his faith in Christ and became a believer! All through an ordinary disciple sharing his life with somebody else and giving a straightforward proclamation of the gospel. God used that to accomplish His glorious mission and bring someone to eternal life.

So, God uses ordinary disciples, He uses the ordinary proclamation of the gospel, and then He uses ordinary fellowship of believers. I love that after this fishing expedition, what do they do? They sit down and they eat a meal together. Jesus says, 'Come on guys, I've got a fire ready. I've got fish on the fire. I've got bread. Let's sit down and eat.' In that culture, table fellowship was an intimate experience. If you invited somebody to eat a meal with you, you wanted to know them. You wanted to be intimate with them. You wanted to be personal. Very similar in our culture, right? If you have a three-minute conversation with somebody and you kind of do casual small talk, you kind of get to know each other, you kind of think, 'Oh, yeah, that person is a nice person, maybe they want to get to know me. They're being friendly.' But what if they invite you to their house for a meal? They really want to get to know you, don't they? They really want to be intimate. They really want to develop a relationship. It's there, inside their home, that you're probably going to develop a close, intimate relationship where you're going to become deep friends.

Well, that's what Jesus wants here as He invites these guys into this meal, and it's interesting, it says that after the meal, or in the context of the meal, it says, "Jesus says to them, 'Come and have breakfast.'" And then it says, "Now none of the disciples dared to ask Him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord." It was in the context of this meal that He revealed Himself as Lord.

We'll fast forward to the book of Acts. What do we see? What do we see in the early church? How do they do evangelism? Is it through fancy programs and elaborate presentations? No! It's through meals. It's through partaking in the ordinary means of grace, together. I want to read Acts 2 to you guys, quickly here. I don't have it on the slides so I'm going to have to find it. 42-47. Listen to this, it says: "⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

That 'the' there tells you that this was specific. There was a specific teaching from the apostles that they were studying. And there was a specific fellowship, the fellowship of believers, that they experienced, and there is a specific meal, the breaking of the bread. The Lord's Supper. Communion. And there are specific prayers, probably the Psalms. This is a formal gathered worship service in which they are participating in the means of grace. So, you've got this formal worship service which is what we are doing right here. We're doing very similar things right here.

And then later, you see there is informal fellowship. I'm just going to read it all.

"⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common." So, they're radically being generous and sharing things with each other "⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by

day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.”

So, they're sharing with each other radically. They're engaging in radical hospitality where they're eating together in each other's homes. So, they've got this formal worship that they're engaging in and they've got this informal table fellowship that they're engaging in and look what it says at the end. “⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

God's method of evangelism in the book of Acts was worship through the word and the sacraments. Formal worship. And then there's informal table fellowship together. That's how people were believing that Jesus was the Lord. That's how they were attracted to the gospel. That's how they were growing in grace! That's how people were experiencing eternal life. It's the same thing today. God uses this formal worship service, this ordinary thing that we're doing here, and that we're doing every Sunday, to proclaim that Jesus is the Lord and to give people eternal life. He uses things like Ethos Groups and our service projects and our meals with Ethos and all of these informal things that we're doing together, so that people can see that Jesus is the Lord and they can experience life there, and they can say, 'That's what I want.' I want to be a part of this body. I think one of the tragedies of our individualistic culture is too often Christians are trying to follow Jesus on their own. They're trying to just make it me and Jesus. 'All I need is me and Jesus' and you can't do that. Jesus uses this ordinary fellowship of believers to reveal Himself.

I listen to a lot of talks by Alcoholics Anonymous and Celebrate Recovery and one of the things that I'm always jealous of is the way that their community helps each other. The way that they heal and change and grow in community. This week I was listening to this one talk and the guy said that he grew up in the church, he had gone to church, he had gone to Alcoholics Anonymous, for years, like seven or eight years, but yet he'd only been sober 89 days in a row, basically, in his adult life. He said the reason why was he never really understood the community aspect of either one of those groups until his sponsor said, 'I want you to go to AA and I want you to shake everybody's hand before it starts and tell them you're glad to see them.' He said when he started doing that, and he looked them in the eye and he saw that they were glad to see him, he felt like he was at home, and he wasn't alone, and that began to change him.

I just thought, man, what if the church was like that? What if our church was like that? What if people walked in and when they looked you in the eye and greeted you, they saw genuine care and compassion and they felt like they were at home and they were loved. What would that do to people? We have the word of God, we have the presence of God, we have the Holy Spirit. We can give that to them! We can give them a home where they can heal through the gospel. You can't do this life on your own, but we often try to do that. We can't believe these truths on our own.

I have a friend who was doing jury duty once, and he was talking with one of the other jurors and of course they said, 'Hey, what do you do?' and he said, 'I'm a pastor,' and the other juror said, 'You know, I'm a Christian, but I haven't gone to church in years and I'm really struggling with my faith.' And the pastor just said, 'You know what, I can't believe in the resurrection by myself. I have to have the body of believers with me to help me believe in the resurrection.' That other juror, it just woke her up, and she went to worship and she began to grow in worship again and she began to thrive in her faith. She realized she couldn't do it on her own, and neither can we.

God uses ordinary disciples, and He uses the ordinary means of grace, and He uses the ordinary fellowship to accomplish His glorious mission, and the last thing we see is that He uses ordinary leaders like Peter and John. Look back at the passage, John 21:15, it says,

“¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.””

Peter followed Him, and Peter became a pillar of the early church. He preached the first sermon at Pentecost where thousands of people came to faith. He took the gospel out to the Jews. He carried his cross, metaphorically, until he carried it physically. The legend has it that Peter was crucified like Jesus, but he didn't feel like he was worthy to be crucified right side up the way Jesus was, so he asked to be crucified upside down. It was this repentant, redeemed sinner that God used to lead the early church.

God still uses repentant, redeemed leaders today to shepherd His church, to care for them, to tend them, to make sure that their souls are fed, and they are protected. Whether you like it or not, when we look throughout the New Testament, we see that God has placed leaders, shepherds, elders, pastors, over the church, and their job is to care for you, our job is to care for you: mine, Tyler's, and our other elders, and we want to do that. We're sinners saved by grace just like you guys, but we want to care for you guys, we want to shepherd you and Lord willing, God will use that to bring more and more people to Christ.

Not only does He use shepherds, but He uses teachers like John. Look back at verse 20:

“²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” ²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” ²² Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” ²³ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” ²⁴ This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

²⁵ Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

God used John's faithful testimony here in the gospel of John and in the epistles of John to bring many, many to faith in Jesus. As we see in the New Testament, Paul says in Ephesians, God uses the evangelists, the teachers, the shepherds, the pastors, to equip the saints for the work of ministry. So, what God still does today is He uses those leaders in the church to equip you for the

work of ministry so that every member of our church can go out and be a part of God's glorious mission to share eternal life with others. What does that look like?

There was a great example of this I heard a few years ago by a pastor in California. This pastor in California, he had a neighbor, and he was getting to know his neighbor one night, and they were talking and of course, the neighbor said, 'What do you do?' and he said, 'I'm a pastor,' and he said, 'What do you do?' And he said, 'Well, I make adult films.' The pastor said, 'Oh. Okay.' Well, the pastor and his family maintained a friendship with this man, and eventually that man's girlfriend had a stroke and she got put in the hospital and because of her stroke she had to have heart surgery, brain surgery, and she had other complications. Well, all of their 'pretty' friends from the film industry completely ditched them while they were in the hospital, because she was in the hospital for a long time, but this pastor and his family, they brought her meals and they sat with her.

Then one Sunday, the man called up the pastor, Jason called up Tim and said, 'Hey Tim, would you come over and pray for us?' And Tim, honestly, said he was like *sigh*. 'I don't know if I want to go.' He didn't tell him that, but he was thinking about it, he was like, 'I don't know if I want to go,' and Tim's wife was like, 'Dude, you've been praying for opportunities like this! Go down and pray with them.' So, he went to the hospital and he prayed for them, and in their prayers they all started weeping, and Jason said, 'If I would have known that Christians were like this, I would have considered Christianity earlier.' Well eventually his girlfriend got out of the hospital and they were meeting with Tim, and the girlfriend said, 'I want to go to your church, Tim.' And Tim said, 'You know, you don't have to do that for us to be friends. It's really okay,' and Jason said, 'No, we know that. But you're the only people that we've met in LA that care about anybody but themselves.'

And so, sure enough, that next Sunday, Jason and his girlfriend were sitting in the front row of Tim's church, and Tim says in the front row of his church that day was Jason and his girlfriend, a musician who was off tour, an actress from Mad Men, a heroin addict, and the sweetest little Christian family that you'd ever met. He said he looked down and he said, 'Jesus, these are your people. These are the people that you've given me to shepherd.' After the worship service, that couple stayed for an hour and people from the congregation came up to them and talked to them and prayed with them, and that couple kept wanting to meet with Tim later on for prayer. What a beautiful picture of the body of Christ, of everybody working together to minister to someone, to help them experience the love of Christ and come to faith and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's the kind of church that we want to be. That's the kind of body that we want to be. That's the kind of God that we serve. He uses ordinary disciples and the ordinary means of grace to do miraculous things.