

“Who Do You Want To BE?”

John 21:1-17

November 23, 2014

CONTEXT:

Epilogue – by definition, serves a purpose (see Prologue)

John’s account of the resurrected Christ (for the 3rd time)

Thomas’ example was just highlighted...

“...so that you will believe... in believing have life”

T/S: So now we find the disciples in a very important context... one that we share in a very powerful way... They are waiting on Jesus to come back....

Jesus is reminding them yet again:

Who HE is...

Who they are...

Why HE came...

Why they go...

VIDEO: “Gospel of John 20:29 – 21:17

So what... & now what?

BE-cause (active change agents)

BE-come (active works-in-progress)

o-BE-dience (abiding means obeying)

BE-troth (committed, unified love)

PREVIEW: mMm

Miracle:

Christ comes again

Christ calls His (children/friend)

Christ sees, directs, & empowers

Messiah:

Our Messiah is a Missionary

Our Messiah has a message

Our Messiah saves us for Mission

Mission:

Miraculous (vs. manageable)

Messianic (vs. mechanical)

Missional (vs. moral)

SERMON TEXT:

1After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way.

The Lord had instructed His disciples to meet Him in Galilee, which helps to explain why they were at the Sea of Galilee, or Sea of Tiberias (Matt. 26:32; 28:7-10; Mark 16:7). But John did not explain why Peter decided to go fishing, and Bible students are not in agreement in their suggestions. Some claim that he was perfectly within his rights, that he needed to pay his bills and the best way to get money was to go fishing. Why sit around idle? Get busy!

Others believe that **Peter had been called *from* that kind of life (Luke 5:1-11)** and that **it was wrong for him to return. Furthermore, when he went fishing, Peter took six other men with him! If he was wrong, they were wrong too; and it is a sad thing when a believer leads others astray.**

Certainly, Peter must have remembered what happened two years before, when Jesus called him into full-time discipleship (Luke 5:1-11). On that occasion, Peter had fished all night and caught nothing, but Jesus had turned his failure into success.

Perhaps Peter's impulsiveness and self-confidence were revealing themselves again. He was sincere, and he worked hard, but there were no results. How like some believers in the service of the Lord! They sincerely believe that they are doing God's will, but their labors are in vain. They are serving without direction from the Lord, so they cannot expect blessing from the Lord.

With characteristic impulsiveness, Peter quickly put on his outer garment ("naked" simply means "stripped for work") and dove into the water! He wanted to get to Jesus! This is in contrast to [Luke 5:8](#) where Peter told the Lord to depart from him.

To be a "fisher of men" in that day meant to seek to persuade men and "catch" them with the truth. A fisherman catches living fish, but when he gets them, they die. A Christian witness seeks to catch "dead fish" (dead in their sins), and when he or she "catches" them, they are made alive in Christ!

- Bible Exposition Commentary

“After this” = making the point of blessed faith

MIRACLE = “Jesus revealed Himself again”

“by the sea of Tiberias” = (a.k.a. Sea of Galilee)

NOTE: Jesus told them to go there... (Matt. 28:16)

“He revealed Himself this way” = eye-witness account

VIDEO: “*Perspective Matters!*”

2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.

7 of the 11 are together...

John is one of the sons of Zebedee...

NOTE: Peter is always listed first (implied leadership)

3 Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

NOTE: “Simon Peter” = old Peter title...

Peter takes (by talking) the leadership posture again...

NOTE: “I’m going fishing”

Peter’s instincts = Go fish for fish...

I am going 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 ([Matt. 28:16](#)). Peter and the others occupied themselves with fishing, which was their former livelihood, while they awaited Jesus’ appearance. - The MacArthur Bible Commentary

Peter’s insufficiency = “but they caught nothing.”

Symbolism... “Flesh fails, faith prevails!” - JDP

Peter’s inspiration = Go fish for men!

4 *Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.*

NOTE: Jesus the Missionary Messiah comes again!

5 *Jesus said to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, do you?”
They answered him, “No.””*

MIRACLE: Resurrected Christ is seen again

MINISTRY: “Children” (eternal term of endearment)

MIRACLE: Jesus knows they caught nothing

CRITICAL NOTE: “*They answered Him, ‘No.’*”

- They told the truth!
- Not all do...
- **Truth opens the door to blessing :-)** - JDP

6 *He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.*

Whereas truth opens the door to blessing...
faithful obedience ushers it in! - JDP

See the Great Commission in this verse...

MESSIAH: Jesus speaks authoritatively

MIRACLE: Jesus tells them what will happen

MISSION: “...the harvest/net is plentiful...”

7 *That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.*

See Peter & John Profiled:

NOTE: See how God uses BOTH personalities...

“There is beauty in unity thru diversity.” – JDP

John = Perceptive, Measured, & Informational

Peter = Instinctive, Unguarded & Inspirational

NOTE: See our R.E.S.C.U.E. Personal Evangelism training for an overview of different biblical personalities & their subsequent ministry designs

8The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

This verse is used to create the context which helps to heighten the contrast between Peter and the other disciples.

9When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread.

As the curtain lifts, the backdrop is the morning-lit Sea of Tiberias in Galilee. In the foreground is a rocky beach with a glowing fire. The principal characters in this true-life drama are Jesus Christ, Peter, and six other disciples seated around the fire.

The key to understanding what is about to transpire is an appreciation of Peter's inner feelings, for while Peter made the greatest confession in church history ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," [Matthew 16:16](#)), he also denied Christ three times just after the Savior's arrest. How the mighty had fallen!

In the wake of his denial, Peter's Master was brought out from the inner chamber, and the meeting of their eyes—the fallen disciple and the eternally loving Lord—was one of the most painful in history. Oh, the agony of that moment when, with the echoes of the rooster still ringing, Jesus' unblinking, guiltless, omniscient eyes looked into the heart of Peter! Peter went out and wept bitterly, but his tears could not wash the image from his mind. He would never forget the awful thing he had done. Could he ever be what he had been again?

- Preaching the Word

Jesus met His disciples on the beach where He had already prepared breakfast for them. This entire scene must have stirred Peter's memory and touched his conscience. Surely he was recalling that first catch of fish ([Luke 5:1-11](#)) and perhaps even the feeding of the 5,000 with bread and fish ([John 6](#)). It was at the close of the latter event that Peter had given his clear-cut witness of faith in Jesus Christ ([John 6:66-71](#)). The "fire of coals" would certainly remind him of the fire at which he denied the Lord ([John 18:18](#)). It is good for us to remember the past; we may have something to confess. - Warren Wiersbe

CRITICAL CONTEXTUAL NOTE:

Verse 9 confirms that the context of this account is intended to speak far more into the ears of the Christ's listeners (both then and now)...

See the overwhelming parallels:

Christ comes to Peter/John/others while fishing

Christ comes after failed fishing effort...

The "charcoal fire" is same as when Peter denied

The "fish and bread" recalls John 6's hard lesson

10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught."

NOTE: Jesus instructs His fishermen...

Jesus says: Bring the "fish"/men to Me!

Implied: Jesus empowers ALL catching of fish

11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.

NOTE: Peter obeyed Jesus (and set a good example)

NOTE: Jesus fulfilled His command/promise (“full”)

NOTE: 153 means nothing more than “abundance”

NOTE: Jesus will equip & empower obedience...
“although there were so many, the net was not torn.”

12 Jesus said to them, “Come and eat.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.

CRITICAL CONTEXTUAL NOTE:

This is the 3rd key gospel invitation...

1. “Come and See”
2. “Come and Drink”
3. “Come and Eat”

Three "invitations" stand out in John's Gospel: "Come and see" ([John 1:39](#)); "Come and drink" ([John 7:37](#)); and "Come and eat" ([John 21:12](#)). How loving of Jesus to feed Peter before He dealt with his spiritual needs. He gave Peter opportunity to dry off, get warm, satisfy his hunger, and enjoy personal fellowship. This is a good example for us to follow as we care for God's people. Certainly the spiritual is more important than the physical, but caring for the physical can prepare the way for spiritual ministry. Our Lord does not so emphasize "the soul" that He neglects the body.

13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish.

NOTE: see the Eucharist symbolized here!

Again: see John 6 symbolically revisited here

14 This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

the third time. The reference to the "third time" refers only to the appearances reported in John's Gospel, i.e., the first being in [20:19-23](#) and the second in [20:26-29](#). - The MacArthur Bible Commentary.

T/S: In v.15 Jesus shifts from fishing to shepherding...

CRITICAL CONTEXTUAL NOTE:

Key points:

- Peter's instructions
- Role of "shepherding"
 - Defining "love"
 - Discipling "sheep"

~ Feeding

~ Leading

Informing

Instructing

Inspecting

Insulating

Inspiring

Focus = **"Define & Defend the Church"**

Jesus and Peter

21:15-17 The meaning of **this section hinges upon the usage of two synonyms for love. In terms of interpretation, when two synonyms are placed in close proximity in context, a difference in meaning, however slight, is emphasized.** When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, He used a word for love that signified total commitment. Peter responded with a word for love that signified his love for Jesus, but not necessarily his total commitment. This was not because he was reluctant to express that greater love, but because he had been disobedient and denied the Lord in the past.

He was, perhaps, now reluctant to make a claim of supreme devotion when, in the past, his life did not support such a claim. **Jesus pressed home to Peter the need for unswerving devotion by repeatedly asking Peter if he loved Him supremely.** The essential message here is that Jesus demands total commitment from His followers. Their love for Him must place Him above their love for all else. Jesus confronted Peter with love because He wanted Peter to lead the apostles ([Matt. 16:18](#)), but in order for Peter to be an effective shepherd, his overwhelming drive must exemplify supreme love for his Lord.

- The MacArthur Bible Commentary.

***15*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love/agape me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love/phileao you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”**

Since Peter had denied the Lord *publicly*, it was important that there be a public restoration. **Sin should be dealt with only to the extent that it is known. Private sins should be confessed in private, public sins in public.** Since Peter had denied his Lord three times, Jesus asked him three personal questions. He also encouraged him by giving a threefold commission that restored Peter to his ministry.

Peter had boasted of his love for Christ and had even contrasted it with that of the other men. "I will lay down my life for Thy sake!" ([John 13:37](#)) "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended!" ([Matt. 26:33](#)) There is more than a hint in these boastful statements that Peter believed that he loved the Lord more than did the other disciples.

16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love/agape me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love/phileao you.” He said to him, “Tend/Lead my sheep.”

17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love/phileao me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love/phileao me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love/phileao you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

Complete Restoration

The restoration was accomplished, and they had all seen it. And now they probably understood that the Lord had planned it all. Peter's denials happened before a fire, and now Peter's confessions were before a charcoal fire. There were three denials, and now three confessions, as well as three gracious commissions.

QUOTE: **Christ is saying to us through Peter's example that the greatest priority in life is the nature and primacy of our love for God.** Here we see a man who had loved God with all his heart but needed to be affirmed in that love before he could again serve fruitfully. Some of us may love him dearly, others may not. But **the abiding principle is that before all things, even service to him, we must love him with all our hearts.** That is the highest priority in life. It is the first question for every theologian. It is the essential question for the pastor. It is the supreme question for every missionary. It is the number one question for every one of us who wants to please God. Loving God is the highest priority of our lives.

- Preaching the Word

The image changes from that of the fisherman to that of the shepherd. Peter was to minister both as an evangelist (catching the fish) and a pastor (shepherding the flock). It is unfortunate when we divorce these two because they should go together. Pastors ought to evangelize (2 Tim. 4:5) and then shepherd the people they have won so that they mature in the Lord.

QUOTE:

Jesus gave three admonitions to Peter: "Feed My lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," and "Feed My sheep." Both the lambs and the more mature sheep need feeding and leading, and that is the task of the spiritual shepherd. It is an awesome responsibility to be a shepherd of God's flock! (1 Peter 5:2) There are enemies that want to destroy the flock, and the shepherd must be alert and courageous (Acts 20:28-35). By nature, sheep are ignorant and defenseless, and they need the protection and guidance of the shepherd.

While it is true that the Holy Spirit equips people to serve as shepherds, and gives these people to churches (Eph. 4:11ff), it is also true that each individual Christian must help to care for the flock. Each of us has a gift or gifts from the Lord, and we should use what He has given us to help protect and perfect the flock. Sheep are prone to wander, and we must look after each other and encourage each other.

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20-21), and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Pastors are "under-shepherds" who must obey Him as they minister to the flock. *The most important thing the pastor can do is to love Jesus Christ. If he truly loves Jesus Christ, the pastor will also love His sheep and tenderly care for them. The Greek word for "sheep" at the end of John 21:17 means "dear sheep."* Our Lord's sheep are dear to Him and He wants His ministers to love them and care for them personally and lovingly. (See Ezek. 34 for God's indictment of unfaithful shepherds, the leaders of Judah.) A pastor who loves the flock will serve it faithfully, no matter what the cost. - B.E. Commentary

Closing Illustration:

PRIORITIES:

In the 1930s Mr. Ivy Lee, a management consultant and an aggressive and self-confident man, by stealth wangled a private interview with Charles Schwab, then president of Bethlehem Steel, who was no less self-assured, being one of the most powerful men in the world.

During the conversation, Lee asserted that if the management of Bethlehem Steel would follow his advice, the company's

operations would be improved and their profits increased. Schwab responded, "Mr. Lee, if you can show us a way to get more things done, I'll be glad to listen; and if it works, I'll pay you whatever you ask within reason."

Lee handed Schwab a blank piece of paper and said, "Write down the most important things you have to do tomorrow." Schwab did so. "Now," Lee continued, "number them in order of importance." Schwab did so. "Tomorrow morning start on #1 and stay with it until you complete it. Then go on to #2 and #3 and #4, and so on. Don't worry if you haven't completed everything by the end of the day. At least you will have completed the most important projects. Do this every day. After you have been convinced of the value of this system, have your men try it. Try it as long as you like, and then," concluded Lee, "send me your check for whatever you think the idea is worth."

This was a very simple idea, and I doubt that it was original to Lee. It might well have been practiced by the Babylonian satraps or officials in the Roman Empire or even some medieval monks. At any rate, a few weeks later Charles Schwab sent Ivy Lee a check for \$25,000—an astronomical amount during the thirties. He said it was the most profitable lesson he had ever learned in his long business career. In the cold, hard business world there are few lessons more important than learning how to prioritize and live by those priorities. The degree of one's expertise in this matter is directly related to the success or failure of one's future.

On a much higher level, how well we Christians recognize and maintain spiritual priorities bears incalculable consequences for our entire lives. Sadly, some have never given a second thought to life's priorities. Others have, but have chosen the wrong priorities. Still others have the right priorities in perspective but do not have the self-control or wisdom or whatever to live by them. In [John](#)

[21:12-17](#) our Lord sets the matter straight for Peter and for all who make up his church.

The Priority of Love

Christians are called to serve, but it is all too easy in the everyday following of Christ to put our priority on service rather than on loving God. Techniques and methods can easily become our primary focus... (“DO-ing ministry vs. BE-ing the Church). To carry out our methods we need power, and instead of longing for and loving the source of the power, we sometimes lust for power alone. Production or results or success then becomes the center of our thinking. Roy Hession in his beautiful little book *We Would See Jesus* says:

To concentrate on service and activity for God may often actively thwart our attaining of the true goal, God himself. At first sight it seems heroic to fling our lives away in the service of God and of our fellows. We feel it is bound to mean more to him than our experience of him. Service seems so unselfish, whereas concentrating on our walk with God seems selfish and self-centered. But it is the very reverse. The things that God is most concerned about are our coldness of heart towards himself and our proud, unbroken natures. Christian service of itself can, and so often does, leave our self-centered nature untouched. ...With those things hidden in our hearts, we have only to work alongside others, and we find resentment, hardness, criticism, jealousy, and frustration issuing from our hearts. **We think we are working for God, but the test of how little of our service is for him is revealed by our resentment or self-pity....** We need to leave our lusting for ever-larger spheres of Christian service and concentrate on seeing God for ourselves and finding the deep answer for life in him.

The inversion of life's priorities is a deadly trap, especially for those who take their Christianity seriously—both Christian workers and caring laymen—because they want their lives to count, to do something that will make a difference.

The fact is, God has always made the first priority clear. From earliest times he has been explicit, even in the *Shema* sung by ancient Israel:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength! ([Deut. 6:4-5](#))

This theme was also explicit in our Lord's dealings with Mary and Martha. When Martha urged Jesus to send Mary into the kitchen to help and stop wasting time at the feet of Jesus, he answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better." **God wants us to be doers—to feed his sheep. But he wants us to *be* before we *do*. Love first!**

We need to reflect honestly upon our lives in the light of Peter's words in [verse 17](#): "Lord, you know all things." **In Peter's previous affirmations of Jesus' omniscience ([John 21:15-16](#)), he used a strong Greek word that meant Jesus knew every detail, but here he switches to a word that means intimate, personal knowledge, as if to say, "Lord, you have walked with me, you know me personally in every way."**

How do we make our love for Christ the highest priority in our lives? First, we must be absolutely honest about the level of our love. Secondly, we need to spend time with him, because the more time we spend with him, the more we will love him. How much time have we spent with him in the last month? We spend time with those we love.

- Preaching the Word