

## Comments on John 21

This chapter provides the background on what event changed the post-crucifixion apostles from being passive to active in the ministry. We are informed at the end of all three of the Synoptic Gospels that something changes and the apostles become zealous. This chapter explains what brought about that change.

The text parallels literal fishing with the apostle's former call to be fishers of men (cf. Matt. 4:18-21, Mark 1:16-19, Luke 5:1-11), an account absent in John's gospel. While Jesus was alive, Peter, James and John forsook their trade of fishing for the ministry. The original call is likewise attended by a miraculous catch of fish (cf. Luke 5:2-6). However, with Jesus' death they return to fishing again. Why? Perhaps they considered themselves failures, or maybe it was with the absence of Jesus as leader they lost their impetus, or they had bills to pay. Regardless, they left the full-time ministry and went back to their former vocation, at least on a part-time basis. So, Jesus comes to them and shows them as long as they are fishers of fish they will have no success. But, if they return to fishing after men, then they will have great success, and the Lord will take care of their material needs.

Another underlying theme to this chapter is Peter's former threefold denial of Jesus (cf. Matt. 26:75). Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, three confessions to recant his three denials. The connection between this past event and their present situation is Jesus is equating their abandoning the ministry and Peter's denial of Jesus. If they abandon their calling as special witnesses of Christ, then they are denying him. This is why Jesus asks Peter if he loves him more than the fish they have just caught. This implication was clearly focused primarily at Peter, but would have applied to all of the apostles present. All of them had let go of the public ministry.

<sup>1</sup>After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself.

<sup>2</sup>There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. <sup>3</sup>Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

<sup>4</sup>But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. <sup>6</sup>And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. <sup>7</sup>Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he

was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. <sup>8</sup> And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.

<sup>9</sup> As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. <sup>11</sup> Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

v1-11 There is another significant appearance of Jesus that John wants the reader to know about (v. 1).

Peter, several of the apostles and some disciples are at home in Galilee, and Peter decides to return to fishing, and they join him, but are unsuccessful in the effort (v. 2-3). When the sun rises the next morning they see a man on the shore (v. 4), who calls out to them, asking if they've caught anything, and they reply in the negative (v. 5). The man calls out to them to cast the net on the other of the ship, and they do, and the resulting catch is so large they cannot pull in the net (v. 6). John Beloved realizes it is Jesus and says so, and when Peter hears it he realizes he is correct, so he jumps in and swims to shore (v. 7). The others bring the smaller boat to shore, dragging the net full of fish the relatively short distance to shore (v. 8).

When they get to land they see Jesus waiting there with an established fire, with fish and bread cooking (v. 9). Jesus tells them to gather the fish (v. 10). Peter leaves Jesus and returns to the disciples to assist in landing and gathering the enormous amount of fish (v. 11).

v1 This appearance of Jesus is undocumented in the other three gospels, so John, who was present for the event, documents it.

"sea of Tiberias", the same as the [sea of Galilee](#).

v3 Jesus appeared to them in 20:21 and told them to continue in the ministry. But, here, Peter, who should be leading them in their efforts instead leads them back to their former vocation. Hence Jesus' intervention and chiding later in the chapter. Peter should be their ecclesiastical leader, instead, he says "I go a fishing".

v6 Whereas they were fishing all night and caught nothing, Jesus tells them a simple command and fills their net with fish. The act is a symbol of Providence. If they follow Jesus' instructions, they will catch many "fish" because He will tell them where they are.

v7 "for he was naked", "naked" isn't always naked. To the Semitic mind being stripped to the waist is "naked", cp. Isa. 20:2-3. The "coat" Peter puts on was more of a shirt, so Peter was probably not

wearing a shirt and was bare to his waist for the strenuous labor at hand.

v8 "in a little ship", they apparently had a larger sailing boat and a smaller boat involved in the fishing operation. Some, or possibly all, of the apostles and disciples get into the smaller boat and apparently row the short distance to shore.

v9 John includes the details here to show the reader that Jesus had been there for a while, long enough to start a fire and have is cook down to a bed of coals, and to catch, gut and filet fish and prepare bread for them to eat. If the resurrected Lord didn't do it Himself, then He had someone else take care of it for them. Regardless, John's intent is to convey the message that the Lord will provide for their temporal needs. He knows they need to eat, and He will take care of it. They need to go about their work as apostles.

v11 Compare this miracle with that of Luke 5:6-7. There, the net broke, while here it doesn't. The change in nets suggest their ministry will this time be more successful in garnering converts than was the ministry while Jesus was alive. It also suggests their material needs will be met providentially.

<sup>12</sup> Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. <sup>14</sup> This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. <sup>15</sup> So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. <sup>16</sup> He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. <sup>17</sup> He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

v12-17 After they finish landing the net full of fish, Jesus invites them to come and eat (v. 12), and He serves them all bread and fish (v. 13). After they've all eaten, Jesus specifically addresses Peter, asking him three times if he loves Him, and Peter confesses his does, then Jesus tells him to be His shepherd (v. 15-17).

As Jesus was the Good Shepherd, and still is in a Heavenly sense, but is absent from the earth, He commissions the apostles to now be His shepherds on earth in His absence. The fishermen are to become shepherds.

v14 John includes this detail to place it temporally in the series of post-resurrection events. This event was after those described in the previous chapter, but preceding those described in Matt. 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-18 and the later Mark 16:19, Luke 24:49-51, which subsequently led to Luke 24:52-53 and Mark. 16:20.

v15-17 In the questions between Jesus and Peter the word "love" is used consistently. However, in the Greek, the term alternates between "agapao" and "phileo". The Greek "phileo" makes reference to brotherly love and congenial fondness, whereas "agapao" makes reference to the kind of transcendent love that motivates one to self-sacrifice for another's well-being. The first two times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him he is presented by John as using "agapao". The last time Jesus asks him he uses "phileo". All three times Peter replies he is presented as using "phileo". If we assume there are Aramaic equivalents, then what is happening here is something of a confession on Peter's part that Jesus' love for him is greater than Peter's love for Jesus. Peter is confessing and grieving over the previous threefold denial and is no longer brazenly insisting he would follow Jesus to the death. During the interview Jesus informs Peter what he must do in order to change his "phileo" to "agapao", namely "feed my lambs/sheep".

Jesus then closes the interview in v. 18 with a prediction that Peter's "phileo" will change to "agapao" as he follows in Jesus' footsteps being crucified for his sake.

"lambs...sheep...sheep", the KJV translation accurately reflects the Greek as there are separate terms used for babies versus adults of [arnion](#)...[probaton](#)...probaton. Jesus wants Peter to be sure to take care of all of His followers, from the most vulnerable to the least vulnerable.

v15 "lovest thou me more than these?", Jesus is referring to the net load of 153 fish and asking Peter if he loves fish more than himself.

<sup>18</sup> Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. <sup>19</sup> This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

<sup>20</sup> Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? <sup>21</sup> Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? <sup>22</sup> Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou

me. <sup>23</sup> Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

v18-23 Jesus closes the adjuration by telling Peter he will live until he is old, and will ultimately follow Jesus is being crucified, which he previously feared, but will not fear (v. 18-19).

Peter then asks about John Beloved (v. 20-21) and Jesus says John will wait until He returns, which people thought meant he would not die (v. 22-23).

v20-21 Peter may well have asked about several, if not all, of the other apostles. But, John only records this one because it deals with himself.

v23 This verse is ambiguous without the later statements in D&C 7 clarifying the issue. See also Matt. 16:28 for another similar ambiguous statement.

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. <sup>25</sup> And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.

v24-25 John closes the book with his testimony that what he has written is true (v. 24). Jesus also did many other things as well, but it would be impossible to write it all down (v. 25).

v25 An allusion to Deut. 34:10-12, implying Jesus is the prophet like Moses.

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