

UNIT 1: THE GOSPEL BY JOHN

Lesson 8

Jan. 25, 2026

Breakfast With Jesus:

The resurrection of Christ should compel us to join His mission to reach the lost.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

Chapter 21 is a profound conclusion to the Gospel of John. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples by the Sea of Galilee, where He miraculously provided a catch of fish and shared a meal with them, demonstrating His care and provision. A key moment unfolds as Jesus gently restores Peter, who had previously denied Him, by entrusting him with the mission to feed His lambs and sheep. This chapter demonstrated Christ's forgiveness, His call to serve others, and the responsibility He imparts to His disciples. John concludes by affirming the truth of his Gospel and saying that what he had presented only scratches the surface of all Jesus did.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Fishing on the Sea of Galilee was closely tied to the economy, society, and culture during Jesus' time. It served as the primary livelihood for many, providing vital sustenance and income that supported families and trade. As a freshwater lake rich in fish, its resources were essential to local communities. Fishermen typically worked in crews, relying on their skills, teamwork, and tools such as boats and nets. This trade gained further significance through Jesus' ministry, with disciples like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, who were fishermen. Jesus often invoked fishing symbolism, calling His followers to be "fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). In John 21, Jesus reinforces this call.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. A MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH: John 21:1-8.

- A. Gathering in Galilee (1-6)
- B. Recognizing the Lord's Presence (7-8)

2. BREAKFAST AND COMMISSIONING: John 21:9-19.

- A. Dining With the Risen Lord (9-14)
- B. From Fishing to Shepherding (15-19)

3. JOHN CONCLUDES HIS WONDROUS GOSPEL: John 21:20-25.

- A. Hope for Jesus' Return (20-23)
- B. A Testimony of the Truth (24-25)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. A MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH: John 21:1-8.

A. Gathering in Galilee, John 21:1-6

Before His crucifixion, Jesus foretold both Peter's denial and His resurrection, promising to meet His disciples in Galilee after rising again (Matthew 26:32; Mark 14:28). In John 21, we see the fulfillment of this promise unfold. Contrary to the common assumption that the disciples returned to fishing as a way of reverting to their pre-Jesus lives, there is no Biblical evidence to support this notion. Their decision to fish may have been driven by practical needs, such as generating income, processing the recent life-altering events, or as a distraction during a time of uncertainty. What is clear, however, is that they obeyed the message to go to galilee and await Jesus (Mark 16:7; Luke 24:6). Their journey demonstrates faithfulness despite the emotional and spiritual challenges they faced following their Teacher's death and resurrection.

Fishing at night was a customary practice on the sea of Galilee, as it allowed fishermen to catch fish more easily in deeper waters and sell their fresh haul in the morning markets. Yet on this particular night, the disciples caught nothing despite their efforts (John 21:3). As dawn approached, Jesus appeared on the shore, though they did not recognize Him. He instructed them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat – a directive that seemed illogical given their fruitless attempts all night. Fish do not distinguish between sides of a boat, and after many hours of failure, a single catch would hardly seem significant. Nevertheless, at His word, they obeyed. Their act of faith resulted in an extraordinary miracle, as they hauled in an abundance of fish (v. 6). This moment not only demonstrated Jesus' divine authority but also served as a potent reminder that success comes through obedience to Him, even when circumstances seem futile.

B. Recognizing the Lord's Presence, John 21:7-8.

In verse 4, Jesus arrived at the lake, but the disciples did not recognize Him. On the one hand, this seems to have been a common occurrence for His followers after His resurrection. Many mistook Jesus for the gardener (John 20:14-16), and two other disciples on the boat, which included the inner circle of Peter, James, and John, had already seem the resurrected Lord. Only a few days earlier, Thomas had witnessed the scars on Jesus' hands and side (John 20:24-29). Perhaps the conditions early in the morning prevented a clear view of Jesus on the shore, but being only about a hundred yards away at that time (2:18), why didn't they recognize His voice? After all, Jesus had taught them, "My sheep hear my voice" (10:27).

With the miracle of the catch of fish, John recognized this was Jesus. Peter immediately agreed (21:7). It probably reminded them of their earlier encounter with Christ in Luke 5, where Jesus initiated such a great catch of fish that the nets began to break, the boats began to sink, and Jesus told them that from then on, they would catch men (Luke 5:10). Hence, Peter put on his outer garment and jumped into the water. He could not wait to greet his Savior, and he demonstrated his devotion by sloshing to shore ahead of the boats (John 21:7).

In John 21:1-8, a powerful contrast is drawn between striving and seeking. When we passionately desire something, even after God has already promised it, as Abraham and Sarah did, we might try to force it to happen instead of trusting His promise. In our striving, we can become so caught up in our efforts that it becomes harder to see or hear Jesus. But when we pause, listen, and seek His presence, we realize He's been near all along. With His intervention, things that seem to take forever with our efforts can happen instantly, reminding us of the power of faith and surrender.

2. BREAKFAST AND COMMISSIONING: John 21:9-19.

A. Dining With the Risen Lord, John 21:9-14.

When the rest of the disciples reached the shore, Jesus already had fish and bread prepared for them. However, He still recognized their efforts by urging them, “Bring of the fish which ye have now caught” (v. 10). If there were lingering doubts concerning the identity of the man who called out to them, now seeing and hearing Him up close, they knew “that it was the Lord” 9v. 12). To make the picture even clearer - reminiscent of the way He took bread and fish, blessed them, and fed the multitude (6:1-13) – Jesus now provided food for the disciples.

Considering the historical reliability of the Scriptures, particularly the resurrection of Jesus, this passage carries significant weight. First, John’s inclusion of the exact number of fish caught that morning – 153- is an unusual detail that should not be overlooked. It testifies that the disciples were so impressed that they counted the fish and years later, when writing the Gospel, John remembered the exact number. Details such as this are not referenced in stories that are merely myths or legends. Second, those who do not believe in Jesus’ physical resurrection as truth argue that He only appeared in the form of a spirit, but verse 12-15 indicate Jesus ate with His disciples. Spirits do not eat. This was a bodily resurrection. Last, verse 14 notes this was the third time Jesus had appeared to His disciples after His death and resurrection, so we can discount the theory that they were hallucinating. These appearances cannot be explained away as visions because Jesus appeared to different people in different places and at different times – in Jerusalem and then in Galilee.

B. From Fishing to Shepherding, John 21:15-19.

In the first fish-catching miracle, Peter was overcome with his sins and even begged the Lord to go away. However, Jesus responded by calling Peter to follow Him, saying, “From now on you will catch men” (Luke 5:10 NKJV). In the miracle of John 21, however, we witness something different. When Peter swam to Jesus and followed Jesus’ instruction regarding the fish (v. 11), Jesus responded by inquiring about Peter’s love. Three times Jesus asked, “Do you love Me? (v. 17a NKJV). This was likely intended to negate the three times Peter had denied knowing Jesus just a few days prior (18:15-18, 25-27). Jesus’ motive had nothing to do with any desire for personal affirmation from Peter. Peter responded, “Lord, You know all things. You know that I love you” (21:17b NKJV). Something deeper was taking place, and Peter was struggling to understand it. Each time Peter reaffirmed his love, Jesus reaffirmed Peter’s calling. Peter had not been disqualified because of his failure; instead, he was being restored and reinstated for Kingdom service.

While Jesus initially commissioned Peter to fish for people, Jesus now explained that the way Peter was to fulfill his calling involved laying aside the fishing nets and taking up the staff of a shepherd. Jesus said, “Feed my lambs” (v. 15), “Feed my sheep” (v. 16), and “Feed my sheep” (v. 17), which expressed Jesus’ desire to see Peter become a shepherd to the church by preaching the Gospel, expressing love and compassion, and spiritually nourishing the flock. Therefore, the call, “Follow Me” (v. 19), is twofold. First, Jesus called Peter to follow Him by becoming a faithful shepherd. Second, Jesus called Peter to follow Him into a life of sacrificial service, even to the point of death.

Jesus’ tough love is on display in this passage, serving as both an encouragement and a warning. On one hand, for those of us who may fail, we can remember our Lord is willing to restore and renew us for service. Because of His grace, we are not disqualified. On the other hand, we are

reminded that fulfilling Christ's mission involves following Him into a life of radical love and self-sacrifice. This is no mere children's tale with a nice moral at the end. Jesus truly lived, died, and was resurrected: therefore, His commission to serve demands a genuine response.

3. JOHN CONCLUDES HIS WONDROUS GOSPEL: John 21:20-25.

A. Hope for Jesus' Return, John 21:20-23.

After hearing about his fate, Peter wondered about John. According to verse 20, it appears that this conversation was taking place privately between Jesus and Peter, although John was nearby. Perhaps Peter's question in verse 21 should not be surprising since Peter and John were so closely associated after years of ministry and service together. However, Jesus quickly clarified that John's fate was of no consequence to Peter: "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me" (v. 22 NKJV). Jesus was saying that Peter should be more concerned about his own journey than anyone else's to avoid the trap of comparison and trust that Jesus knows what is best. What matters to Jesus is that everyone faithfully fulfills their assigned role in ministry.

In verse 23, John addressed a rumor that had spread concerning his fate. Some had interpreted Jesus' words to mean that either John would not die or that Christ would return before John died. Either way, this belief was in error. Jesus was not saying John would not die; He was only urging Peter to concern himself first and foremost with his pursuit of God and living out an honorable response to His call. Regardless, underlying this test is the important reminder and assumption that Christ's return is imminent. It is how we wait and prepare ourselves until His return that matters.

B. A Testimony of the Truth, John 21:24-25.

These verses present an impactful conclusion to the Gospel of John, emphasizing the reliability of its testimony and the immeasurable nature of Christ's deeds. In verse 24, the role of the beloved disciple is highlighted as the author of these sacred accounts. He is portrayed as a firsthand witness to the events recorded, giving readers assurance of the Gospel's authenticity and preserving its historical integrity. This testament, however, is not only an individual claim. Its reliability is emphasized through the endorsement of others, whose collective agreement ("we know that his testimony is true" v. 24) further establishes its validity within the early Christian community. This communal affirmation invites readers to place their trust in the account as a truthful and reliable account of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Verse 25 shifts the focus to the boundless legacy of Jesus' works, utilizing vivid language to convey the vastness and incomprehensibility of His ministry. It says if it were possible to collect all of Christ's deeds in written form, all the libraries in the world, indeed the world itself, could not contain the full scope of all He did and taught. This remark highlights the divine nature of Jesus, whose earthly mission transcended what could ever be fully documented. Through this statement, readers encounter the infinite richness of Christ's life and the profound mystery of God's work through Him. Together, these concluding verses encapsulate both the trustworthy nature of John's Gospel and the awe-inspiring splendor of Jesus' mission, encouraging readers to reflect on the eternal significance of His life, teachings, and ultimate impact.

In the Gospel of John, we are invited to follow Jesus, eagerly await His return, and embrace the gift of eternal life through Him. Along this journey, it's important not to get caught up in comparing ourselves to others or speculating about God's plans for them. Comparison steals the joy of our unique path, and rumors can create unnecessary division and mistrust. Instead, let's focus on keeping a Kingdom perspective, fixing our eyes on Jesus, and seeking His personal purpose for our lives with an open heart.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Having been called by Jesus to be His representatives on earth, we must (1) set our eyes on Him, (2) join Him in His mission, and (3) lovingly serve others as He did.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Like Peter, we should draw near to God, repent for any sins, and experience His forgiveness. Then, we should join Christ's mission by seeking opportunities this week to tend to His sheep.

WORKSHEET

The Great Commission in John's Gospel

The Great Commission is the commission (commandment) Christ gave to His disciples, which is in effect for all believers in Him for all time, as stated in the well-known words of Matthew 28:18-20.

This Commission To Evangelize the Whole World is found in all the Gospels, and in The Acts of The Apostles, but in different forms, and always by the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ speaking to His disciples.

In The Gospel by Mark, the Great Commission is stated as follows: "And He (Jesus) said to them (His disciples), 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned'" (Mark 16:15-16 NKJV).

In the Gospel by Luke, the Great Commission is told this way: "Then He (Jesus) said to them (His disciples), "thus it is written (in Holy Scripture), and this it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission (forgiveness) of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem'" (Luke 24:46-47 NKJV).

In The Acts of The Apostles, the Great Commission is found in these words spoken by Jesus to His disciples shortly before His ascension back to God the Father in Heaven" "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NKJV).

In The Gospel by John, the Great Commission is found in words spoken by Jesus to His disciples on the day of His resurrection: "So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" (John 20:21-23 NKJV).

Go Into All the World

- 1. Why do you suppose Jesus enabled the disciples to catch a vast number of fish (John 21:6)?**

- 2. From verse 7:**
 - How should we be like John?

 - How should we be like Simon Peter?

- 3. Why do you suppose Jesus spoke the exact two words to Simon Peter in John 21:19 that He had spoken to him three years earlier (Matthew 4:18-19)?**

- 4. In John 21:25, what did John declare about the works of Jesus?**

- 5. Describe a work of God in your life that you should tell others about.**