

*For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.*

Isaiah 28:10

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First Love Ministries, Inc.

PRAYER STUDY #209

**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN**

**CHAPTER 21**

1. Jesus appears to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee.
2. Unfruitfulness of service not led by Christ
3. Fruitfulness of service when following Christ
4. Jesus' provision for His disciples
5. Love, the only proper motive for service
6. Jesus prophesies Peter's manner of death.
7. John's concluding remarks

Part One-Verses One through Two

1. After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias and in this manner showed He Himself.
2. There were together Simon Peter; and Thomas, called Didymus; and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee; and the sons of Zebedee; and two others of His disciples.

The Gospel of John seems to come to an end in Chapter 20. We don't know if John added Chapter 21 or if someone else wrote it, but whoever wrote Chapter 21 most likely knew these fishermen personally. I believe, because of verses 20-23, which I will discuss later, that John did write this chapter.

Scholars believe John added Chapter 21 to further verify the resurrection. Some thought the resurrected Lord was only a spirit or a vision or a hallucination. The reality is that Christ was in a physical body and was a real person with the marks of the nails and spear thrust in his side. A spirit or vision or hallucination most likely would not point out a school of fish to the fishermen or cook and eat a meal with the disciples as we will see that Jesus did later in this chapter.

Jesus appeared to His disciples only on ten occasions during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. Five of these were on the very first day. So He only appeared 5 times in the remaining 39 days, and not all of these times were to His original disciples. The order of the appearances are as follows:

1. To Mary Magdalene (Matthew 16:9-11 & John 20:11-18)
2. To the women returning from the tomb with the angelic message (Matthew 28:8-10)
3. To Peter, probably in the afternoon (Luke 24:34)
4. To the Emmaus Disciples toward evening (Mark 16:12 & Luke 24:13-32)
5. To the disciples, Thomas being absent (Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36-43, & John 20:19-25)
6. On the next Sunday night, to the disciples, Thomas being present (John 20:26-31 & 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:5)
7. To the seven beside the sea of Galilee (John 21)
8. To the apostles and more than 500 people (Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-18, & 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:6)
9. To James, the Lord's half brother (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:7)
10. At His ascension from the Mount of Olives (Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:44-53, & Acts 1:3-12)

The Sea of Galilee is 33 miles in circumference, 13 miles long, 8 miles wide, and 141 feet deep at its maximum depth. It is in northeastern Israel near the Golan Heights in an area subject to earthquakes and volcanic activity. It is also known as the Lake of Genneseret, Lake of Tiberias, and Kinneret.

#### Part Two-Verses Three through Four

3. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth and entered into a boat immediately, and that night they caught nothing.
4. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

This is typical Peter. He could not just sit around and do nothing, and because of his charismatic leadership, the other disciples followed right in line with him.

Night time was the best time to fish on the Sea of Galilee.

Scofield says that these verses illustrate the fruitlessness of service to Jesus in self-will and under human leadership.

#### Part Three-Verse Five

5. Then Jesus saith unto them, **Children, have ye any food?** They answered Him, No.

The word translated *children* in this passage is more like saying, “Sirs.” It is not a term of endearment, like “little children” in 1<sup>st</sup> John. The fishermen most likely were frustrated and gave a short and emphatic answer, “No.”

#### Part Four-Verse Six through Eleven

6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.
10. Jesus saith unto them, **Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.**
11. 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.

To have someone on the shore direct fishermen on the lake is a common practice. People on the shore often could see schools of fish that were invisible to those on the water.

In the dark of the dawn John was the first to recognize the Lord. When John told Peter that it was the Lord, Peter puts on a garment and instantly dives into the water to swim to Jesus. Peter was not actually fully naked but had on a loin cloth, sort of like having on a bathing suit. This is what all fishermen of that day wore. However, according to Barclay, this was considered being naked, and to the Jew greeting someone was a religious act, and all religious acts had to be carried out by someone who was clothed. That is why Peter took the time to put on a tunic before jumping in the water.

John is a master at symbolism. Every detail he writes has significance. Why was he so specific about the number of fish caught? There have been many theories about this. Perhaps the

simplest explanation comes from Jerome, a bible scholar of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. He says that there are 153 kinds of fish in the sea. The net represents the Church. The catch symbolizes that some day all people of all nations will be gathered together in Christ. The net or Church is able to hold such a large catch without the net breaking. Thus, the Church is for all men of all colors and ethnic backgrounds. Whosoever will, may come.

Scofield says this is an example of the fruitfulness of Christ directed service.

#### Part Five-Verses Twelve through Fourteen

12. Jesus saith unto them, **Come and dine.** And none of the disciples durst ask Him, Who are thou? Knowing that it was the Lord.
13. Jesus then cometh and taketh bread and giveth them and fish likewise.
14. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed Himself to His disciples, after that He was risen from the dead.

Jesus sends us out into the whole world to share the Gospel, but first He gives us an invitation to *Come and dine*. He wants to feed us His word. We have to come apart to be with Him.

#### Part Six-Verses Fifteen through Seventeen

15. So when they dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, **Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?** He said unto Him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my lambs.**
16. He saith to him again the second time, **Simon, son of Jonas, loveth thou Me?** He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.**
17. 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.**

These few verses are very powerful. What was Jesus asking Simon Peter? Was He asking him if he was willing to give up all these things around him for the Kingdom's sake? Was He asking Peter if he would abandon the tools of his livelihood and abandon all hope of a successful career and a steady job in order to give himself completely to the service of the Lord, to the preaching of the Gospel, and to the care of God's people? Or was Jesus asking Peter if he loved Him even more than all

the rest of this intimate group loved Jesus? Or was He asking Peter if he, Peter, loved Him more than he, Peter, loved anyone else? We don't really know what "these" refers to, but we can assume that Jesus asked Peter this question three times to give Peter the chance to affirm his love for Jesus and to assure Peter that he was forgiven for his three denials of Christ.

According to Scofield, there are two different words used for "love" in this passage. One is *agape*, which is to love deeply as God loves, and *phileo*, which is a lesser love and means *to be fond of* as in friendship. Scofield tells us, "In the first two instances, where the Lord asks Peter, 'Lovest thou me?,' He uses *agape*; but Peter, remembering his three denials of the Lord and aware now of his own weaknesses, does not dare to reply with as strong a word as *agape*. Instead, he employs *phileo* in his reply, 'Yea Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.' When the Lord inquires the third time, 'Loves thou me,' He uses the lesser word *phileo*. And again the humbled disciple replies, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love [phileo] thee.'

Jesus responds to Peter's answer to His questions by giving him a great commission: "*If you love me, then feed my lambs or feed my sheep.*" Notice that it is *My lambs and My sheep*. Jesus is telling us that pastors, missionaries, teachers, and parents are undershepherds to whose care Christ's sheep are entrusted. We can prove we love Jesus best by loving others in His name. The whole Gospel can be summed up in one word, *Love*. And we can best follow Him by loving Him *first* and then our neighbors as ourselves. Like Peter we are called to feed His sheep and to guard His lambs.

#### Part Seven-Verses Eighteen through Nineteen

18. **Verily, verily, I say unto thee. When thou was young, thou girdest thyself and walkedst where thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another gird thee and carry thee where thou wouldest not.**

19. This spoke He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, **Follow me.**

The love that Jesus was asking from Peter brought Peter to a cross in Rome where he was crucified on a cross. He asked to be nailed on the cross upside down, for he said that he was not worthy to die as his Lord had died.

#### Part Eight-Verses Twenty through 25

20. 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?

21. Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?

22. Jesus saith unto him, **If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.**

23. 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?**

24. This is the disciple which testifieth of these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

25. 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.

These last verses of this short chapter are probably the reason John or whoever felt a need to write Chapter 21. There was a rumor going around in the church that John would not die but be alive when Jesus came back for His Church. Assuming it was John who wrote this, we get the truth straight out of the mouth of one who was present when Jesus spoke these words. I don't think Peter was speaking out of jealousy. I believe that John was his best friend, and he sincerely wanted to know what would happen to John.

John was a great witness of Jesus as he lived out a long life in Ephesus, with a short side trip to Patmos. He was well-respected and loved by the early Church. He was regarded as the general overseer of the Church and was the last of the original twelve to die. He was the only one who died of natural causes. John was the first who gave the greatest argument for Christianity, that is personal experience. We can argue with opinions and dogma, but we cannot argue against personal experience. John was there. He was recording what he actually saw and heard. He was an eye-witness.

The last verse gives us a great truth. Whatever we know of Jesus, we have only grasped a fragment of Him. Human thought, human books, even human testimonies are inadequate in revealing the greatness and the power of the Lord.