

“Breakfast by the Sea”

John 21:1-14

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Introduction:

If I were to ask you what the Smokehouse, Uncle Herchel's, Old Timer's, and the Country Boy have in common, I would imagine that at least several of us here this morning understand that those are breakfasts served at Cracker Barrel. Most of you know that I love breakfast. In fact, I would agree with most nutritionists that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. The nutritionists would probably disagree with me, however, as to exactly *what* should be eaten for breakfast! When discussing this with our own nutritionist several months ago, she suggested some kind of high fiber bread, with perhaps cheese or peanut butter, accompanied by a cup of milk. And we have made some huge progress in this department. We have found some English muffins with 8 grams of fiber, and I have been eating a little chunk of cheese every morning. However, it is hard to break some of those old habits. It is hard to beat the Old Timer's from Cracker Barrel, or the breakfast special (the bacon, and yanks, and wheat toast, and eggs) at Mickies' Dairy Bar across from Camp Randall, or the sunrise sampler from Perkins, or the Dutch Baby at the Original Pancake House, or the biscuits and gravy at the Log Cabin in Baraboo, or the Big Breakfast at the Cottage Café—these are some amazing meals.

Breakfast is certainly the most important meal of the day. But perhaps the only thing that would make any breakfast better would be to eat it outside, to cook it over a campfire—to survive a night of camping, to wake up and get the fire started, the smell of the smoke and the coffee, the whole experience just seems to make a good breakfast taste even better.

This morning, I would like for us to consider a breakfast that was cooked by the Lord over a charcoal fire on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The passage is found in **John 21**, and in our pew Bibles, the Scripture is found on **page 1697**. **John 21** is rather unusual, because when we get to the end of **John 20**, it almost seems as if John brings it to a close. At the end of **John 20** is where John said, ***“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”*** That would have been a good and powerful end to the book of John, the last of the four gospel accounts to be written, but then it is almost as if John says, ***“Oh, but there's this one more thing!”***

And so the inspired writer continues with **John 21** as several of the apostles decide to go fishing together one last time. You might remember that on the night before

the Lord was crucified, He told His disciples that he was about to die, but that after He was raised up from the dead, that He would go ahead of them to Galilee (**Mark 14:28**). And then even after the resurrection, the angels at the tomb, and then the Lord Himself, also told Mary Magdalene to go remind the disciples that they were to meet Him in Galilee (**Matthew 28:7-10**). And so many years later, as John writes this down, perhaps he thinks to himself, **"I need to finish this. We cannot leave this hanging. We need to finish this story. We need to explain what happens in Galilee."** And so he continues with **John 21**. If you will, please look with me at **John 21:1-14**...

¹ After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. ² Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

⁴ But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." ⁶ And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. ⁷ Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.

⁹ So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." ¹¹ Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. ¹⁴ This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

Back up in those opening verses, we find that Peter, after the Lord's resurrection, goes back to fishing on the Sea of Galilee. We have studied quite a bit about fishing

over the past 24 hours (I don't know much about fishing, but I do know breakfast), and so it is fitting that we bring this series to a close by once again looking at an event that takes place on this particular body of water. And so this morning as we close our Vacation Bible School by thinking about what happened here in **John 21**, I would like for us to consider just a few basic reasons as to why the apostle John would have included this paragraph in the Bible.

I. And one of the first and most obvious ideas that comes across here is the importance of OBEDIENCE.

In **verse 3**, the Bible says that the disciples, ***"...went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing."*** Now please remember: Several of these disciples were commercial fishermen—these disciples were like those fishermen on the show *Deadliest Catch*—this is what they had done for a living. They knew the Sea of Galilee, they knew all of the secret spots, they knew what bait to use, they knew all of the techniques. And yet we find here that they fished all night long and did not catch a single fish. How frustrating that must have been! Can you imagine those disciples pulling up that empty net at 2 o'clock in the morning? Can you imagine how they must have inspected the net for tears, and how they must have discussed among themselves what they were doing wrong and what to try next? Over and over again, the net goes in, the net comes out, and it is empty. What in the world is going on? This has never happened before...actually, it had happened once before, 3-½ years ago...but we'll get back to that in just a moment.

But after doing this all night long, the sun starts to come up, and as the sun comes up they start to make out the figure of a man over on the shore, and the man calls out, ***"Children, you do not have any fish, do you?"*** And from what I can tell, the normal word for ***"fish"*** is not actually used here, but the word the Lord uses here literally refers to anything that you would put between two pieces of bread. And so the Lord is basically calling out from the shore, ***"Hey, you guys don't even have enough for a sandwich, do you?"*** The disciples answer, ***"No,"*** and then this figure on the beach calls out again and tells them (in **verse 6**), ***"Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch."*** Remember: At this point, the disciples do not even know that the man on the beach is Jesus, but they listen to His instruction, they obey, and then immediately (in the very same verse), the Bible says that, ***"...they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish."***

Now, from the point of view of a commercial fisherman, the Lord's instruction here would have made no practical sense whatsoever. Here they were fishing all night long: What possible difference could it make whether they cast off the right side or the left side? They had been putting the nets in and out of the boat all night long, the boat has been all over the place at all different angles—is one more cast really going to make much of a difference? Please try to imagine the crew of *Deadliest Catch* coming in after spending several days on the Bering Sea with absolutely nothing to show for it—not a single crab: Can you imagine someone standing there

on the dock as they come in, **“Hey, did you guys try fishing on the right side?”** I would not want to be that person!

The difference is that Jesus told them what to do and they did it. As the Creator, Jesus could have just made all of those fish jump up into the boat. I mean, that would have been really, really cool! Can you imagine fishing all night long and not catching anything, and then someone on the shore says, “Watch this!” and then suddenly 153 fish just jump up into the boat? That would have been amazing! But instead of doing that, it is interesting to me that Jesus told the disciples to DO something! Even though the command did not necessarily make sense, even though it went against everything they knew as fishermen, even though the Lord’s command went against all of the knowledge about the Sea of Galilee that had been passed down through the generations, they obeyed the Lord and they were blessed! It takes humility to listen, it takes humility for a fisherman to take advice from a carpenter, it takes a teachable spirit to accept something, even when we may not understand it completely at the time—marching around the walls of Jericho once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day; dipping seven times in the Jordan river as a cure for leprosy; leading 300 soldiers to surround an enormous enemy camp with nothing but torches, clay pots, and trumpets; allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins.

One thing I love about **verse 11** is that when Peter finally gets around to actually dragging the net from the boat to the shore, the Bible says that the net was full of **“large fish.”** The word **“large”** there is the Greek word **“mega.”** And so, literally, these were **“mega fish.”** These were not just any old fish, but these were **“mega fish.”** They were huge, and the net was full, almost to the point of breaking!

The point here is that God can do some amazing things. He does not NEED our help, but He wants us to be included. He wants us to learn the lesson of obedience. The Lord already had some fish already up there on the beach, but He wanted the disciples to bring their own. He wanted them to trust and obey. Today, is there something we know we need to be doing (based on our study of God’s word)? Perhaps what we are being told to do will be difficult. Perhaps it will be a challenge. Perhaps it will change our relationship with our parents or with our children or with our good friends. Perhaps we are worried or frustrated. Like the disciples, though, we are being called on to obey the Lord—to stop the sin, to trust in the Lord, to make a change, to publicly admit that Jesus is God’s Son, to be immersed into the Lord, to stick with it, to go out there and fish. Are all of us ready to cast our nets on the other side? The Lord just wants us to obey. He does not demand that we be good fishermen. He does not demand that we catch lots of fish. But He does tell us to put the net out there. Are we willing to do what the Lord has commanded?

II. As we look back at this passage, there is another very practical lesson for us to consider, and that is: GOD HAS THE POWER TO TAKE CARE OF US EVEN WHEN THE SITUATION LOOKS REALLY BAD.

Let us just remember here that the apostles would have been very hungry. They would have been tired. They had struggled through the night. But in the morning, Jesus was standing right there on the shore with breakfast cooking on the fire. Even after all that Jesus had been through over the past several weeks, He remembered to care for these disciples who were out there struggling on the Sea of Galilee. The Lord is a God of compassion, and even after His crucifixion and resurrection, the Lord continues to serve. The same Jesus who washed the disciples' feet is now crouched over this charcoal fire and He is cooking them breakfast! Doesn't it seem that this is one reason why this passage was preserved for us in the Bible, to remind us that God always cares for us, that the Lord always provides for us?

When we are going through some kind of stressful situation, the Lord is standing on the shore and is ready to help us through it. And what we notice here in **John 21** is that the Lord is the one who takes the initiative. In **verse 10**, the Lord is the One who says, *"Bring some of the fish which you have now caught."* It is the Lord who says (in **verse 12**), *"Come and have breakfast."* Jesus offers the invitation, and it is up to us to accept that invitation. Peter could have turned it down, Peter could have stayed in the boat, but we find here that he puts his outer garment back on, he jumps overboard, and he starts swimming for the shore. Just as we should also, Peter accepts the Lord's invitation. Peter accepts the Lord's help.

But the main idea here is that Jesus as the Son of God was providing for His disciples. After a night of catching nothing, Jesus provides a boatload of mega-fish! He went above and beyond and provided for those disciples even beyond what they could have imagined. As Paul would go on to write later (in **Philippians 4:19**), *"...my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* This breakfast reminds us that God always cares for us.

III. But before we close our lesson this morning, I would also suggest another reason why this account was included in the Bible for us, and the lesson comes in the form of yet another reminder that JESUS MEANS EVERYTHING.

We remember that the apostles caught nothing all night long, but when the Lord stepped in, the net filled up immediately. In fact, it was as if the fish had cooperated with the Lord. The fish obeyed the Lord just as the apostles obeyed the Lord. The fish gave up their own lives to make the point that Jesus means everything, that Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth, that Jesus is the Creator, the Son of God. Just like the fish that swallowed Jonah, these fish were also obeying the will of God to make a point. And again, this is so similar to the miracle near the beginning of Jesus' ministry (as Silas read for us earlier in the Scripture reading), the miracle from our first lesson yesterday morning—when Jesus told the disciples to go out into the deeper water after a night of catching nothing, when He told them to cast their nets on the other side. Obviously, that miracle would have come to mind here. They were reminded once again that even fish obey the Lord, that Jesus means everything.

In **verse 11**, we find that they drag in 153 fish. As I prepared for this morning's lesson, I was amazed at all of the ways people have tried to explain the figure 153. I mean, people went crazy on this! I even found a little brochure in my files with the title, "**Why Did Jesus Catch 153 Fish?**" And this man took up 16 pages explaining his particular theory. I'll have to admit that I got lost after page 4, but the theory has something to do with 153 being some kind of "**triangular number.**" But I was thinking to myself, "**Who cares?**" And really it seems that so many people can very easily get caught up in this kind of thing, and ultimately it gets back to their desire to claim to have figured out something that nobody else knows! It gets back to a matter of pride, it gets back to a matter of, "**I know more about the Bible than you do!**"

But after extensive research, I want to let you know the real significance behind the number 153. Are you ready? John gave us this number...because that's how many fish there were! In other words, the catch was so huge, they knew that it was one for the record books! And so like any good fishermen, someone sat down and counted those mega-fish one-by-one! They counted the fish for the same reason fishermen measure fish today, because it matters! This event was unusual, it was miraculous, and it was a reminder that Jesus is everything, that the Lord was responsible. And the number is even more important when we realize that John did not write his gospel account until several decades after the Lord's death. And so here we are maybe in 80 or 90 AD, perhaps 50 or 60 years later, and John remembers, "**Ahhh, 153 fish! That was definitely a miracle!**"

Of course, as those fish were lying there in the net, the fish themselves were not important. But what was important was how they got there! Those 153 fish got there because Jesus put them there! They got there because the disciples obeyed the Lord, because the Lord cared for those disciples, and they got there to prove that Jesus means everything! This catch was not the result of good bait, or good equipment, or a good boat, or good technique, or a good location, but these 153 fish were proof that Jesus was the Son of God.

And here is something else to consider: At least a few of these fish were about to be eaten by God! Again, here is the Son of God crouching down by a charcoal fire eating fish with a few of His closest friends. That's the point! Jesus is the point! Without the Lord, there's no story here! Jesus means everything!

As I mentioned at the beginning of this morning's lesson, I love breakfast! But this breakfast was awesome, because they were eating with the Son of God, and they knew it. Can you imagine being there? We have an interesting statement in **verse 12**, where John tells us that, "**None of the disciples ventured to question Him, 'Who are You?' knowing that it was the Lord.**" And so as they sat around the fire, we have the idea that they are about to burst with excitement, because they know that they are eating breakfast with the Lord! John knew it by the sound of His voice. Peter knew it because John said so. Even Thomas knew it. They all knew it. Jesus means everything!

Conclusion:

As we close our lesson this morning, I hope we appreciate why John remembered this event for so long. It must have really made an impression, and it helps us understand why John has included this account in the Bible. We may be overwhelmed, we may be facing some tremendous problems, but the account of Jesus and the breakfast by the sea reminds us that as long as we obey the Lord, He will provide, and that the Lord Jesus is all that really matters in this life. Do we really believe this? Some here this morning may need to rearrange some priorities. A lot of these guys ended up dying because they refused to back down from their claim that Jesus is the Son of God. In fact, tradition tells us that all of them were killed for their faith, with the one exception of John himself, who most likely died of old age as he was in prison for preaching the gospel. Do we have that kind of courage, the courage to put Jesus first even when our own families may tempt us to turn away? As far as I can tell, this breakfast, prepared by nail-scarred hands, was perhaps the last meal that the disciples ate with the Lord.

This morning, the Lord is inviting us once again to join him for a meal. We meet the Lord around His table on the first day of the week, but before we meet Him at His table, we need to make sure that we are in a right relationship with God. We make things right by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be immersed into His death in baptism. If you are already a Christian and are ready to apologize to this congregation for your unfaithful attendance in the past, if you are ready to set things straight and work it out with God, we would be honored to pray to God on your behalf. If there is something else you need to discuss, we would be glad to meet with you after the service. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org