



# Believe

## JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: John 20:30-21:14*

**30** Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book.

**31** But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**1** After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way: **2** Simon Peter, Thomas (called “Twin”), Nathanael from Cana of Galilee, Zebedee’s sons, and two others of his disciples were together. **3** “I’m going fishing,” Simon Peter said to them. “We’re coming with you,” they told him. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. **4** When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus. **5** “Friends,” Jesus called to them, “you don’t have any fish, do you?” “No,” they answered. **6** “Cast the net on the right side of the boat,” he told them, “and you’ll find some.” So they did, and they were unable to haul it in because of the large number of fish. **7** The disciple, the one Jesus loved, said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tied his outer clothing around him (for he had taken it off) and plunged into the sea. **8** Since they were not far from land (about a hundred yards[e] away), the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. **9** When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. **10** “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught,” Jesus told them. **11** So Simon Peter climbed up and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish—153 of them. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. **12** “Come and have breakfast,” Jesus told them. None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. **13** Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. **14** This was now the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

### I. Chapter 21 – an Epilogue

- “The fishing expedition of John 21 is a bit of an anticlimax, a descent into the real world, or, rather, a reminder that the real world & its demands need to be taken seriously. The grand story & events of

previous chapters culminate in the resurrection & inaugurate an eternal eschatological reality, an age to come that in the meantime remains in tension with temporal reality as it presently exists.” [Brian Larsen, *Archetypes & the 4th Gospel*, p. 38]

#### A. The purpose of this epilogue

##### 1. How should the disciples live in the post-resurrection world?

- “In the light of the unique pastoral interest & the later church’s mission reflected in Jn. 21, we may say that the Gospel [in Jn. 21] looks beyond the horizon of Jesus’ resurrection to the life & ministry of his new community.” [Jey J Kanagaraj, *John*, p. 205]
- “The temporal openness and shift in location from chap. 20 to chap. 21 may indicate that Jesus’ presence is not limited to his appearances in that first week in Jerusalem, but is available to the disciples wherever and whenever they gather.” Gail O’Day, *John*, p. 734

##### 2. What is the role and mission of the church?

- “The Johannine story of Jesus comes to an end in 20:30-31, but that was not the end of the story of Johannine disciples... We know from subsequent Johannine literature (1, 2, 3 John) [that] Johannine disciples were troubled by the unanswered questions concerning the nature & mission of the community, & questions of leadership & authority ... In order to [answer these questions &] tell this further story, the...author of Jn. 21 called upon other Johannine traditions concerning the risen Jesus.” [Francis J. Moloney, *Johannine Studies 1975-2017*, p. 536]
- “Jn. 21 points explicitly to the future life of Jesus’ disciples...Jn. 21 turns the readers attention to the story of the church, much as Acts does for Luke. It illustrates what the life of faith looks like after the events of Jesus’ hour.” [Gail O’Day, *John*, p. 199]
- Gail O’Day treats Jn. 21 as a concluding message to the church concerning the nature of true discipleship, an intentional element in the design of the 4th Gospel rather than an epilogue added as an afterthought.” [Bruce McNab, *Believing is Seeing: A Guide...to John’s Gospel*, p. ]
- “John 21... can be understood as an epilogue insofar as it brings the Gospel story beyond its conclusion into the time of the early audience & clarifies the form & mission of the community... This epilogue is best contextualized in terms of the problems emerging in the community as reflected in the Johannine Letters.” [Sherri Brown, *God’s Promise...in John*, p.]

##### 3. Does it address some problems that arose during John’s time?

- “Perhaps... the epilogue was added because the [Beloved] disciple in the early church saw some ‘loose ends’ that needed tying together because of what was going on in the Johannine community near the end of the 1st century. There may have been some turmoil or tension which existed between rival groups of Christian believers or some unresolved questions in the community that needed to be addressed. Whatever was surfacing, however, may have tended toward being heretical & needed to be addressed.” [Michael Hickey, *Themes from...John*, p. 56]

## II. Jesus reveals Himself – 1:1

After this, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way:

- “The vocabulary of “revealing” is thoroughly characteristic of this Gospel. John’s intent from the start was that Jesus be “revealed to Israel” (1:31); at Cana he “revealed his glory” (2:11); his brothers urged him to “reveal yourself to the world” (7:4); in the course of time, he did just that and in the end, he was able to tell the Father, “I revealed your name to the men you gave me out of the world” (17:6). But these revelations are different. Now that Jesus is risen, “revealing himself” means establishing his identity as the Crucified One, the Jesus his disciples have known all along. He did this for Mary...for the gathered disciples...and for Thomas. Now we learn that he did it one more time in a very different venue, “at the lake of Tiberias.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 1028
- “The verb ‘to show [oneself]’ or ‘to reveal’... is an important verb in the Fourth Gospel. It is associated with the revelatory dimension of Jesus’ miracles at 2:11 and 9:3, and it is used to summarize the purpose of Jesus’ ministry at 1:31 and 17:6. The repetition of the expression ‘Jesus showed himself’ at the beginning and end of v.1 thus underscores for the reader that the miracle story

that follows is an epiphany and should be interpreted in the light of the revelatory acts of Jesus' ministry." Gail O'Day, John, p. 734

A. Similar to the wedding at Cana – 2:1-11

11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

1. With abundance of wine

- "The miraculous catch of fish... functions analogously to the miracle at the wedding in Cana (21:1-11); in both stories the miracle is the vehicle for an epiphany. Jesus' first and last revelatory acts in the Gospel narrative are thus both miracles of abundance in Galilee." Gail O'Day, John, p. 734

B. Similar to feeding the 5000 – 6:1-14

1. With abundance of food left over

### III. Did Peter and the others backslide?

A. Some think Peter backslid from his ministry

- "Due to the trial of the need of their living, Peter returned to his old occupation, backsliding from the Lord's call, & Thomas, Nathaniel, the sons of Zebedee, & two other disciples followed him to go fishing. Peter was tested, but he could not pass the test. They all went down to the sea to return to their old profession..." [Witness Lee, God's NT Economy, p. 85]

- Peter "Left the Ministry: Jn. 21:1-3 'I go a fishing' This does not mean he was taking a fishing trip, but it was his public announcement that he was leaving the ministry. He fully intended to quit. He influences six others to leave the ministry at the same time (21:1-3)." [Curtis Hutson, Twelve Chosen Men, pp. 14-15]

- "Peter... quit preaching & went back to the fishing business... But Peter did not lose his salvation... That's not what the Bible is talking about in the story of Peter's backsliding." [John R Rice, Fall of a Preacher, p. 6]

- Initially, "Peter left his fishing to become a minister (Lk. 5:10) ... [Later,] Peter went back to fishing in John 21:3. Peter left his ministry, but God did not bless it (Jn. 15:5; Hb. 10:38)." [Norman Holmes, Homiletics, p.]

- "It took the Lord's miracle to turn [Peter's] situation around. The miracle of the Lord here was to restore him from backsliding." [DK. Olukoya, War at the Edge of Breakthroughs, p.]

B. There is no indication that they were backsliding

- "We are not given any explanation for why Peter & the others went fishing. There is no indication that they were backsliding; they may simply have needed to work to provide for their basic needs." [Brian Wintle, South Asia Bible Commentary, p. 1447]

1. According to John's gospel we do not know they were fishermen.

- "Contrary to the Synoptic Gospels, John never says that any of the first disciples were fishermen, & the Gospel contains no call to fishermen to leave their nets & follow Jesus (cf. Mk. 1:16-20). Jn. 21:1-14 is the only reference to fishing in the Gospel of John. The question of whether the disciples' going fishing was apostasy, a return to their former vocation, or not is really extraneous to John." [R. Alan Culpepper, Designs for the Church p. 533]

- In interpreting v. 3, most commentators focus on the disciples' motivation for the fishing trip and what it says about their relationship to Jesus... Schnackenburg, however, eschews entering 'into the difficult problems as to how the disciples behaved after Jesus' death, whether they staying Jerusalem or returned to Galilee, etc.,' and wisely recommends that one interpret v. 3 by 'staying with the text,' Verse 3 plays a critical role in the miracle story per se, because it establishes the situation of need that Jesus' miracle will correct; the disciples' inability to catch any fish." Gail O'Day, John, p. 735

2. Motives are never mentioned

- Moralistic observations to the effect that the disciples are somehow disobedient because they have returned (some of them at least) to their former occupation instead of fulfilling their mission of forgiving and retaining sin (20:23) are beside the point.... nothing is said of Peter's motivation." J. Ramsey Michaels, John, p. 1030

3. Jesus does not condemn, in fact Jesus has prepared a meal for them

#### **IV. The fishing trip is not backsliding but a foreshadowing what was to come**

A. This is a sign related to the mission of the church

- Previous signs were for us to believe
- This is a bonus sign for the church's mission
- Here "we are given a description with symbolic overtones that paint a picture of the early church... The great catch of fish... pictures the missionary task of the church." R. Alan Culpepper, John, p. 247

B. Unable to catch fish

- "The accent is not on why he and the other disciples went fishing, but simply on the fact that they did so and in particular on the concluding statement that "in that night they caught nothing" – dramatizing Jesus' caution to them six chapters earlier that "apart from me you cannot do anything" (15:5)." J. Ramsey Michaels, John, p. 1030

C. Catching fish at the Lord's command

1. Catching an abundance of fish

- Jerome claimed ancient writers said there were 153 different kinds of fish, representing all kinds of people. "AM Hunter called it 'the best of a bad lot of guesses'." [R. Alan Culpepper, Designs for the Church, p. 540]
- 153 is a 'triangular number' the sum of integers from 1 to 17.  $17 = 10 + 7$  Augustine says 10 signifies the Law; the Holy Spirit is represented by 7 [7 spirits in Rev.] We can suggest reasons why 17 ( $10 + 7$ ) is a significant number, but it's not so easy to see what relevance it has in this context." [R. Alan Culpepper, Designs for the Church, p. 542]
- In Jn. 6 2 numbers are mentioned: 5 loaves & 12 baskets:  $17 = 5 + 12$  [But what about the 2 fishes?]

- RE. Brown "On the principle that where there's smoke there's fire, we...concede to the above-mentioned interpretations the likelihood that the number [153] may be meant to symbolize the breadth or even the universality of the Christian mission." [R. Alan Culpepper, Designs for the Church, p. 547]

2. The beloved disciple recognizing the Lord

- "This miraculous catch of fish is the direct catalyst for the beloved disciple's recognition of Jesus (v. 7)... The two earlier Galilean miracles provide a clue in identifying what it is about the catch of fish, that evokes the beloved disciple's recognition. In the Cana miracle (2:1-11), The disciples saw Jesus' glory in the abundance of good wine; the feeding miracle of 6:1-14 also points to the abundance of Jesus' gifts. In this miracle, too, the beloved disciple recognizes the abundance of fish as deriving from the fulness of Jesus' gifts (cf. 1:14, 16)." Gail O'Day, John, p. 734

3. Peter's response

- "The focus on the beloved disciple and Peter in v. 7 anticipates vv. 15-24. The portrayal of their responses to the miracle is consistent with their responses to the empty tomb (20:3-10). The beloved disciple is again the first to recognize what he sees (cf. 20:8), while Peter responds with his characteristic eagerness (v. 7b, 20:6; cf. 13:9; 18:10). Gail O'Day, John, p. 734-5

#### **V. Symbolic relationship between catching fish and the church's mission**

A. Seeing the two levels of the fishing story

1. First level – the disciples need food

2. Second level – fishing symbolizes the preaching ministry of the church

- "As so often in the 4th Gospel, the story works on two levels. There's the straightforward reading... as an episode in the lives of the disciples where they go fishing &, at least in part, need fish for sustenance. But there is also a reading that sees the fishing continually pointing beyond itself to the disciples' mission. The fishing metaphor is not only to be interpreted in the light of the Synoptic Jesus' words about making the disciples those who fish for people (Mk. 1:17; Mt. 4:19; Luke 5:10), but behind those words lie ...the Jewish Scriptures that picture God's eschatological judgment in terms of fishing or catching people in nets (Jer. 16:16; Ezek. 29:4-5; Amos 4:2; Hab. 1:14-17). A saving

function now attaches to God's eschatological mission in which Jesus & the disciples are agents. ... At this second level of reading, the comment that 'that night they caught nothing' suggests the failures & frustrations of mission. Readers are reminded of Jesus' words....'apart from me you can do nothing' (15:5)." [Andrew Lincoln, John, p. 511]

- "The more significant question is whether John attaches ecclesial or missiological significance to fishing...The interpretation of fishing as a metaphor for the preaching ministry of the church is strengthened by the metaphor[s] of shepherding & feeding the sheep later in Jn. 21. We therefore... conclude...that 'By the time this Gospel was written, the use of the image of fishing for the pastoral ministry of the church was common' (Schneiders)." [R. Alan Culpepper, *Designs for the Church*, p. 534]

B. Confirmed by the drawing in of the fish

1. To haul in the fish symbolic of drawing people to Jesus (6:44; 12:32)

- "Both the...verb 'to draw' & the image of the untorn net appear to have direct ecclesial significance. Earlier Jesus proclaimed 12:32 The verb is used in 6:44. In Jn. 21 the verb is used twice...in v. 6... & v. 11...This provides some basis for interpreting the fish as an image for persons being drawn to Jesus, & for interpreting the number 153 as symbolic of 'all persons.' Numerous proposals [for the meaning of 153 have been offered].. If the fish 'drawn' to Jesus in the 'untorn' net are symbolic, then there's reason to think that the number 153 is symbolic also...Nevertheless, the text gives no basis for interpreting the number. Interpretations must be sought from the context..." [R. Alan Culpepper, *Designs for the Church*, p. 539]

- "The symbolic relationship between the miraculous catch of fish and the disciples' mission does not seem to lie in the description of the quantity of fish, however, but in Peter's action in hauling in the net. The verb 'to haul' is the same verb used in 6:44 to describe those who come to Jesus from God ('No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me') and in 12:32 to describe the salvific effect of Jesus' death ('And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself'). The use of this verb with reference to the disciples and the catch of fish suggests that they now join God and Jesus in drawing people to Jesus." Gail O'Day, John, p. 735

- "[Hauled] is the same word used of the Father "drawing" people to Jesus (6:44), or Jesus "drawing" them to himself (12:32), and some have theorized that it is chosen here for that reason, in keeping with the symbolic import of "fishing" for human beings." J. Ramsey Michaels, John, p. 1036

2. Bring some to me (v. 10) – joining with God to draw all people to Jesus

- "He asks for their offering, and they will bring it, not to the table but simply to "the Lord," in fulfillment of their mission. What happens to it after that is not part of the story." J. Ramsey Michaels, John, p. 1028

- "The catch of fish, then, marks the extension of God and Jesus' work into the disciples' work. This story thus stands as the narrative fulfillment of Jesus' promises to his disciples in the Farewell Discourse that they will share in his works (14:12; 15:5, 7-8, 16; cf. 17:18, 2021)." Gail O'Day, John, p. 735

3. The net not being broken

C. Application

1. Fish as a team – 7 went fishing

2. Fish with a net – not individual but as group – community groups (summer activities)

3. Need Lord's leading – the "right side"

4. Need to abide in Him – apart from me you cannot do anything" (15:5)

## VI. Supplied by the Lord

A. A charcoal fire with fish and bread

- "The 'charcoal fire' recalls the 'charcoal fire' at which Peter warmed himself when he denied the Lord (18:18, 25), thus preparing the reader ... for Peter's reinstatement (20:15-17)." J. Ramsey Michaels, John, p. 1035

- "Verses 9-13 focus on Jesus' identity as the source of life for the disciples. This identity is

highlighted in two interrelated scenes; Jesus' offer of a meal to his disciples (vv. 9, 12-13) and the attestation of the abundance of the miracle (vv. 10-11) ...Jesus' preparation of this meal for his disciples confirms that he is the giver of gifts, the source of life-sustaining nourishment (4; 13-14; 6:35, 51; 7:37; 10:9)." Gail O'Day, John, p. 735

B. Jesus supplies the "fish"

C. Jesus supplies the food

D. Jesus is the source of life, the giver of gifts and the sustainer of life