



Jesus Reveals Himself Again

John 21:1-14

- 1. Failure on the Sea (verses 1-3)**
- 2. Jesus on the Shore (verses 4-8)**
- 3. Breakfast on the Beach (verses 9-14)**

The big question that comes from John 21 is this: “Why did John write this chapter?” It seems as if chapter 20 ended this entire gospel well! It ended with that clear purpose statement.

John 20:30-31

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

It seems as if anything after these words would be anticlimactic. John has already written about the signs. John has already pressed us to believe. Consider how Matthew ends his gospel, with the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Boom, and he finishes there.

But John didn’t finish there. John continues on for another 25 verses, and chapter 21 is often referred to as “John’s Epilogue,” the final words that he says. If you remember, the gospel of John began with “John’s Prologue,” the first 18 verses, which set up the themes we would see in the gospel: the deity of Christ, how he came as light into a dark world, how Jesus was full of grace and truth and glory, how Jesus made known the Father. In chapter 21, John doesn’t remind us of the themes. Instead, he seems to wrap up some things. He includes another appearance of Jesus alive to the disciples after the resurrection. He includes a conversation that Jesus had with Peter, restoring him to the ministry after his denial. He

includes some words about John himself, and the longevity of his life.

This morning, we will look at the first of these, found in John 21:1-14. In these verses we see yet another appearance that Jesus has with the disciples. My message this morning is entitled “Jesus Reveals Himself Again.” This is how our section begins and how our section ends. In verse 1, we read that after this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and then in verse 14, John concludes: “This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.” Then John continues on to show how Jesus revealed himself alive to the disciples.

In John’s counting, apparently he does not include the appearance of Jesus to Mary in the garden. He only counts the two appearances of Jesus to the band of disciples: the first time without Thomas, and the second time with Thomas. This third appearance is what our text is all about.

I know that Easter Sunday was a few Sundays ago, but this morning we have another resurrection sermon. It is another proof that John gives us of the appearances of Jesus after he rose from the dead. When you compile all of the resurrection appearances of Jesus throughout all the gospels, there are something like 16 appearances of Jesus alive after his death and burial.

One of the more notable appearances comes in Luke 24, when Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Do you remember this scene? These two unnamed disciples were walking along the path toward Emmaus. Jesus joined them along the road, but he was not recognizable to them. Jesus asked them about their conversation, and one of them, named Cleopas, said: “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” (Luke 24:18). He went on to explain about Jesus, who had been recognized as a prophet by the people, who was condemned by the chief priests and crucified. This was particularly difficult for them because they had hoped that Jesus was going to redeem Israel from the oppression of the Romans. Now the tomb was empty, and Jesus had appeared alive to several of the disciples. His explanation showed his confusion. Then Jesus called them “foolish” for not believing “all that the prophets had spoken” (Luke 24:25), and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Another notable appearance of Jesus is recorded in Acts 9, when Saul of Tarsus was on the road to Damascus. He had letters in hand from the religious authorities

in Jerusalem, ready to arrest and bring back anyone who was following after Jesus, whom Saul had presumed to be a heretical preacher. Along the way, Jesus appeared to Paul in a bright light that blinded him, saying.

Acts 9:4-5

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”... “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

Saul was blind for three days, which he spent in prayer and fasting (Acts 9:9). Then the Lord appeared to a man named Ananias in a vision, telling him to go to Saul and commission him for his future missionary work. Ananias laid his hands upon Saul and said.

Acts 9:17

“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Saul arose, became known as Paul, and the rest of the New Testament is history.

One other notable appearance of Jesus after he rose from the dead is mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:6. We don't know much about it: we don't know where it took place, we don't know exactly what happened, only that Jesus appeared alive to more than 500 people at one time. Apparently it was some large gathering where Jesus was able to address the crowd. Paul noted that most of those who were at that gathering were still alive when he wrote about it, though some had fallen asleep. What a great event that would have been, to have the risen Jesus as your guest preacher!

Well, this morning we come to another great appearance of Jesus to his disciples. This time it is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is also called “the Sea of Tiberias.” Let's read our text.

John 21:1-14

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

There are three movements in this text, each of which will become a separate point. My first point is this.

1. Failure on the Sea (verses 1-3)

The first verse sets the context: Jesus revealed himself to the disciples in this way. The second verse sets the stage, telling us who was there: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other unnamed disciples. Seven disciples in all. Peter, the obvious leader of the group. Thomas, who had said he would not believe unless he could see and touch the marks of death on Jesus’s body. Nathanael, one of the first disciples Jesus called, mentioned in John chapter 1 and not again until now. James, one of the sons of Zebedee. John, the other son of Zebedee, the two who left their father in the boat when Jesus first called them to follow him. Then two other unnamed disciples. Seven in all.

In verse 3, Peter says, “I am going fishing.” Now, that is different from what a man might mean today. Today when a man says, “I’m going fishing,” what he often means is that he is taking a break from work to enjoy himself. But this was

work for Peter. Fishing was his occupation. Some read into Peter's words as if he were saying, "Forget this Jesus stuff. I'm going back to earn some money." But it may simply be that Peter was saying, "I don't know what's next for me, so I'll do what's familiar." As one commentator observed, "The narrative does not show any interest in why Peter (and the others) went fishing; it is more concerned to describe how their fishing went."^[1]

It didn't go well. This is my point: 1. Failure on the Sea (verses 1-3). We read of this in the second half of verse 3: they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. In those days, they didn't fish with hook, line, and sinker; they fished with nets cast off the side of the boat, gathering the nets back in to bring up whatever fish had been caught. This wasn't sitting on the bank with a line in the water while you think about the realities of life. This was a very labor-intensive business, and it went on all night long without a single fish to their credit.

When you read the rest of the story, you see that this wasn't simply a case of bad luck. There was more going on. At this point in their lives, the disciples were all confused. They were back to where they were before Jesus called them. They were fishing. They didn't really know what was next for their lives. Yes, Jesus had appeared to them and said.

John 20:21

Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

But they didn't really know what this meant. Then Jesus came to the shore.

2. Jesus on the Shore (verses 4-8)

Verse 4: "Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore." The phrase "as day was breaking" implies that the disciples had been at their work all night long. But Jesus arrives on the scene just as the sun is making its mark in the early morning hours. I believe this is an accurate recording of the details of what happened, but as John tells the story, he brings out the backdrop of the darkness and confusion of the disciples, contrasted with the breaking of the dawn and the coming of the light, and how all of this was about to change as these disciples recognized Jesus alive once again.

At this point in the narrative, the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. He calls out to them: "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered, "No." This is the question that is often asked of fishermen. I was out for a bike ride this past Friday

evening with Yvonne. At one point, we stopped at a bridge to take a selfie and happened upon two men along the trail with poles and a tackle box in hand. I asked them the same question: “Did you catch anything?” They both said, “No.” I could not pass up the opportunity, so I said: “Hey, I’m a pastor, and I’ve been preaching through the gospel of John. Do you know anything about the gospel of John?” They shook their heads. So I continued: “This Sunday I’m planning to preach from the very last chapter, which has a story of the disciples of Jesus who had gone fishing. Jesus, who had risen from the dead, asked them how many fish they had caught. They were just like you. They had fished all night long and caught nothing. Jesus said to them, ‘Cast your net on the right side of the boat.’ When they pulled in the net, they counted 153 fish. It shows the power of Jesus. I’m not saying you will catch 153 fish, but maybe you will think about the power of Jesus.” They smiled and appreciated the story. Who knows, perhaps that was their first introduction to the life of Jesus.

This is what happened when Jesus was on the shore. He said to them: “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish. This was a change of pace from the entire night before. I don’t know exactly how long it took to cast the net and gather it back in, perhaps ten or twenty minutes each time, and this had taken place dozens of times that night with nothing. But this time the nets were so full that the disciples were not able to bring them back into the boat. This was a clear miracle. Any attempt to explain it by suggesting that Jesus had spotted a school of fish off the right side of the boat misses John’s point entirely. This was a clear display of the power of Jesus. He is sovereign over the fish, able to bring them into the net of his disciples.

John, the author of the gospel, recognized what was going on. He said to Peter: “It is the Lord!” Do you remember on the road to Emmaus, when Jesus came into the home and broke bread with the disciples, and something about the way he did it opened their eyes? Something similar happened here. In Luke 5, we are told of an almost identical event to what took place this morning in our text.

Luke 5:1-11

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to

Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” When they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

There are so many parallels between this story and the one in our text this morning. Peter and the disciples were out fishing. They toiled all night long and caught nothing. Jesus recommended a new way to cast their nets, and when they did, they had an abundance of fish. In the earlier account, this event caused Peter to recognize his own sinfulness. He said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8). He had an encounter with Jesus that showed him his sin and unworthiness, and he and the disciples left everything to follow him.

Now, in John’s gospel, we read of a similar event near the end of the ministry of Jesus. Peter senses the similarities. But things have changed after three years with Jesus. We don’t see Peter requesting Jesus to depart from him. Rather, Peter does everything he can to get to Jesus as fast as possible. When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, threw himself into the sea, and swam the hundred yards to shore. The current world record for the 100-meter freestyle is 46.40 seconds, set by Pan Zhanle of China during the Paris 2024 Olympics. I don’t think Peter swam it that fast, but it was certainly only a few minutes before he reached the shore. When he did, Jesus invited him to 3. Breakfast on the Beach.

3. Breakfast on the Beach (verses 9-14)

Jesus had it all prepared for them. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus then invited them to contribute a portion of their catch. It is typical when you come to someone’s home for dinner that the host prepares the meal and the guest brings something to contribute. In this case, Jesus invited the disciples to bring some of the fish they had just caught. We read about their catch in verse 11: Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. Although there were so

many, the net was not torn.

Through the ages, many have tried to explain the significance of the number 153. Jerome, who translated the Scriptures into Latin, said that in the ancient world there were thought to be 153 different kinds of fish, thus showing that this number is representative of the full harvest of believers that will come into the church. Of course, we know there are far more than 153 species of fish, but this is one attempt at explaining the number. Another suggestion is that this is an allusion to the 153,300 workers Solomon employed to build the temple, though any meaning of the allusion is unclear. Others have pursued numerology: Origen, an early church father, pointed out that 153 can be divided as $(50 \times 3) + 3$, and thus argued it refers to the Trinity. Augustine noted that 153 is the sum of the natural numbers from 1 to 17, which is a “triangular number,” and identified 17 as the 10 commandments plus the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit.

All of this is speculative. I think John says there were 153 fish because there were 153 fish. These were fishermen who planned to sell their catch in the market, and to properly divide the proceeds it would have been helpful to know exactly how many fish they had. I don't think there is any spiritual significance to this number, other than the fact that this was a historical event. You don't include the exact number of fish in a fairy tale. This really happened.

Jesus then gave the formal invitation in verse 12: “Come and have breakfast.” This alludes back to Jesus's very first invitation to his disciples in John 1, when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and some of the disciples began following him. Jesus turned and said, “What are you seeking?” They said, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” And he said, “Come and see.” Just come be with me. Come and learn. Here at the end of the gospel, it is the same invitation: come and have breakfast. Come and be with me. It is an allusion to Jesus being the one who feeds and provides for all who simply come to him.

None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. There is still mystery here. Perhaps the resurrection body had changed Jesus in some way. You cannot pass through death and come out the other side looking exactly the same. Perhaps he was somewhat veiled, as he was on the road to Emmaus. We don't know. But there was something unmistakably him, and they were convinced of it, and perhaps they wanted to talk about other things rather than press him on the details of his resurrection.

Anyway, Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish.

Jesus began his ministry with a meal at the wedding at Cana, and now here Jesus closes his ministry with a meal. This would have been reminiscent of the feeding of the 5,000, when Jesus took bread and fish and fed the multitudes. Perhaps in their minds they knew how often Jesus had fed them, physically and spiritually.

John 6:35

I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

This again is a call from the gospel of John to believe in Jesus. He is the one who can satisfy all of our spiritual hunger and all of our spiritual thirst.

Note that Jesus did not need the fish that the disciples brought to breakfast in order to feed them. He already had fish on the fire and bread that he was preparing. I believe this is the lesson for us this morning: Jesus doesn't need us for his work. He already had enough for the disciples to eat. Yet he invites us to share the fruit of our labors. This is a living illustration of John 15:5.

John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Is this not exactly what we see here? The fishermen went out, labored all night long, and caught nothing. But with Jesus, they cast the net but once and gathered in 153 fish. What was true in this story is true in our lives as well. We need the Lord. We need to abide in the Lord if we expect any fruit to come from our lives.

Are you abiding in the Lord? Are you praying? Are you reading the Scripture? Are you attentive to the working of God in your life? Are you expecting the working of God in your life? The older I get, the more attuned I am to the subtle ways in which the Lord continues to show his kindness to me. Events take place; sometimes they are hard, but the timing is often perfect.

I see the meeting of people as providential meetings, trusting that the Lord is working in my life. Those fishermen on the trail were a divine appointment. I don't know what the Lord will do with that conversation, but I was abiding in him, trusting him to bring people along my path at the right time, trusting him that I might say the right things.

And here is the thing about those 153 fish. In a sense, they were Jesus's fish,

because Jesus is the one who put them there. The disciples gathered them in and then brought a portion back to Jesus. Isn't that what it is? What do we have that we have not received? Everything we have is a gift from God. We just give it back to him. What a delight to walk in that kind of ministry. Let us abide in the Lord. Let us cast our nets. Let us be fishers of men and see him do a work in and through us.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 26, 2026 by
Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), pp. 895-896.