

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: Jesus continued His appearances after He arose from death. He went to seven of His Disciples and challenged them to awake from their confusion and grief and do the mission at hand. They had returned to fishing in the Sea of Galilee, perhaps because that was their profession or because they did not know what to do or because they had lost their focus. So, Peter went fishing; Thomas, Nathanael, John, and James followed suite, but, they caught no fish, which was unusual. They kept at it all night; when dawn came, so did the Lord. Jesus was beside the shore and called out to them; *friends, did you catch any fish?* They replied, *no*. Then Jesus said, *throw out your net to the right and you will catch plenty*. Of course, they knew night was the best time to fish, but with all the commotion, there would be no fish there. But, recognizing something more profound was at hand, they complied as John realized it was the Lord! Then, Peter put his coat on, jumped in, and swam to shore, while the rest pulled in the enormous catch to the shore. Meanwhile, Jesus had breakfast ready for them as they hauled in 153 large fish, the net not even tearing; this was amazing! They were in awe of this catch and more so of the wonder of our Lord as He fed them. This was the third time Jesus appeared to His Disciples after He had risen.

Contexts and Background

This passage continues to show us the heart of Christianity—the resurrection. It is interesting to note that many liberal, higher critics have determined that this passage is a postscript—true, but not a part of the original text. Most Jewish and Greek writings did not use postscripts because they considered them to be anticlimactic. Not so, according to ancient manuscripts. This passage also follows the ending of the most popular ancient work of all time, the *Iliad* that also had a postscript as does Romans 16; thus it does have harmony and great value. So, when these higher critics cry “foul,” tell them to read the *Iliad*. In spite of all the criticism, this passage was the most circulated of the passages in John, shared apart from the rest of the Gospel for cost savings and for evangelism. This early church track gave hope and a reason for faith!

This also refers to the vindication and triumph of the person suffering; Jesus was proclaiming victory, not just agony! Why? God cannot be touched by sin; Jesus took our sin upon Himself and God turned His head as Christ absorbed and bore our sentence of guilt and death. Now, grace is offered, and we, by faith in Him, have salvation by the work He did on the cross! He endured real suffering that we cannot fathom; beyond the physical agony was His separation from the Father and the wrath from our sin for the first time in eternity (John 16:7-11; Rom. 4:7-8; Eph. 1:7)!

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *Jesus appeared again.* This indicates the remaining disciples, whom, as the Gospel of John records, went back to their former way of life. This was normal; this was their livelihood and home. Since the feast days at Jerusalem had ended, they may not have known what to do next. Now, once again, they encountered a “mountain top” experience. This time, it was Jesus’ final orders. All that was important started with a couple of sentences (Matt. 28:7; Acts 1:3).
- *Sea / Lake of Tiberias.* This was the Roman name for Galilee, then a new city that Herod Antipas had built around 18 to 22 A.D, and named for the Emperor Tiberias. It was one of the major cities in the Galilean area. It was a large city for that time to which Greeks migrated and from which religious Jews stayed away. Since Jesus lived and ministered nearby, He may or may not have gone to these cities many times and observed cultural standards. The area between these cities was filled with agricultural villages with populations of 1,000 to 3,000 people each. Most of Jesus’ ministry had centered around this area and later in Jerusalem. This is where the Sea of Galilee was, where Jesus calmed the storm. It is 13 miles long and is six to eight miles wide, and is located in a basin 700 feet below sea level, making it one of the lowest points on earth. Mountains surround it, and at its southern end is a deep, cliff-lined valley. Most first-century fishermen stayed close to the shore of Capernaum or rowed around the lake close to shore. (Matt. 11:1-9; 14:13-15; Luke 8:22; John 6:1).
- *Sons of Zebedee.* John, the human instrument of this Gospel, calls himself, humbly, the *Disciple*

whom Jesus loved and his brother James. He was also a fisherman, and was a partner with Peter. He and his brother John were called the *Sons of Thunder*, perhaps because of the “hot” temperament of their father, or of themselves. James was the first of the Apostles to be martyred. It is rumored that he had preached in India and Spain before he was beheaded by Herod. For more on the Disciples, see Matthew 10: 1-4 (Matt. 4: 21-22, 10:1-4; Luke 5:10; 9: 52-54; John 1:40; Acts 12:1-2).

- *I'm going out / gone to fish / gone fishing.* After Jesus rose from the dead, a contrast was presented of working with versus doing so without the Lord. If we work without Him, we will catch nothing and our work is in vain. If we work for Him, we will see failure turned into success because of the great catch. This is all about loyalty versus disobedience as well as about God's enablement. Peter perhaps felt that he betrayed Jesus beyond the restoration point; perhaps he did not know what else to do. Thus, he returned to his old ways when he already had something so much more—his witnessing of the Lord's resurrection! Let's be careful not to forget what we are supposed to do (John 15:5)!
- *Boat / ship.* This was perhaps a small fishing boat that held about fifteen people; it was roughly twenty-plus feet long and was seven feet wide with oars and maybe a small sail that would be like the one Jesus used when He calmed the storm. A typical fisherman stayed close to shore and would have been unprepared for such a storm; the boat could easily capsize a small boat, killing all aboard. This explains the fear the disciples had, of which more is recorded in Matthew 8: 23-27 (Matt. 4:21; Luke 5:5; John 6:16-24).
- *Did not realize that it was Jesus.* At first, as in the last chapter a week prior to this event, they did not get it; then they did, and realized that the resurrection was the primary fulfillment of Scripture, and what Jesus needed to do to save humanity. Perhaps, it just had not sunk in or else they did not recognize Him because of the distance and lack of light, their exhaustion of working all night, being overwhelmed with all the events of the last week (that is, everything in John chap 12) and now, not expecting Him. and Jesus obviously not looking the same as He had; thus, they did not know what to think or believe (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Psalm 16:10; Isa. 53:1-12; Hos. 6:2; Matt. 28:8-10, 17; Luke 24: 2,16, 26-47; John 1:14; 14:26; 15:13-14; 16:13; 20:1-18; Acts 2:25-32; 1 Cor. 15:35-49).
- *Friends.* Here meaning “little children,” Jesus shows His endearment for them as well as His authority. In the first century, “friend” meant an alliance or companionship pursued by self-interests, client based, or a shared life with closeness, confidence, and mutual support. Here, it refers to our alliance in Christ by His sacrifice, modeling how we are to be friends to others too. The true mark of a mature Christian is obedience and submission, the ability to totally surrender it all to Him as LORD, and to be as the Epistle writers demonstrated, His slaves. By so doing, He lifts us up to be His friends. Real friends listen, forgive, and love, and are there for one another no matter what; Christ is all this to us! Thus, it is imperative to have the commitment to build effective relationships (Prov. 18:24; 27:17; Matt. 5-7; Luke 15:1-2; John 15:1-15; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; I Pet. 4:9).
- *Throw your net.* Fisherman fished at night using nets to catch fish bunched up and sleeping after they had been baited earlier. Thus, they could sell the fish early in the morning or dry them for commerce. In contrast, reel or fly fishing is done in the morning when the fish awake hungry. Thus, fishing in the morning was not done and would be a bizarre act, but it showed their willingness to obey in the midst of confusion (Luke 5:1-11).
- *Outer clothing / garment...naked / girt.* An outer, coat-like garment was very expensive and meant to be kept clean; it was a gesture of great reverence, as Peter was *naked*, meaning he was not properly dressed or just had on a loincloth (underwear), not necessarily without clothes. Pious Jews would never be seen without proper covering of their bodies; they were modest, and here Peter did not want to offend the Lord as he did so greatly during His trial (John 13:1-17).
- *Jumped into the water.* Peter was too far out to walk or wade, he had to swim for it, which showed great impulsiveness, passion, and determination. This is quite a contrast to how Peter sank when he walked on the water to get to Jesus (Matt. 14:30; John 20:6, 28).
- *Burning coals / charcoal fire.* Jesus shares and breaks bread with His Disciples as He had done many

times, but not for the last time. Did this fire over coals remind Peter of Jesus betrayal (John 6:1-15; 18:15-18, 25-27)?

- *Large fish, 153.* Meaning such a large number for such a small boat. All of these fish were large, not of various sizes. This testifies to the power of the miracle and that Jesus meets our needs more adequately than we could even ask. It is not an esoteric or symbolic code; fisherman and people of commerce counted their wares. Jesus is also affirming manual labor and tradesmen, as He was a carpenter; as long as one is loyal to The One, a lawful occupation is glorifying to the Lord. In contrast, the wealthy Jews and Romans detested tradesmen and manual laborers, even though they provided for their needs, yet the tradesmen had more pride in their work and even wrote their occupations on their tombstones and burial boxes (2 Kings 19:53).
- *Net was not torn.* This would be an astounding, not-so-minor miracle, yet miracles are of no value unless people have faith. A net was a large, open-mesh fabric, made from hemp or flax, woven into small diameter ropes which are knotted and laid in a looped crisscross pattern so that it intersects with itself, forming one- to two-inch rounds or squares. The net was held up and in place by buoys or floats that were pulled by men or dragged by larger ropes that skimmed the surface and a few feet below—just like today’s fishing boats. The makeup of the mesh pattern allowed for holes for the water, as well as for fish that were not ready and things that were too small to go through it, so the proper size fish can be caught. The net could have been a few feet wide and several feet long so it could be dragged through the water while not being impeded by it. Such nets would hold only a fraction of this 153 (Matt. 4:18-22; 1 Cor. 13:2).
- *Breakfast / dine.* Meaning “break your fast,” now the most important meal of the day and Jesus was the host! This would be about six o’ clock in the morning and Jesus invited them to come and dine with Him. This was the duty of the family patriarch or appointed host, the head of the home. This showcases Jesus as the Good Shepherd, caring and providing for His sheep. Gratitude is our chief response to show our faith, sincerity, and reliance on our Lord (Psalm 23:2).
- *Took the bread and gave it to them.* The bread was like pancakes or pita bread, small and thin and usually made with barley, as it was healthier and cheaper but it was less desirable than wheat. Fish and bread were the daily, essential food staples for that time and region (2 Kings 4:38-44; John 6:11).
- *The third time Jesus appeared.* Meaning the third time that John listed this group of seven, not the third appearance, as the other Gospels and John refer to many more (John 20:19-28).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications

Without the resurrection, we would not have Christianity—as in saving faith. We would have no salvation, no connection to God, no remission from sins, no purpose for life, no hope, no reason for living, and no reason to do evangelism, discipleship, or missions or any other kind of ministry as it would all be futile and meaningless. Without the resurrection, we would have no reason to meet for worship or have a Church, as we would have no message or meaning or ministry; all we would have is futility, a life of emptiness, vanity, and senselessness. We would just have some great rules and precepts to live by. Well, so do the Buddhists (1 Cor. 15:1-19)! A former Buddhist once told me why he converted to Christianity. *I was at a turn in the road; who do I follow; the man who is dead or the man who is alive? I chose the One who is alive!* A dead man, no matter how good and great, cannot save anybody. Buddha has saved no one! The difference is with the resurrection; we are transformed, and saved for eternity—not just for here and now (John 10:4; 16:10; 2 Cor. 5:20). We are not called to save souls. That is the role of the Holy Spirit. Rather, we are called to help the “soul bearers” to learn and grow (Rom. 4:25; 14:8; 1 Cor. 15:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:20-21; Phil 1:23; 2:6-11; 3:10-14)!

We are chosen by God and by God alone for our Christian journey, because we are not at our final destination. Rather, each of us is in a process in life and faith. As long as we have breath, God is not finished with us yet; He is still at work in you, He deeply loves you, and wants you to draw ever so nearer to Him. We need to avoid slipping into unbelief and cynicism just because we can’t wrap our minds around it or because we are disappointed. Yet, this is where we all can easily live, because life can be so

hard and confusing. We can learn from it, no matter what, so we can have joy and praise Him for His guidance from His Word and Holy Spirit, and, as we walk in Christ, we can always know God was the One who created us to walk and continues to teach us. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion." (Phil. 1:6)

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Do you like to go fishing? How do you handle impulsiveness, passion, or determination? How should you?
2. Why, after seeing Jesus arise, did they not realize that they were face to face with Him? Do you ever slip into unbelief and cynicism?
3. How does this passage give hope and a reason for faith? Why do you think many liberal, higher critics hate this passage?
4. Why is the resurrection the heart of Christianity? Why is it that without the resurrection, we do not have Christianity—as in saving faith?
5. What has Jesus done to help you awake from confusion, grief, and compliancy? How can His enablement help you recognize and do the mission at hand?
6. Have you ever been in awe of the wonder of our Lord? Has Jesus ever fed you? How so?
7. How does it give you comfort that God is not finished with you yet, but that He is still at work in you?
8. How do you feel about how Jesus deeply loves you and wants you to draw ever so nearer to Him? What will you do with this information and comfort?
9. How have you struggled with loyalty versus disobedience and/or God's enablement? What can you do to better pursue His work in you?
10. How can you be more careful not to forget what you are supposed to do and what to do next?
11. Next time you do not know what to do or you lost your focus, what should you do? How can you recognize something that is more profound at hand?
12. Christianity is also about obedience and submission, and the ability to totally surrender it all upon Him as LORD! So, how can this produce more in your life?