

Lesson Twenty-Six

(John 21:1-25)

Chapter 21 contains another post-resurrection appearance to the disciples by Jesus, along with two incidents in which Jesus teaches Peter to have greater trust in him. The disciples had returned to Galilee, just as Jesus had commanded (Matt. 28:10,16).

Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

(John 21:1-14)

¹After this, Jesus appeared once more to his disciples at Lake Tiberias. This is how it happened. ²Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael (the one from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of Jesus were all together. ³Simon Peter said to the others, "I am going fishing."

"We will come with you," they told him. So they went out in a boat, but all that night they did not catch a thing. ⁴As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge, but the disciples did not

know that it was Jesus. ⁵Then he asked them, "Young men, haven't you caught anything?"

"Not a thing," they answered.

⁶He said to them, "Throw your net out on the right side of the boat, and you will catch some." So they threw the net out and could not pull it back in, because they had caught so many fish.

⁷The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken his clothes off) and jumped into the water. ⁸The other disciples came to shore in the boat, pulling the net full of fish. They were not very far from land, about a hundred yards away. ⁹When they stepped ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it and some bread. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

¹¹Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net ashore full of big fish, a hundred and fifty-three in all; even though there were so many, still the net did not tear. ¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³So Jesus went over, took the bread, and gave it to them; he did the same with the fish.

¹⁴This, then, was the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from death.

Acts 1:3 tells about the purpose of the resurrection appearances of Jesus: "For forty days after his death he appeared to them many times in ways that proved beyond doubt that he was alive. They saw him, and he talked with them about the Kingdom of God."

So here they were, temporarily living on the edge of Lake Galilee. (The Romans called it "Tiberius".) Paul Butler offers his opinion that "the disciples were merely occupying the time while they waited for the Lord in plying their trade as fishermen. Some of them (Peter at least) could need to provide some sort of financial support for their families. Men of the sea, active, hard-working, industrious men could not remain inactive while they waited for Jesus to come" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 447).

Those of us who enjoy fishing might be tempted to use Peter's fishing trip as our "approved example." But let's remember that there is no evidence that he skipped the worship assembly on Sunday in order to do it! All of us need to relax and change our environment once in awhile. There comes a point, however, when "recreation" can be a detriment to our relationship with the Lord and a bad example to others. We must use our time wisely.

I can personally identify with these frustrated fishermen. They

fished all night, with no success at all. Then, as they slowly worked their way along the shore, they saw someone at the edge of the water. Since they were about 100 yards away and it was not completely light yet, they could not see exactly who the figure was.

The man asked them whether they had caught anything, and the embarrassing answer was, "Not a thing" (21:5). It may very well be that it was no accident that they had failed in this their regular profession, for Jesus wanted them to become fishers of *men*. Then the man on the shore told them to cast their nets on the right side of their boat. And when they tried it, they "could not pull it back in, because they had caught so many fish" (21:6).

"The disciple whom Jesus loved" began to put two and two together. The man's voice, his dim form, and his uncanny knowledge of exactly where they would find some fish — all these pointed to one person: "It is the Lord!" (21:7).

This miracle was proof that the apostles could depend upon the power of Jesus as they did his work. They not only caught some fish, they caught so many they had a hard time getting those 153 large fish back to shore. They must have been deeply impressed with the fact that Jesus is their Source, the one who will supply their every need (Phil. 4:13,19).

Well, when Peter heard John's words he pulled on his fisherman's cloak (a sleeveless garment which was knee-length) over his loincloth and jumped into the lake (21:7). Peter figured he was on a slow boat to China. He wanted to see Jesus and he didn't want to wait until they could maneuver the boat and net closer to the shore. By the time the other disciples arrive, Jesus already has a charcoal fire cooking a fish breakfast for them.

"The main point to get from this section," according to Paul Butler, "is exactly the point the disciples got and the one Jesus intended: a dramatic and awe-inspiring demonstration of the omnipotence and omniscience of Jesus Christ, the resurrected Lord of heaven and earth" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 451).

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples on at least ten different occasions. We know that he appeared to Mary Magdalene (20:11-18), the women (Matt. 28:9-10), Cleopas and his friend (Luke 24:13-35), Simon Peter (Luke 24:34), to the apostles here on Lake Galilee, to over 500 people in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20; 1 Cor. 15:6), to Jesus' brother James (1 Cor. 15:7), to the apostles on Mount Olivet (Acts 1:4-11; Luke 24:50-51), to the

apostles with Thomas absent (20:19-23), and to the apostles with Thomas present (20:24-29).

Jesus and Peter

(John 21:15-25)

¹⁵After they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my lambs." ¹⁶A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷A third time Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter became sad because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" and so he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!"

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep. ¹⁸I am telling you the truth: when you were young, you used to get ready and go anywhere you wanted to; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you up and take you where you don't want to go." ¹⁹(In saying this, Jesus was indicating the way in which Peter would die and bring glory to God.) Then Jesus said to him, "Follow me!"

²⁰Peter turned around and saw behind him that other disciple, whom Jesus loved — the one who had leaned close to Jesus at the meal and had asked, "Lord, who is going to betray you?" ²¹When Peter saw him, he asked Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

²²Jesus answered him, "If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!"

²³So a report spread among the followers of Jesus that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say he would not die; he said, "If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you?"

²⁴He is the disciple who spoke of these things, the one who also wrote them down; and we know that what he said is true.

²⁵Now, there are many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down one by one, I suppose that the whole world could not hold the books that would be written.

Some eloquent sermons have been preached on the two different Greek words which are both translated simply as "love" in the TEV and most other English translations. The first two times Jesus used the Greek word *agapao* to inquire of Peter's love for him, and each time Peter replied with the Greek word *phileo*. But when Jesus asked the question the third time, he used the word *phileo* just as Peter did. The point is often asserted that

agapao referred to a deeper, stronger love than the word *phileo* conveyed. However, *both* verbs are used to describe God's love for man (3:16; 16:27), God's love for Jesus (3:35; 5:20), the love of men for Jesus (8:42; 21:15-16), and to describe brotherly love (13:34-35; 15:19). So we should guard against being very dogmatic about the "differences" between the two words.

The text itself shows that Peter was upset by the *number of times* that Jesus asked the question, not by his use of a different Greek word (21:17). Just as he had three opportunities to witness for Jesus in Pilate's courtyard, Jesus gave him three more opportunities to reaffirm his love. And he did. But the number "three" was still a sore place for him.

Jesus expressed his confidence in Peter by instructing him to teach his disciples (21:15,17). Everyone knew that Peter had made a mistake, one which stood out more clearly because he followed Jesus right up to Pilate's doorstep. Jesus realized, as some Christian leaders do not, that when a person rededicates himself to the Lord he needs to be put to work. So Jesus reminded Peter of his great responsibility of preaching to the lost and of teaching the saved (Matt. 28:19-20).

In 20:18-19, Jesus reveals that Peter will also give his own life for God's people. Paul Butler says, "The figure of speech used by Jesus was vivid. The Jews, in walking or running, gathered up (girded) the long folds of their outer garments and fashioned them about their waists like belts, that their progress might not be impeded. The figure then expresses the freedom to go as one pleases unimpeded and unfettered. In fact Peter had just so "girded" himself and made his way to Jesus on the shore unfettered and unrestrained. But in his later years it shall not be so. Solemnly Jesus told him that he would stretch forth his hands to be fettered and bound and he would be led according to the will of another" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 457-58).

Then an interesting thing happened. Peter had just found out what would happen to him, and when he saw John nearby his curiosity was flamed. "Lord, what about his man?" (21:21). Peter and John had been very close friends. And they, along with James, had been Jesus' most trusted disciples. It was only natural that Peter should wonder about the future of his friend.

However, being "natural" did not make his question acceptable. Jesus replied, "If I want him to live until I come, what is that to you?" (21:22). In other words, he told Peter that God's will would be done and that was no particular business of his. It is

awfully tempting for us to say, when given a responsibility, "Yeah, but what about *them*?" As members of the Lord's Army, we must accept our personal orders and let our Commander take care of the other soldiers.

In 20:23 we have a good example of how quickly false information can get started. Before we pass on information, we should make sure of the facts of the case and make sure we are not using facts to hurt others. Whenever someone says, "A little birdie told me this," make sure it wasn't a cuckoo! (Verses 24 and 25 aren't found in the oldest available manuscripts, so we won't comment on them.)

Final Remarks

The gospel written by the apostle John is an exciting and accurate account of the highlights of the life of Jesus. John did not sit down to write just a biographical work about an unusual man. He wrote about the unique and divine Son of God, Jesus the Messiah. John said it this way: "In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written *in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life*" (20:30-31).

Similarly, this workbook on the gospel of John was not written just so you could engage in an intellectual exercise. It was written to help *you* examine the evidence about Jesus so that you would claim him as your Lord and be immersed into his body. If you have accepted Jesus as a result of this study, would you please write to me and tell me about it? Write to: Stan Paragien, %College Press, Joplin, Mo. 64801, U.S.A.

Thought Stimulators on John 21:1-25

1. "Lake Tiberias" was also known by what other name?
2. Who was the first person to recognize Jesus standing on the shore?
3. What did Peter do when he realized that Jesus was on the shore?
4. Why did Jesus appear to his disciples after his resurrection?
5. What was the purpose behind Jesus providing them with a good catch of fish?
6. How many times did Jesus appear to his disciples after his resurrection?
7. What upset Peter when Jesus questioned him about his love?

8. What steps can we take to stop rumors?
9. Based upon the evidence presented in the gospel of John, do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the only Son of God?
10. Do you believe that Jesus died upon the cross to make salvation possible for you?
11. Do you love Jesus enough to turn away from your sins?
12. Do you love Jesus enough to follow his command to be immersed (if you have never done so)?