

John 21

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After Jesus' resurrection, He made several appearances to His disciples. We learn from Luke in the book of Acts that this occurred over the span of 40 days. Most of these appearances were on the first day following His resurrection, and are recorded primarily in the book of Luke. They included appearances to Mary Magdalene, and then the other women, to Simon, and two disciples on the road to Emmaus, before finally appearing to the eleven at dinner that night (or rather 10, as we learn from John's gospel, Thomas not being there). If we only had Luke's accounts, we would not know that many of the rest of His appearances took place in Galilee. Matthew, on the other hand, while recording very few of His appearances in Jerusalem, emphasizes that the disciples were to meet with Him in Galilee:

(Mat 26:31-32 NKJV) "Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' (32) "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.""

(Mat 28:5-10 NKJV) "But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. (6) "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. (7) "And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." (8) So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. (9) And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" And they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. (10) Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go *and* tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.""

(Mat 28:16-17 NKJV) "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. (17) And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

1 Corinthians 15 records that at one point, Jesus met with over 500 brethren at once. Perhaps that took place on this mountain we read about here. But it appears that as John became aware of what the other 3 gospel writers had to say about these appearances, he chose to include details of one incident that took place in Galilee, probably shortly after their arrival and before this meeting on the mountain. We find it in the 21st chapter, and this is what I'm going to focus on today.

In chapter 20 John records Jesus' first appearance to the apostles as a group, on the first day (20:19) and eight days later (20:26), at least the first being in Jerusalem. He doesn't say where this latter appearance took place. That may have depended on how quickly they left town. The feast would have ended on Wednesday. Perhaps they waited until at least after the feast was over. Maybe they were still in Jerusalem for this second appearance, which this time included Thomas.

(John 21:1-22 NKJV) "After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias [Sea of Galilee], and in this way He showed *Himself*: (2) Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the *sons* of Zebedee [James and John], and two others of His disciples were together [the latter probably not apostles].

(3) Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."

- V3 why? Some say he was giving up and going back to his old profession. But that does not really make sense. There was too much stated by Jesus about what they were to do with their three years of training for Peter to believe that. And remember, they were in Galilee specifically to meet again with Jesus. Most likely, Peter was looking for something to do while he waited. And he knew, and admittedly may have even missed to some extent, fishing.

They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.

(4) But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

- V4 they had already seen Jesus. They knew what He looked like, even after His resurrection. But it was probably still twilight, and hard to recognize who it was.

(5) Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?"

- V5 children=boys (or girls), less endearing than the "little children" He sometimes used (John 13:33 NKJV) ""Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer." It was probably more like "Hey boys, do you have any food?" Perhaps they thought He was interested in purchasing some of their catch, or that maybe He was just hungry.

They answered Him, "No."

(6) And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find *some*."

- V6 We learn later that they were about a hundred yards (1 football field) from the shore, so it wasn't too hard to have this exchange, and they may have felt that He could see visual or movement disturbances in the water that indicated the presence of fish. But for some reason they agreed to try it.

So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

- V6 this seemed awfully familiar to them, and undoubtedly brought back memories:

(Luke 5:1-11 NKJV) "Now so it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret [yet another name for the Sea of Galilee], (2) and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing *their* nets. (3) Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. (4) Now when He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." (5) But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." (6) And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. (7) So they signaled to *their* partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. (8) When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees [still in the boat], saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (9) For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; (10) and so also *were* James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." (11) So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him."

Peter, James and John had been fishing partners prior to their calling. They are often mentioned together in gospel accounts, but their friendship predated their association with Jesus.

(7) Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea.

- V7 As with walking on the water, Peter can be pretty bold, and he goes to Jesus. And he does so by doing the opposite of someone about to go swimming, by putting on his coat. Being only a short distance from shore, swimming may not have been necessary, or at least not a lot or swimming. But he felt he should be a bit more modest under the circumstances.

(8) But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. (9) Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. (10) Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught."

- V9 it is not stated where the food came from, or the fire. This is reminiscent of 1Ki 19:6 when Elijah was fleeing. As we learned in Luke 5, the fish to some extent were symbolic of catching men. The disciples caught fish, but Jesus already had some. Elijah was told of 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Jesus calls people we may not know about: (John 10:16 NKJV) ""And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd." Jesus has more men to catch. Some He wants us to catch, others He takes care of Himself.

(11) Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken.

- V11 why 153? Possibly some Greek or Hebrew numerology. Some have suggested that the Hebrew letters in "sons of God" add up to 153. The problem with that is that given most any number it is likely you can find some meaningful word or phrase that works. Others have suggested that it was the number of nations known at the time. But quite likely it was just an incidental number related by John to show there were a lot of fish. And these were "large" fish. Unlike the event in Lk5:6, the net was not broken.

(12) Jesus said to them, "Come *and* eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"; knowing that it was the Lord.

- V12 Jesus used to be with them all the time. Then they saw Him killed. Since His resurrection He had appeared to them occasionally, but it was still hard to believe Jesus was there, but nobody asked "is it really you?" It seems like they didn't ask any other questions either. Perhaps they ate in silence.

(13) Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish.

- V13 more memories—of the bread and fish He had served to the great multitudes a year earlier. And perhaps of the breaking of bread the night before His crucifixion.

(14) This *is* now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead." [Referring to appearing to them as a group]

- It is in this context that Jesus now addresses Peter. It had been Peter who jumped into the sea to greet Jesus. It had been Peter in v10 who ran over to the net to bring the fish ashore when Jesus asked for some. Does it seem that perhaps he is going out of his way to show adoration and cooperation? And this fire of coals they were standing around. There is only one other time such a fire of coals is mentioned.

(John 18:15-27 NKJV) "And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so *did* another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. (16) But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. (17) Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also *one* of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." (18) And the servants and officers who had made a **fire of coals** stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself... (25) Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?" He denied *it* and said, "I am not!" (26) One of the servants of the high priest, a relative *of him* whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" (27) Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed."

So what was on Peter's mind as they stood there in silence with all of these memories, with the fire of coals before them?

(15) So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of Jonah,

- Jesus named Simon "Cephas" or "Peter" (Jn1:42), but He is only quoted as using that name twice: (Mat 16:17-18 NKJV) "Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (18) "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Some have stressed the idea that Peter means pebble (which is actually a different Greek word), almost to diminish Peter as being insignificant in terms of building the Church. But Peter was not just a pebble, he was a significant stone in building the foundation of the Church, and Jesus had foreshadowed that when He named him. Peter had a very important role to play as the chief apostle, which is supported by this exchange in John 21.

(Luke 22:33-34 NKJV) "But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." (34) Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."" Here He seems to use the name as a form of irony—you think you are so strong, and yet your strength will fail.

(15) So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

- V15 Some have suggested that "more than these" refers to the fish, or fishing equipment, meaning his employment. It reflects that idea I mentioned earlier that he was giving up, or at least a belief that they shouldn't have gone fishing. But while Jesus may be conveying that He wants them to focus on their job as fishers of men, I'm not sure that was the meaning of this question. More likely it means "more than the other apostles love me". Matthew's account of the warning to Peter again:

(Mat 26:31-35 NKJV) "Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' (32) "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." (33) Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." (34) Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." (35) Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples."

(15) So ... Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

- Peter's self-confidence was broken. Now it was being tested. Jesus does not condemn or reproach Peter. He does not even directly remind him of the denial. He tests the false confidence that led to his downfall. Jesus uses **agape** [godly love], Peter replies with **philia** [brotherly love]. "Do you [truly] love me more than these? / You know that I have brotherly affection for you."

He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

- Jesus says to "feed" the "lambs". This is reminiscent of His admonition in (Luke 22:31-32 NKJV) "And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. (32) "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, **strengthen** your brethren."

Peter was already in the process of returning to Jesus. He knew he had failed with his denial, and wept bitterly.

(Luke 22:54-62 NKJV) "Then, having arrested Him, they led *Him* and brought Him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed at a distance. (55) Now when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. (56) And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he sat by the fire, looked intently at him and said, "This man was also with Him." (57) But he denied Him, saying, "Woman, I do not know Him." (58) And after a little while another saw him and said, "You also are of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" (59) Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently affirmed, saying, "Surely this *fellow* also was with Him, for he is a Galilean." (60) But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!" And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. (61) **And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.** And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." (62) Then Peter went out and wept bitterly."

We are told in 1 Cor 15 and Luke 24 that Jesus had appeared to Simon alone, the first of the apostles to see Him. This was undoubtedly a comfort to Peter that he had been forgiven. Jesus is now testing him, but He is also reminding him of the responsibility he was given.

(16) He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I [have brotherly affection for] You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

- V16 Jesus brings it down a notch. He again uses agape, but He drops the comparison about whether he loved him more than the others. Peter again replies with philia. Jesus says "tend" or "shepherd" the "sheep". (1 Pet 5:2-3 NKJV) "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; (3) nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;"

(17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you [have brotherly affection for] Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you [have brotherly affection for] Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I [have brotherly affection for] You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

- V17 This time Jesus drops down to philia, which makes Peter groan, having already made that claim, and now being asked if it was really true. He probably also remembered his three denials, and the fact that he is being asked this a third time. And in this last case he appeals to Jesus' ability to see the hearts of men, and hopes that what Jesus sees agrees that at least he has brotherly affection for Him. Jesus goes back to "feed" and retains "sheep".

(18) "Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish." (19) This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me.""

- V18 Peter had decided to go fishing freely, on his own. It was only moments before that he had girded himself and come freely to shore. This may have meant something to Peter here. It is also ironic that he had said he would be willing to die for the Lord, just prior to his denials." (Lk 22:33) But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." And eventually Peter did go to prison, and to death, and fulfilled the role Jesus had for him.

(20) "Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, (who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?") (21) Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what *about* this man?" (22) Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me.""

Jesus was patient with Peter, working in a profound way with him. We too have our own role to play, our own responsibility, and we make our own mistakes. Jesus works with us personally, And we need to be humble, and not cocky as Peter had been about how we might behave in a time of trial. And if we are tempted to look around and compare ourselves with what is happening to others, we best heed these last words: If Jesus works with somebody differently, "what is that to you. You follow Me."