

Looking at the Life of Jesus

Session 8

Prayer: Dear Lord, *Help us serve you.* As you have called us to your service, make us worthy of our calling and use us to your glory and the welfare of your people. By our life and service help us to enrich your church and world. Help us to see you in others who need our help. As we share your love with others, let us also experience and be transformed by that love. Amen.

Video from The Gospel of John/ Scripture Lesson: John 21:1-22

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 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. (1-3)

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to 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 there were so many fish. (4-6)

That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish 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, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. (7-11)

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. (12-14)

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." (15)

A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." (16)

He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (17)

Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me." (18-19)

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" (20-22)

Discussion Questions

Why are the disciples fishing?

What are their results?

How do the disciples encounter Jesus again?

What does Jesus do?

Who recognizes Jesus and who goes to him?

What is the significance of the meal?

Why does Jesus ask Peter three times?

Why doesn't Jesus tell Peter he loves him?

What is Jesus asking Peter to do?

Why does Jesus use different words for each answer?

What does it mean to tend?

Who are the sheep to be tended? How do we tend them?

How are people fed?

What other verses speak to this?

Where are we strongest in feeding God's people?

Where are we weakest in feeding God's people?

How do we know when God's people are fed?

What is our mission? (What is God calling us to do?)

What is our vision? (What will the church look like when we achieve our mission?)

How are we doing as church leaders?

Verse by Verse discussion (adapted from [A Study of John 21:1-22](http://www.elite.net/~ebedyah/PastorsSite/gospels/john21-1-22.htm) © 1997 by David Humpal (<http://www.elite.net/~ebedyah/PastorsSite/gospels/john21-1-22.htm>)

In these verses, Jesus commissions Peter for the great apostolic ministry ahead. As we examine these verses, consider how the words of Jesus apply not only to Peter, but also to every disciple and every church that wishes to reach others for Christ.

Verses 1-3

Why are the disciples fishing?

Jesus intended to meet his disciples in Galilee. In Matthew 26:32 Jesus told his disciples, "after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." And the angel told the women at the tomb in Matthew 28:7, "Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

In a sense, it is reasonable for them to practice their trade while they are waiting. However, it might also show that they have returned to their way of life before Jesus came.

What are their results?

And when they return to fishing, the disciples in their own strength and own ability caught nothing even though they were experienced fishermen. If we try to do God's work in our own strength and in our own ability, we will also come up empty.

This is the way we sometimes get when doing work in the church. We forget to pay attention to God through prayer or Bible study. If we try to build the church in our own strength, we will be like the disciples and come back to shore with empty nets. We will be like the disciples – fishing all night and frustrated because our best efforts have produced nothing. Your best efforts and my best efforts will only give us one thing – nights of failure and frustration.

Verses 4-6

How do the disciples encounter Jesus again?

In the early morning darkness the disciples see a lone figure on the shore calling to them. They don't immediately recognize him. Jesus calls to them: "children." The Greek word used here is *paidia*, which means literally little children and is a term of familiarity and affection. Jesus loves and cares about the disciples.

What does Jesus do?

He teaches them an important lesson (and performs a miracle). All night they had fished in their own strength. Now in one simple moment of obedience to Christ, they will take in a huge and miraculous draught of fish. As soon as we listen to Christ's instruction and learn to depend on his strength, we will discover an abundant catch.

MacLeod writes, "A simple obedience to His word brings results beyond all expectation. ...the purpose of the miracle is to show the condition upon which alone the work of disciples as fishers of men is to be effected." (MacLeod: The New Bible Commentary pg. 896, 1954 edition, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company)

The catch was so large that they were not able to haul it in the boat. This was a true miracle.

How many years have how many churches been fishing in the waters of Merced and wondering why they can't seem to bring in any new fish? We must allow the Lord to be our guide. We must listen to his word and obey his command, and we will discover a net full of fish so great that the churches of Merced will not be able to contain it all. Christ was not teaching his disciples about fish. He was preparing them for their work in establishing his kingdom here on earth. These verses are not teaching us about fish. They are teaching us about filling this church with an abundant catch of souls if we listen to God's voice and obey his instructions.

Verses 7-11

John Chrysostom wrote in A. D. 390, "John first recognized Jesus, Peter first came to Him. For no ordinary signs were they which had taken place. What were they? First, that so many fish were caught; then, that the net did not break...."

John was the first to recognize Jesus, but Peter was the first to go to him. Peter always wanted to be with Jesus. Oh that we would have that same longing and desire – to spend time in prayer and communion with our Savior.

This story parallels two earlier events in Peter's story. He is called to the ministry by Jesus after a miraculous catch of fish; now his ministry is restored to him. He lost his ministry by a denial beside a fire of coal; now he recovers it beside a fire of coal.

Verses 12-14

Jesus tells the disciples to come and have breakfast. He had prepared them a meal. Jesus has prepared a meal for us, and he wants us to come and dine with him. He will feed the hungry spirit and refresh the thirsty soul. He will satisfy the longing in our heart, and he will fill us with his goodness. Jesus was about to send the disciples on their great apostolic mission. But first he gave them nourishment.

McGee comments, " 'Come and Dine' – what an invitation! Jesus did say, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel,' but He would rather you would come and have

breakfast with Him before you go. The lovely part is that the resurrected Lord, God Himself, feeds them. If only we would sit today and let Him feed us! He wants to feed His own."

Notice that none of the disciples questioned Jesus. They knew they were in the presence of God.

Verses 15-17, generally

In these next three verses Jesus commissions Peter to do three things – feed my lambs, tend my sheep, and feed my sheep.

Why does Jesus ask Peter three times?

Remember, Peter had denied Christ three times at the palace of the High Priest. Now he is given a chance to affirm his love three times. This mirrors his denials: John 18:17-27. Peter had in a sense ended his public Christian life by denying his Lord, and he had begun it again when he "went out and wept bitterly." He was now making a new confession of his faith before his Lord and his brother disciples.

Charles Spurgeon said "Poor Peter! Surely when that breakfast began he felt awkward. I put myself into his place, and I know I should hardly have liked to look across the table to Jesus, as I remembered that I denied Him with oaths and curses. Our Lord desired to set Peter quite at his ease by leading him to speak upon his love, which had been so seriously placed in question. Like a good doctor he puts in the lancet where the anxiety was festering: He enquires, "Lovest thou Me?" It was not because Jesus did not know Peter's love; but in order that Peter might know of a surety, and make a new confession, saying, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." The Lord is about to hold a tender controversy with the erring one for a few minutes, that there might never be a controversy between Him and Peter any more. "

Why doesn't Jesus tell Peter he loves him?

He does. Charles Spurgeon wrote: "When Peter said, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." you half thought that the Lord would answer, "Ah, Peter, and I love you"; but He did not say so, and yet He did say so. Perhaps Peter did not see His meaning; but we can see it, for our minds are not confused as Peter's was on that memorable morning. Jesus did in effect say, "I love you so that I trust you with that which I purchased with My heart's blood. The dearest thing I have in all the world is My flock: see, Simon, I have such confidence in you, I so wholly rely on your integrity as being a sincere lover of Me, that I make you a shepherd to My sheep. These are all I have on earth, I gave everything for them, even My life; and now, Simon, son of Jonas, take care of them for Me." Oh, it was "kindly spoken." It was the great heart of Christ saying, "Poor Peter, come right in and share My dearest cares." Jesus so believed Peter's declaration that He did not tell him so in words, but in deeds. Three times He said it, "Feed My

lambs: feed My sheep, feed My sheep," to show how much He loved him. When the Lord Jesus loves a man very much, He gives him much to do or much to suffer."

What is Jesus asking Peter to do?

Above all, he's asking him to serve/minister to others. Peter was a leader among believers, yet he must feed the lambs. He must be his master's self rather than his own.

St. Augustine wrote in 416 A. D. "Let it be the office of love to feed the Lord's flock... For what else means the words, 'Lovest thou me? Feed my sheep,' than if it were said, If thou lovest me, think not of feeding thyself, but feed my sheep as mine, and not as thine own; seek my glory in them, and not thine own; my dominion, and not thine; my gain and not thine...."

Why does Jesus use different words for each answer?

They seem very similar, but there are four different Greek words used for these six English words, and I this indicates a threefold commission to ministry.

Feed my sheep: The Greek word for feed used in "feed my sheep" is different from the word employed in the precept, "feed my lambs." The second "feed" means exercise the office of a shepherd, rule, regulate, lead, manage them, do all that a shepherd has to do towards a flock; but this first feed does not include all that it means distinctly feed, and it directs teachers to a duty which they may, perhaps, neglect—namely, that of instructing children in the faith. The lambs do not so much need keeping in order as we do who know so much, and yet know so little: who think we are so far advanced that we judge one another, and contend.

Verse 15

The Greek word used in verse 15 for lambs means little lambs. Jesus' first instruction is feed my lambs. Every church has little lambs. There are young children and there are new believers – both are lambs.

Charles Spurgeon said "The lambs are the young of the flock. So, then, we ought to look specially and carefully after those who are young in grace. They may be old in years, and yet they may be, mere babes in grace as to the length of their spiritual life, and therefore they need to be under a good shepherd. As soon as a person is converted and added to the church, he should become the object of the care and kindness of his fellow-members. He has but newly come among us, and has no familiar friends among the saints, therefore let us all be friendly to him. Even should we leave our older comrades, we must be doubly kind towards those who are newly escaped from the world, and have come to find a refuge with the Almighty and His people. Watch with ceaseless care over those new-born babes who are strong in desires, but strong in nothing else. They have but just crept out of darkness, and their eyes can scarcely bear

the light; let us be a shade to them until they grow accustomed to the blaze of gospel day.”

He says we need to feed them because they are often overlooked; and the result of feeding them is hugely profitable.

This feeding is forming, instructing them.

Those who are new to Christ need special attention. They need to learn about God and about the Bible. We need to be willing to spend the time to spiritually nourish them and help them realize that they are an important part of God’s family. So the first instruction that Jesus gives us is to feed the little lambs – the children and the spiritual children.

Isaiah 40:11: “[The Lord God] will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.”

Verse 16

What does it mean to tend?

The second instruction by Jesus is to tend my sheep. The Greek word for tend means not only to feed, but to take care of, guide, govern, guard, etc.

Phillip Keller was actually a shepherd. This is what he wrote about the shepherd’s responsibility of tending to his sheep, "He will go to no end of trouble and labor to supply them with the finest grazing, the richest pasturage, ample winter feed and clean water. He will spare himself no pains to provide shelter from storms, protection from ruthless enemies and the diseases and parasites to which sheep are so susceptible. ... From early dawn until late at night this utterly self-less shepherd is alert to the welfare of His flock. For the diligent sheepman rises early and goes out first thing every morning without fail to look over his flock. It is the initial, intimate contact of the day. With a practiced, searching, sympathetic eye he examines the sheep to see that they are fit and content and able to be on their feet. In an instant he can tell if they have been molested during the night – whether any are ill or if there are some which require special attention. Repeatedly throughout the day he casts his eye over the flock to make sure that all is well. Nor even at night is he oblivious to their needs. He sleeps as it were ‘with one eye and both ears open’ ready at the least sign of trouble to leap up and protect his own."

Ezekiel 34 defines bad shepherds and good shepherds. Jesus relies on this chapter for our understanding.

Who are the sheep to be tended? How do we tend them?

The Lord tells us we must tend the sheep. Who are the sheep? Certainly those believers who are under our care. Others? Who is my neighbor?

So let us not neglect our responsibility in caring for the family of God. We must be willing to minister to hurts, to encourage the disheartened, to pray for those who are sick, to help the needy, and to reach out to those who are drifting away. Let us never neglect the job that the Lord has given us to tend the sheep. We must not only care about them, but we must also take care of them. It is not enough to just offer the bread of life; we must take care of people. 1 Peter 5:1-2 says, "Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it --not for sordid gain but eagerly."

Verse 17

Now Jesus gives Peter a third command – feed my sheep.

How are people fed?

We must be fed from God's word. We must learn about God and his nature, his attributes, his personality. We must be taught how to rely on the Holy Spirit. We must go from the milk of a new believer to the meat of God's word. As Paul wrote in Hebrews 5:12-14, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil."

How does this maturity come? It comes from being fed. As we learn from God's word, we will grow in his grace. But how will the sheep grow if they are not being fed? That is our responsibility. We must be willing to not only tend the flock, but also feed it with spiritual food.

Too often churches tend to their flock but neglect to feed them. Many churches have fabulous programs to meet the needs of their members – programs for all ages, support groups, counseling groups, addictive behavior groups. They have times of fellowship and activities for the whole family. They tend their sheep well.

But Jesus said we must also feed the sheep. Jesus is asking his disciples to fulfill the prophecy in Jeremiah 3:15: "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding."

Verses 18-19

Here we have Jesus preparing Peter for his future ministry and his eventual martyrdom. He concludes these two verses with the instruction, Follow me. This is all Christ asks of us – to follow him. Whatever our troubles, follow Jesus. When we learn to follow Jesus,

we will learn how to be a successful Christian. We will stop doing things our own way, and start doing things God's way. We will discover we are a lot happier doing it this way.

And we'll find abundance and success (returning to the fishing story).

Verses 20-22

Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain close to his breast at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!"

Peter got distracted. Jesus had just told him to "Follow me," and Peter starts worrying about John. Of course we do the same thing. MacDonald comments, "Many failures in Christian service arise from disciples' being more occupied with one another than with the Lord Himself."

We start comparing ourselves to other Christians. We compare our finances, our car, our house. We wonder why God is blessing someone more than he is us. We wonder why we have to go through some times of trouble when others don't have to. We compare our church to other churches. We compare our pastor to other pastors. But Jesus here rebukes Peter. He said, what is that to you? In other words, that is not our concern. We should not be spending time worrying about how God is using other people. We need only concern ourselves with following Jesus.

When we learn to follow Jesus, we will not become distracted from the task he has given us. We will then see clearly to be able to minister to others. We will be able to feed the lambs, tend the sheep, and feed the sheep. Jesus commissioned Peter to do these things, but he has also commissioned us. Let us be willing to follow Christ and so fulfill the calling he has placed on our lives.

What other verses speak to this?

Matthew 16:15-19: Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."