

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #77

John 21:1-14

John is writing this Gospel to generate faith in Jesus Christ. The kind of faith he is trying to generate is a faith in Jesus Christ that believes in Him as the only God/Savior so one may have eternal life (John 20:31). Everything he puts in this Gospel is for that purpose. He is very intent upon making certain that we know that the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ was something many people actually saw. There were many eyewitnesses from all different walks of life and from all different geographical locations who actually saw and talked with Jesus Christ. There were well over 550 people who actually saw the resurrected Savior.

When we carefully examine post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ, there are at least eleven of them:

- 1) He appears to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18).
- 2) He appears to other women who were on their way to meet with the apostles (Matt. 28:8-10).
- 3) He appears to Peter (Luke 24:22, 34; I Corinthians 15:5).
- 4) He appears to two men on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:26-32; John 20:19-25)
- 5) He appears to ten disciples minus Thomas in Upper Room (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25).
- 6) He appears to eleven disciples including Thomas in Upper Room (John 20:26-28).
- 7) He appears to seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee (**John 21:1-14**).
- 8) He appears to five hundred brethren (I Corinthians 15:6).
- 9) He appears to eleven disciples at a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20).
- 10) He appears to James the half-brother of Jesus (I Corinthians 15:7).
- 11) He appears to His eleven disciples when He ascends (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:4, 9).

In Matthew 28:7, it was revealed to some women who were to reveal it to the disciples that the Lord would meet with them in Galilee. Actually, He met with them in several places, but one of the places He said He would meet with them is in Galilee.

JESUS CHRIST PROVES HE IS GOD AND PROVES HE IS RAISED FROM THE DEAD FOR THE THIRD TIME TO SEVEN OF HIS DISCIPLES IN A VERY UNUSUAL WAY AND UNUSUAL PLACE.

The word “manifestation,” which shows up twice in **verse 1**, is one that means to show something, to reveal something or to manifest something in a visible way (*Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, p. 439). These manifestations were very real things these disciples actually saw with their own eyes.

What we have here is a special manifestation of Jesus Christ to seven disciples. J. Vernon McGee said that he viewed this section as being a convention with seven problem children. (*John*, Vol. 4, p. 500).

In these verses there are seven manifestation faith building facts we want to see.

MANIFESTATION FACT #1 – We learn where this manifestation took place. **21:1**

This manifestation took place at the Sea of Tiberias. This was a name John used for the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1). Jesus Christ had specifically told His disciples that after He had been raised from the dead, He would meet them in Galilee (Matthew 26:32). That message was reaffirmed by what the angel had told the women to tell the disciples (Matthew 28:7).

Again a key point to see here is that when God says He is going to do something, He does it literally, not metaphorically or symbolically. Jesus said He would meet His disciples in Galilee, angels said that Jesus would meet with disciples in Galilee and that is precisely what He does and precisely where He meets them.

God's Word tells us that Jesus Christ is going to meet us in the clouds and in the air (I Thess. 4:17). You may be absolutely certain that this will be precisely where He will meet us.

MANIFESTATION FACT #2 – We learn which disciples were involved in this manifestation. **21:2**

All in all there were seven disciples to whom Jesus manifested Himself. The seven are:

1) Simon Peter; 2) Thomas; 3) Nathanael; 4) James (son of Zebedee); 5) John (son of Zebedee) plus two other disciples, which many believe were Andrew, the brother of Peter, and Philip, the friend of Nathanael (John 1:40-46). Although they are not specifically named, John makes it clear that we know they were specifically there.

Now we may notice that John is clear to point out that Thomas called Didymus (Thomas in Hebrew means "twin" and Didymus in Greek means "twin"). Nathanael is from Cana in Galilee. We may remember that Cana was the first place where Jesus performed His first sign/miracle of turning water to wine at a wedding (John 2:11). Nathaniel had been there to see the first miracle of Jesus Christ and now He was seeing the last miracle, His resurrection and ascension. Now John is pointing these specific things out and naming some of these people for a couple of reasons:

- 1) It shows we are talking about real people from real places. These are not a bunch of invented names. These were real people who saw the resurrected Savior.
- 2) It shows that a broad spectrum of different kinds of people saw the resurrected Savior. They were not all from the same place and they were not all alike, but they all saw the same manifestation - Jesus Christ alive from the dead.

MANIFESTATION FACT #3 – We learn what the disciples were doing in this manifestation. **21:3**

Simon Peter said to the other disciples that he was going fishing. There has been some debate among Bible interpreters as to whether Peter was right in wanting to go fishing. Jesus had breathed on him the Holy Spirit and some believe he should have waited until Christ met with them and gave them their next assignment. Many question whether this was the leading of the Holy Spirit or the leading of the Apostle Peter.

However, I tend to think this is a good use of time. It is a good way to redeem the time. In fact, no where in the context does Jesus condemn this action.

Spirituality certainly does not mean you cannot fish or hunt. Fishing to Peter was more than a sport, it had been his business. Just as Paul's business was tent making, Peter's was fishing. It had been his former occupation prior to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. It was Augustine who said, "The craft which was exercised without sin before conversion, was no sin after it."

Now I do not think that the disciples had gone to Galilee to resume their former careers. They had gone there because they were told Jesus would meet them there (Matt. 28:7). More than likely there were two reasons Peter decided to fish: 1) They needed some food to eat, or 2) They needed some money to sustain their ministry.

Now when Peter said he was going fishing, the other six disciples said, "We'll go with you." This again would suggest to me that this is not wrong, for all the other disciples agreed with Peter. There was perfect unity among these seven disciples.

James and John would have been fisherman, but there is no hint that Thomas or Nathanael were. So they all got in the boat. This boat was not a massive ship, in fact it was a relatively small boat, but it was big enough to escort seven men while fishing (John 6:22-23; 21:8). In fact, this is possibly the same boat Peter had been in the first time Jesus called him when he was fishing (Luke 5:3-11).

We know that it must have been evening time because they fished all night and had caught nothing. Sometimes you harvest and sometimes you don't. If you are going to potentially catch fish, you need to go fishing. You cannot just sit in your living room and expect God to have fish jump out of water and crawl up to your house. God has designed that certain species of things live in certain places and if you want the possibility of seeing or harvesting one of the species, you must go to those places.

Now I am convinced that God was the One who was seeing to it that all night they caught nothing. Had they caught fish, what God was about to do would never have fully manifested His power. Their seeming failure is actually setting the stage for God to work and develop their faith.

Sometimes God does not want us prosperous so He can show Himself to be a God who is Personally caring for us. Those religious leaders, who preach that God wants you to have prosperity, have apparently overlooked this text. God wanted His own disciples to have nothing so that He could develop their faith that He is the One who cares for them.

MANIFESTATION FACT #4 – We learn when Jesus manifested Himself to the disciples.
21:4

When it was breaking day, Jesus was standing on the beach, but the disciples did not know it was Him. Perhaps they did not recognize Him because of a lack of light or because of the distance between Him and the boat or because He wasn't yet letting them see who He was.

Now I want you to see something here that is so profound. The Person standing on this beach is the resurrected God/man Jesus Christ, who has nail scars in His hands, feet and side because He has just completed by His sacrifice the entire redemptive plan of God that can save sinners.

The place you would actually expect to find Him at this point, would be sitting on His Heavenly Throne, High and Lifted up as Holy, Majestic God. What we see here is amazing for every one of us. The second member of the Trinity is standing on a beach concerned about whether or not His disciples caught fish.

Jesus Christ personally cares about what you do for a living. He is interested in you when you are on your job. He wants you to depend on Him for success in your job. Just remember this point when you go to work. He specifically is concerned when things seem barren or in times when nothing much seems to be happening. Even though you cannot see Him, He is there with you. Keep your trust in Him and keep working and He will do great things for you (Ps. 37:3-11).

MANIFESTATION FACT #5 – We learn what Jesus said to manifest Himself to the disciples. **21:5-6a**

Jesus asks them a question which indicates that He knows that they do not have any fish. We could understand this in our vernacular as meaning - You boys haven't caught any fish out there, have you? To which they immediately answered, "No." One commentator humorously said it is possible that you actually have here the only true fish story that has ever been told.

Notice He calls them "children" (παιδια) (**21:5**) which is not the word for "little children." The particular flare of this Greek word is on an older child, as opposed to completely mature adults (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 333). What Jesus is probably doing by using this word "children" is to establish that these disciples were still young in their faith. They weren't babies but they were young and immature. In fact, this episode would be that which would literally put physical meat in their stomachs and spiritual meat on their bones.

At that point Jesus said to them, put your net on the right side of the boat and you will find a catch there. There are no fish finders on this boat and even if there were, Jesus is on the shore so He would have no way of looking down into the water.

Now in the previous miracle that Christ performed in providing fish, He had the disciples go out into deep water (Luke 5:4). In this case, He simply has them throw their nets on the right side of the boat. One thing is clear, Jesus Christ is God and He knows where the fish are and He even directs them to where He wants them to be, just as Paul said in Colossians 1:16-17.

This is the last recorded post-resurrection miracle of Jesus Christ and the only recorded post-resurrection miracle for us in Scripture. The Apostle Paul was very specific to point out that we do not know Jesus Christ any longer in the flesh, but we know Him in our hearts (II Corinthians 5:16).

MANIFESTATION FACT #6 – We learn how the disciples responded to Jesus' manifestation. **21:6b-9**

Now there are a series of five key actions we want to see:

Action #1 - The disciples cast their nets on the right side and caught so many fish that all seven could not haul in the net. **21:6b**

There is a key principle to see here; if you want the blessings of God, obey the Word of God. When you have been through a lengthy season of draught, God may send you so many blessings you cannot even count them all.

By the way, notice that God uses what people have as a basis for blessing. Here He uses their empty nets and fills them with fish. In Cana, He used their empty water pots and turns it into wine. In the feeding of the five thousand, He used five loaves and two fish. In Moses' case, He used a rod that was in his hand. In David's case, He used a sling that he carried in the field. The point is this, some people wish or want other things other than whom or what they are. They want bigger or better circumstances. But here is the point - if God can't use you for who you are and with what you have, He isn't going to use you somewhere else with something you don't have.

Action #2 - John said to Peter that it is the Lord on the shore. **21:7a**

It was John who first knew, this is the grace of God at work here. That One on the shore is God.

Action #3 - Peter puts his outer coat on and dives into the water to swim to see Jesus. **21:7b**

Peter was a man of action. What is interesting is that Peter had taken off his coat to fish. He had to reach over the sides of the boats and cast out and pull in nets, so his coat was off. But when he went to see Jesus, he wanted his coat on. Typically when you swim you take your coat off, but Peter puts his on and **the only explanation for this was His reverence for God.**

The first time Jesus allowed Peter to catch some fish he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8), but this time he dives into the water to get to Jesus as fast as he can.

Action #4 - The other disciples row the boat about 100 yards into shore, dragging the net. **21:8**

There is a good point to observe here, not all disciples get close to Jesus at the same time.

Action #5 - When they get to shore Jesus has a fire going with fish already on it and bread for them to eat. **21:9**

When they get to shore they see a fire burning, fish simmering and bread baking. This is the Son of the Living God, Who has just been to the cross for their sins and He is cooking breakfast for them.

G. Campbell Morgan said that every wife and mother needs to remember this when they are cooking breakfast for their families. This is also a good thing for every man to remember when he fires up a grill. If this kind of work was not too mundane for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, then it sure shouldn't be for us.

MANIFESTATION FACT #7 – Jesus invites the disciples to join Him for breakfast.
21:10-13

Jesus invited the disciples to bring Him some more of the fish to cook (**21:10**). Peter went up and by himself pulled a net full of 153 large fish to shore. His strength is amazing and so is the fact that the net did not tear (**21:11**). Notice the reliability of John's testimony. He is remembering specific things about this.

Jesus invited the disciples to come and have breakfast. To sit and eat with Jesus Christ you must be invited. Notice **verse 12** says none of them dared to ask Jesus any question for a couple of reasons: **First**, they knew it was the Lord, and **Second**, they didn't want to say anything that would be wrong, and **Third**, they just want to quietly sit there and let Him do the talking.

May I suggest that when we get before the Lord, do exactly what these disciples did; keep your mouth shut and your eyes and ears open.

They are eating breakfast with the One who just a few days earlier died on a cross. As Jesus passed out the fish and the bread, they could not help but see the nail prints in His hands. There is also one thing very interesting to observe here and that is Jesus does not pray and give thanks for the food; rather He just passes it out. Why? Because **HE IS GOD, HE IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD AND HE IS LORD. No longer does Jesus Christ do anything in a condescending manner to His Father. His days of humility are over. He is now seen as being coequal with God the Father.** This is God handing them the fish and bread. This is a heavenly meal provided by a heavenly Person.

He is alive from the dead because He is God and this was the third time He manifested Himself as such to these disciples.

John includes this in His Gospel because it is exactly what happened and it proves that Jesus Christ is the only living God/Savior who can save you from your sins.