

Fishing by Day; Fishing by Night – John 21:1-6

I. Introduction:

- A. This scripture falls apart into two sections, and they create a simple outline for this lesson.
 - 1. The disciples went out fishing one night, but they caught nothing.
 - 2. Then as the sun came up, Christ blessed their efforts, and 153 large fish were led of the Lord into their net.
 - 3. There was fishing by night which produced nothing, but then there was God-blessed fishing by day.
- B. As I make a spiritual application or two, please remember that this was an actual historical event.
 - 1. It appears that at the time there was one particular purpose for it all, but maybe there was more than that.
 - 2. It was another special revelation of Christ Jesus to His disciples, and it came through a great miracle.
 - 3. *“After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias (another name for the Sea of Galilee), and on this wise (in this special way) shewed he himself.”*
 - 4. This would otherwise be a quick lesson, but the details of all this open up to a number of other thoughts.

II. We begin with lessons flowing out of the NIGHT-TIME fishing trip.

- A. This took place during the forty days following Jesus’ crucifixion and before His ascension into Heaven.
 - 1. The fishermen in this scripture were members of the church which Christ established and commissioned.
 - 2. The *“church”* didn’t start at Pentecost through the blessing of the Holy Spirit, it was started earlier by Christ himself, during His earthly ministry. There is plenty of evidence for that.
 - 3. In other words, here in this chapter we are looking at the nucleus of Jesus’ first church.
 - 4. And with that in mind, we can easily apply some of this to our little church here in Post Falls, Idaho.
- B. More specifically, what is it we see?
 - 1. We find seven of the eleven disciples, without the presence of the seventy or the hundred and twenty.
 - 2. For some reason, we see that – only slightly over half the membership was present that day.
 - 3. It doesn’t matter whether it was Sunday or Monday; whether it was a regular church service or a fellowship.
 - 4. Less than two-thirds of the original disciples were present.
 - 5. **Where** were the others, and **what** were they **doing**? Were they a disappointment to these seven?
 - 6. Whatever they were doing, good or bad, they were going to miss this wonderful reappearance of Christ.
 - 7. The Christian who skips assembling with the church always – potentially – misses a blessing from the Lord.
- C. Among those whom **were** present, who do we see at the top of the list?
 - 1. Isn’t it two of the most disappointing brethren in the church – **doubting Thomas** and **denying Peter**?
 - 2. This is the first time that Peter and the Lord meet after the disciple’s denial.
 - 3. It is not until **verse 16** that we hear Peter say – *“Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.”*
 - 4. But he **did** love his Lord Jesus, and he demonstrated it through his fellowship with the brethren.
- D. Now, we know that Peter and his brother, Andrew, along with the sons of Zebedee, James and John, were fishermen, but I wonder about Thomas and Nathaniel.
 - 1. They were both from Galilee, so they may have spent time on the lake, but was fishing their trade?
 - 2. I suppose it doesn’t matter. And also this may not matter... but is there any connection between this fishing trip and to what Jesus told Peter and Andrew?
 - 3. In calling those two into His ministry, the Lord had said *“Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.”* Weren’t **all** the disciples supposed to be spiritual fishers?
 - 4. Keep in mind that it was the Lord who tied together gathering fish and gathering souls.
- E. In addition to the seven disciples who are actually named, there were two unnamed disciples.
 - 1. Why aren’t we told who they were? Was it an oversight on John’s part or was it deliberate.
 - 2. Whatever was in John’s mind as he wrote, it was the will of the Holy Spirit not to give us their names.
 - 3. And to my way of thinking, in one way or another, through this, you and I could be inserted into this story.

- F. In a sense, that church was without a pastor at the time. There was no human undershepherd to lead them.
1. But one of the men, one of the ordinary members, said to those who remained, *"I'm going soul-winning."*
 2. No, he didn't actually say *"soul-winning,"* but for the sake of our lesson, let's pretend that he did.
 3. As the sun sank in the west, Peter said to the other disciples, *"Let's go catch some fish."*
- G. There was nothing wrong with night fishing, just as there were no laws against soul-winning at night.
1. They didn't need state fishing licences – governmental permission. They had the authority of the Lord.
 2. It wasn't as if they weren't throwing dynamite into the lake to stun and then scoop up the fish, like some dynamic mass evangelist.
 3. I don't know for sure, but they may have had a lantern on their boat.
 4. They might have been trying to shine the light of Christ onto the water of the world to attract their quarry.
 5. After Peter stated his intention, they divided into two boats, and off they went seeking fish for Christ.
- H. Digressing just a bit, can't we say that secular things & even mundane things, can be done for the Lord's glory?
1. I don't know what was in Nathanael's mind, but earlier he may have been wondering, *"What next, Lord?"*
 2. The brethren may have been thinking, *"Now that the Lord is gone, how should I feed my family?"*
 3. *"In my old life I was a plumber, I was a tent-maker, I was a fisherman, can I do these things for Christ?"*
 4. And **Matthew** might have said, *"What about me, I was a tax collector for the Romans, what am I to do now? Should I take up fishing?"*
 5. Whether they were fishing to feed their families or fishing for the joy of fishing, this can be done for the Lord.
 6. Anything which is not actually sinful, can be carried out for the glory of the Saviour.
- I. Immediately after Peter's suggestion, they pushed off from the shore and eventually dropped their net.
1. **But they caught nothing.** They used all their skills and training, **but they caught nothing.**
 2. They may have prayed for a good harvest, **but they caught nothing.**
 - a. Somewhere in my house is a book Jackie gave to me thirty years ago called *"Pavlov's Trout."*
 - b. The premise of the book is that to catch fish you have to think like a fish.
 - c. You have to *"ring the bell,"* so to speak, to make the fish saliva flow.
 3. Those disciples may have employed all their Bible school soul-winning lessons, **but they caught nothing.**
 4. Sometimes – many times – even doing the right things in the right ways, the Lord, in his **truly** infinite wisdom, withholds His blessings in order to bless even more greatly a few hours later.
 5. One of the blessings of these few verses is the contrast between catching nothing followed by the miraculous abundance there can be in Christ.
- J. Initially, the brethren were fishing in the dark, illustrating perhaps our efforts at soul-winning.
1. Going down the street, knocking on doors and either talking to strangers or leaving invitations in doors – that kind of ministry is done in the dark, so to speak.
 2. And to some degree even in the preaching of the gospel in a church setting, it is done in the dark.
 3. We throw out the net, but only the Lord knows whether there is one of His fish under it.
 4. I wonder how many times Peter, Andrew & Zebedee's boys, went out fishing at night and been successful?
 - a. Probably often enough. It was apparently a common way to fish.
 - b. And it would have become uncommon if it was always unproductive.
- K. Whether at night or in the heat of the day, here we see another very simple principle:
1. If we want to catch fish, we have to go fishing. No one can catch fish reading fishing magazines.
 2. We **should** go out **praying** for God's blessings. We **should** go **hoping** and **expecting** or the Lord's glory.
 3. But if we don't get in the boat and throw out the net, or if we don't cast out the bait or the lure, it is guaranteed, we will **not** catch fish.
 4. The disciples went out in hopes of catching fish, but on that particular night they returned with empty creels and empty ice chests.

III. Then they began to do a little **DAY FISHING**.

- A. *“But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.*
1. *Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.*
 2. *And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.”*
 3. Christ Jesus casts a different light on everything we do.
- B. Can I lawfully say that Jesus was there all the time, but they didn’t recognize Him?
1. Not only was that true as the sun began to appear, but He was close-by during the night as well.
 2. Wasn’t He in the boat with them?
 - a. *“I serve a risen Saviour; He’s in the world today; I know that He is living, whatever men may say.*
 - b. *I see His hand of mercy; I hear His voice of cheer; and just the time I need Him, He’s always near.*
 - c. *He lives, He lives. Christ Jesus lives today; He walks with me and talks with me, along life’s narrow way.*
 - d. *He lives, He lives. You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.”*
- C. I have had the privilege to spend a few hours, from time to time, out on the lake with different brethren.
1. There have been some wonderful conversations, and glorious periods of fellowship around the Lord even when surrounded by fishless water.
 2. Wouldn’t it be fun to know what Peter, Thomas & Nathaniel talked about as they cast and recast their net?
 3. Wasn’t Christ Jesus in the boat with them.
 4. Their Christian hearts might have been warmed and blessed, depending on their attitude..
- D. Then as the sun began to rise over Gadara, & the 2 little boats returned to shore, someone called out to them.
1. By this time they were in shallow water, where I suppose they might not have thought there were any fish.
 2. Shallow or deep, it means nothing to the Creator and Schoolmaster of fish.
 - a. *“Children, have ye any meat?”* I’m told that the Greek suggests this was asked in a negative sort of way.
 - b. *“Children, you don’t have any meat do you? You didn’t catch anything did you?”*
 3. The Lord knows exactly what is going on in our lives and in our service for Him.
 4. But do we? Quite often, we don’t until the Lord asks the question.
- E. Did the Lord disguise His voice, or were the men simply not paying attention?
1. *“The disciples knew not that it was Jesus.”*
 2. Whether He did or didn’t, isn’t true that the Lord often speaks to our hearts, and we don’t hear Him?
 - a. He might speak to us through a book or a short devotional – maybe it is through a hymn.
 - b. Once in a while a friend says something in general conversation, but the Lord is in it.
 - c. Sometimes the Spirit even speaks through the preacher.
- F. After initially not recognizing Him, shortly thereafter they did. At what point was it?
1. If I had to guess I would say that someone figured that this was the Lord the moment He said, *“Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find,”* but it took a while for the reality to set in.
 2. *“Cast the net on the right side of the ship,”* seems to me to be a totally **unreasonable** suggestion.
 3. But then added to that there was the guarantee of a catch. Who can do this but the Lord?
 4. How wide was that boat? How far out did the nets go when they were cast?
 5. Why should there be no fish on the wrong side of the boat but twenty feet away on the right side there was a school of big fish?
 6. Yes, I acknowledge that the possibility might exist, but then to guarantee a catch?
 7. Maybe that makes sense to some fishermen, but perhaps to a non-fisherman, like me, this suggestion sounds miraculous.
 8. *“They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.”*

- G. Remember, the disciples had been in this boat before.
1. In **Luke 5** there was another miraculous catch of fish.
 2. Jesus told Peter, *“Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a drought.*
 - a. *And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.*
 - b. *And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes...”*
 3. Was this why they once again cast out the net, but this time on the right side of the boat?
 4. Was this an act of faith, built upon an earlier miracle? I would hope so.
- H. One of the lessons here is that Christ Jesus knows where each and every fish is to be found.
1. He not only **knows** the fish, He **directs** and **guides** the fish.
 2. He brought these large fish together into a great school.
 3. Now, I don't know anything about the fish or the fishing on the Sea of Galilee.
 4. But from what little I do know generally, the really big fish, the predator fish, don't school.
 5. This was a miraculous catch in many ways.
 6. These were big fish which could feed several families and perhaps be sold to meet other needs.
 7. How could this stranger on the shore not be the Lord Jesus, and how could He not be the Son of God?
- I. Calvary Baptist Church has work to do for the glory of Lord.
1. No matter how you might apply the disciples' fish catching, it must certainly illustrate our need and our responsibility.
 - a. Are we in need of a **soul-stirring** and **community-rattling revival** of the Spirit of God?
 - b. Has the Lord prepared a **great harvest** of eternal souls for us?
 - c. Is it simply the **opening up** of the **Word of God**, to bring joy to the hearts of the disciples?
 2. Whatever it is, our nets will be empty without the presence and the blessing of the Saviour.
 3. There is nothing wrong with casting our net to the left instead of the right, until the Lord actually points in the other direction.
- J. This scripture should remind us of our absolute dependence on the Lord.
1. And it should teach us that in obeying and depending on Him there is great victory and reward.