

**The Fishing Story  
John 21:1-14**

How much control do you think we have over the circumstances of our lives? I believe that the answer is that we have no control. We might think we have. We might act as if we have. But the truth is that we don't.

Let me read for you **James 4:13-16**. **“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ (14) Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. (15) Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’ (16) But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.”** Do we have control over the circumstances of our lives? No! We are totally without strength and unable to affect even the simplest circumstance but this is not true of Christ.

This morning we will have the opportunity to see this truth illustrated for us in **John 21:1-14**. Let me now take the time to read this passage for you. **“After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. (2) Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. (3) Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will also come with you.’ They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. (4) But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. (5) So Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you do not have any fish, do you?’ They answered Him, ‘No.’ (6) And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.’ So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. (7) Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord.’ So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea. (8) But the other disciples came in the little boat for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish. (9) So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. (10)**

**Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.’ (11) Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. (12) Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples ventured to question Him, ‘Who are you?’ knowing it was the Lord. (13) Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. (14) This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.”**

My hope for this message as we examine this fish story, recorded for us by the Apostle John, is that we understand our total inadequacy to supply for ourselves what we need versus Christ’s sufficiency and this understanding might lead us in every circumstance, no matter how mundane, to remain bowed before Him. Doesn’t this make sense? It is not only right, but it is also smart.

So this is the question we will be seeking to answer this morning. What do we need to know in order to experience the abundant supply of Christ in every circumstance of life?

First of all, experiencing the abundant supply of Christ begins with us understanding how totally inadequate we are for ourselves (John 21:1-5). We will see this clearly illustrated for us in **John 21:1-5.**

Let us begin with **John 21:1. “After these things.”**

John is referring to all the things he spelled out for us in **John 20**; or in other words, he is referring to the tomb having been found empty and also to the post-resurrection appearances of Christ; first of all, to Mary Magdalene and then to the disciples with Thomas absent and then again to the disciples with Thomas present. John is telling us that sometime **“after these things,”** something happened. And what was that something? Let us continue to read.

**“After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias.”** The Sea of Tiberias is better known as the Sea of Galilee. That name came from the city of Tiberias, which was located on the western shore and had been founded by Herod Antipas and named in honor of Emperor Tiberius.

So John is telling us that sometime after the events described in **John 20**, “**after these things**,” Jesus once again appeared to His disciples, but this time He appeared to them at the Sea of Tiberias.

Now we might assume from **verse 1** that when Jesus appeared to His disciples at the Sea of Tiberias that He appeared to all of His disciples but this is not so. **Verse 2** makes it clear that He actually appeared only to seven of His eleven disciples. And who were they according to **verse 2**? They were “**Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples.**” These were the seven disciples that Christ manifested Himself to at the Sea of Tiberias. Five of them were named but two of them were not. So who were these two unnamed disciples? The two unnamed disciples were most likely Andrew and Philip since they had close ties with Peter and the Sons of Zebedee.

This appearance by Christ to seven of His eleven disciples at the Sea of Tiberias to me is somewhat surprising. Why?

Christ’s appearance to His disciples at the Sea of Tiberias is somewhat surprising because this is not where Christ told His disciples to wait for Him once they arrived in Galilee from Judea (Matthew 28:16).

So where were they supposed to wait? The disciples, rather than waiting at the Sea of Tiberias, were, according to **Matthew 28:16**, to wait for Christ on a particular designated mountain. And this of course is not where Jesus found these seven disciples according to **John 21:1-2**. Rather He found them at the Sea of Tiberias. So how did they get there?

Let me us now read **John 21:3**. “**Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will also come with you.’**” In light of what we know from **Matthew 28:16** and what we read here, this is what most likely happened.

After disciples arrived in Galilee at the mountain where they were told by Christ to wait for Him I think that got hungry and Peter, rather than choosing to tough it out while they waited for Jesus on the mountain that He had designated, told the other disciples that He was going on a fishing trip.

I would imagine that all of this seemed so very reasonable to Peter. The disciples were hungry. Peter was hungry and he was a skilled fisherman. So he, seeing the Sea of Tiberias most likely close at hand and filled with so many delicious fish, decided to use the skills that he possessed to meet their needs. So he said to the other disciples, **“I am going fishing.”**

And what was the response of the other disciples? **“They said to him, ‘We will also come with you.’”** So, what was their response? They chose to join Peter in using their fishing skills in order to provide themselves.

So let me ask you a question. Was this fishing trip really necessary? And I believe that the answer is no!

Christ had given His disciples a specific instruction. They knew what they were to do, and if they had heeded the instruction and had not only gone on the mountain but had remained on the mountain, I am absolutely confident that Christ would have met their need for food. And why can I be so confident of this?

What was Christ’s promise to His disciples in **Matthew 6:33** concerning God’s supply? **“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”** What things? All the things necessary for life! Did the disciples really need to go on this fishing trip? No! They didn’t! If they had not only gone to the mountain but had remained on the mountain Christ would have supplied for them, but they didn’t remain on the mountain.

Christ’s disciples, rather than trusting Christ to supply for their needs, chose to trust in themselves when they went on the fishing trip (Matthew 6:33). This was a mistake. They should have not done this. But they felt that within themselves that they had the wherewithal to supply for themselves what they needed.

This is so common today. People rather than seeking to honor the clear teachings of God’s word will sacrifice all of it in order to do for themselves what they think is necessary in order to supply for their needs.

In other words, though God has clearly instructed His disciples to maintain fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ, though God has clearly

instructed His disciples to use their gifts for the building up of the church, though God has clearly instructed His disciples to be engaged in the proclamation of the Gospel, so many will forsake these things because they need to in order to provide for themselves.

What foolishness. They, like the disciples, have left the mountain thinking that they are serving themselves, but the reality is they are in fact exposing themselves to miserable disappointment, which we see in the passage that we are presently examining.

Did the disciples get the fish? Were they able to supply for themselves? No! They failed miserably. Let us once again look at **John 21:3**, but this time we will read the entire verse. **“Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will also come with you.’ They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.”** What did they catch? They caught **“nothing.”**

What an amazing thing to happen? Here they were skilled fisherman going out on a very familiar body of water, the Sea of Tiberias, in a boat that was most likely owned by one of the disciples and did so at the very best time for catching fish, at least on that particular body of water, which was at **“night,”** and yet they had caught nothing.

Why? Was it just bad luck? Absolutely not! Let us now read **John 21:4-5**. **“But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. (5) So Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you do not have any fish do you?’”**

Christ’s question in **John 21:5** implies that He expects a negative answer. He expected a negative answer because He knew that they had caught no fish. So how did He know that? Christ knew that they had caught no fish because He, possessing all authority and power, had prevented them from the catching fish (Matthew 28:18).

Christ told His disciples in **Matthew 28:18** that He had been given all authority and power. Does this authority and power extend to fish? Absolutely! Therefore if Christ does not want fish to be caught they will not be caught.

And how much authority and power do we have over fish? Let me help you with this. We have none. And certainly this was also true of Christ's disciples. They wanted to catch fish. They thought they could catch fish, but they didn't catch fish. Why? They were lacking any power or authority to make it happen.

The disciples needed to learn a lesson. They needed to understand how truly helpless they were when it came to the matter of supplying for themselves, not only just in the area of food but in all areas of need just as we need to learn this lesson as well. And that is exactly what I believe that Christ helped them to see in **John 21:1-5**.

So, what is the very first thing we need to know if we are going to put ourselves in a position to experience Christ's abundant supply? We need to know how totally inadequate we are to supply for ourselves.

So this brings us to the second thing we need to know in order to experience the abundant supply of Christ in every circumstance of life. And what is this second thing?

Experiencing the abundant supply of Christ begins with us understanding our inadequacy, but is not fully realized until we, by faith, come to trust in His sufficiency (John 21:6-14).

Let us now go on to read the first part of **John 21:6**. **“And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.’”**

Now as we consider this instruction by Christ and their response, it is important to understand that at this point, according to **John 21:4**, they did not know who was giving them the instruction. And why was this? We don't really know. It could have been because there was a morning haze. Or perhaps they were still at a considerable distance from the shore. But for whatever reason, they did not recognize Him. The fact was that they didn't.

So how would they respond to this seeming stranger who promised them if they cast their net on the right-hand side of the boat they would not “perhaps” find a catch of fish, or “maybe” find a catch of fish, but “would”

find a catch of fish. You might think that they would ignore Him but they didn't

Let me now let us once again return to **John 21:6**. **“And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.’ So they cast.”**

Why did they do this? The disciples, after they had caught no fish all night, I believe, cast their net on the right side of their boat, not to prove the so-called stranger right, but rather to prove Him wrong (John 21:6). So did they prove this stranger wrong? No!

So now let us once again return by to **John 21:6** but this time we will read the entire verse. **“And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.’ So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.”**

The casting of the net by the disciples and the resulting large number of fish that were caught did not prove the so-called stranger to be wrong, it revealed His identity (John 21:7).

Let us now read **John 21:7**. **“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved [the apostle John] said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord.’ So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea.”**

Clearly from this response we can see that the disciples saw the large catch of fish, under the circumstances as John has just described them, as miraculous. And who first recognized that the person who was responsible for this miracle was their risen Lord? It was John. And how did he respond to this recognition? He told Peter that the so-called stranger on the beach, who had orchestrated this miracle, was Christ. And what did Peter do in response to the words of John? Peter **“put his outer garment (for he was stripped for work) and threw Himself into the sea.”** In other words, Peter most likely dressed only in his underwear or perhaps better said in his loincloth, put on his outer robe and jumped into the sea and began to swim toward shore.

Therefore, though the Apostle John was the first disciple to recognize that the so-called stranger on the beach was Christ, it was Peter who was first chose to act (John 21:7). And how did the other disciples respond? They certainly were not nearly as impulsive as Peter. They actually remained in the boat and slowly but steadfastly maneuvered the boat that was now dragging this net of very large fish nearly a hundred yards back to the shore. We see this in **John 21:8**.

Let me read this verse for you. **“But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.”** So who got back to the shore first? Was it Peter, who had decided to swim back to shore fully dressed, or the disciples, who were dragging behind their little boat a net full of very large fish? I don't know! But I do know this, Christ, being fully in control of all things, lovingly and abundantly supplied His disciples need for food far beyond what they could have asked or imagined (John 21:9-14).

Let me know read for you **John 21:9-14**. **“So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread. (10) Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.’ (11) Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ None of the disciples ventured to question Him, ‘Who are you?’ knowing it was the Lord. (13) Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. (14) This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to His disciples, after He was raised from the dead.”**

Jesus had told them to wait for Him on some specific mountain near the Sea of Tiberias, but they chose to leave that mountain in order to supply for their needs. Was this necessary? No! It was not necessary.

The disciples needed to learn a lesson that we also need to learn. And what is that? We need to learn that if we are going to experience the abundant supply of Christ in every circumstance of life, we need to trust Christ and His sufficiency rather than ourselves.

And how do we do this? We do this simply by bowing ourselves before Christ and His expressed will for our lives. This is what we need to do. And

will we be disappointed? Absolutely not! Christ will not only prepare a breakfast for us, but the breakfast that He will prepare for us will far exceed what we could have ever asked for or imagined.

May God give us the grace as we seek to follow Christ to trust Him to abundantly supply for us what we need.