

Exegetical Notes, John 21:1-14

“Let’s Go Fishing”

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John 21:1-14

Verses 1-3

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way:² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.³ “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

- Sometime after his first appearance to Mary Magdalene and before his return to the Father, Jesus appeared again to a small group of his disciples. The group consisted of, Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two unnamed disciples. This passage is an account of that appearance.
- Peter announced to this group of men that he was going fishing and they agreed to go with him. Peter was a commercial fisherman. This was not a pleasure trip but a return to the business he had managed before he became a disciple of Jesus. This was an act of surrendering to the circumstances he had encountered. He was going back to what he had been before. The others, in joining him, were agreeing with him that the “Jesus Thing” was over and that they needed to give up on it.
- They got in a boat, probably one that belonged to Peter and fished all night long. Fishing was a night time event in that area. But their efforts were unsuccessful. They caught nothing at all, all night long.

Verses 4-6

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

- As the sun rose and the disciples were packing it in, Jesus stood on the shore. They were still in the boat about 100 yards off shore (see verse 8), but they were not fishing for their nets were in the boat. (see verse 6). The disciples did not recognize Jesus at first.
- Jesus called out to them from the shore asking if they had caught anything. To which they answered in the negative.
- The word which is translated "Friends" in the NIV by which Jesus greets the group is the word normally translated "boys." It usually refers to boys under the age of 13. Those who are not yet officially men.
- Jesus instructed them to try again by throwing their net off the right side of the boat. When they did, the net was instantly filled with fish. So full that the fishermen could not haul the catch into the boat.

Verses 7-9

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

- John was the first to recognize that it was Jesus speaking to them. He told it to Peter.
- Apparently Peter had taken off his shirt while he was fishing. He grabbed it and put it on as he jumped into the water to go and greet Jesus. This is because Jews regarded a greeting as a religious act showing respect between those greeting each other. It would have been considered improper for him to greet anyone, but more particularly Jesus, without being correctly attired.
- The others, unable to haul in the catch, rowed the boat to shore dragging the net.
- When they landed Jesus had already prepared breakfast for them.

Verses 10-14

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

- There were 153 fish in the net. The number of fish has no more relevance than to show the size of the catch. The net was full to the point of breaking, but it did not break.
- Jesus invited them to eat with him. And though no one asked, everyone knew the truth. Their host was Jesus.
- This was the third time that Jesus revealed himself to his disciples.

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