# From Fishing to Feeding Sheep

**John 21:1-25**
11-30-2025

***** Peter learned what we all must learn: ***We don't have to go back to our "old trade", if God has called us into His Ministry!***

## I. LEAVING THE OLD BUSINESS OF FISHING FOR FISH (V.1-14)

A. Peter's Choice to Fish influenced others to Follow His Example (v.3)

B. Peter's Success in Fishing was Futile without God's blessing (v.4-5)

C. Peter's Risen Lord would both Catch & Cook all the Fish he needed (v.6-14)

1. The Supernatural Catch (v.6-8, 11)

2. The Supernatural Cookout (v.9-10, 12-14)

## II. STARTING THE NEW MINISTRY OF FEEDING GOD'S SHEEP (V.15-24)



A. Feeding God's Sheep requires a Supreme LOVE FOR THE CHIEF-SHEPHERD
*("Lovest thou me?" - v.15-17)*

B. Feeding God's Sheep requires a ministry to People with VARYING LEVELS OF MATURITY *("Lambs (Arnia – v.15)…."Sheep" (Probaton – v.16-17) )*

C. Feeding God's Sheep requires DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF MINISTRY
*("Feed" (basko – To Feed Food - v.15)…"Feed" (poimaino – Lit. to Shepherd Sheep by providing attention, protection & direction - v.16-17)*

D. Feeding God's Sheep requires a willingness to FOLLOW CHRIST NO MATTER WHAT! (v.18-24)

1. We must Follow Christ no matter what the Cost (v.18-19)

2. We must Follow Christ no matter what Others Do (v.20-24)

Conclusion: v.25

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INTRODUCTION:

It has been said that the five most important chapters in entire Bible are considered to be Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20 and 21, because they tell of the most important event in human history—the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, the capstone of the whole Bible.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 21, Jesus appears to seven of His disciples. This had been "the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead." This appearance takes place on the west side of the Sea of Galilee.

**v. 1**
Jesus had foretold His disciples that after His resurrection, He would meet them up in Galilee (Mt. 26:32), and after He did arise, an angel of the Lord reiterated the meeting place of Galilee (Mt. 28:7, 10).

Whereas John 20 centers on Christ's post-resurrection appearances to Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas, John 21 centers on <u>Peter</u>.

**"Shewed Himself again" –** manifested Himself. Jesus was only seen now and then during the forty days (Acts 1:3), ten instances being recorded.

***** Peter learned what we all must learn: ***We don't have to go back to our "old trade", if God has called us into His Ministry!***

## I. LEAVING THE OLD BUSINESS OF <u>FISHING FOR FISH</u> (V.1-14)

### A. Peter's Choice to Fish influenced others to <u>Follow</u> His Example (v.3)

John 21 starts off by introducing the disciples: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, John, James and two other unnamed disciples.

An interesting mix of disciples are mentioned. Backslidden Peter (who had denied the Lord), Thomas the Doubter, Nathaniel the critic ("Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"), and the one-time glory-seeking sons of Zebedee.

Peter, being a restless man, abruptly said, **"I go a fishing,"** and the other disciples agreed to follow.

**v. 3**
**"I go a fishing"** – the infinitive of the verb "to fish" is present tense, which may suggest sustained action. However, we cannot be sure whether Peter returned to fishing because he could not stand inactivity or because he wanted to <u>permanently</u> return to his former occupation.

Fishing was Peter's old trade. Jesus had called Peter, Andrew, James and John away from the fishing business to be "fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19-21; Lk. 5:10).

Peter, at this point, may have been tempted to go back to his former career. There was nothing wrong with fishing. However, Jesus had called Peter into the ministry (which would involve feeding the Lord's sheep).

How do you know God's call into full-time vocational ministry?

1) You will have a desire
2) You will have an ability
3) Others will recognize God's hand on your life

It's a shame to see some men, called into the ministry, go back to a lesser occupation.

**"I go a fishing. . . we also go with thee" –** Peter's influential personality and leadership qualities had a strong effect on others who would follow his example.

Be careful! Someone is following your lead.

**"We also go with thee"** – Never underestimate the influence of your example. Someone is looking up to you and is, to one degree or another, following you.

As the hymn writer expressed it:

> "Many now are watching the footsteps that we take,
> Many soon will follow in the choices that we make
> So let us then be faithful to be what we should be
> And leave a good example that they may clearly see
> . . . Be an example of the believer.

**B. Peter's Success in Fishing was <u>Futile</u> without God's blessing (v.4-5)**

Peter probably had his fishing gear all ready, so they immediately entered the boat and went fishing, but with no success. The night time was the preferable time to fish, but although they labored through the night, their toil was to no avail.

As daybreak came, it may be that they gave up hope and headed to shore, because they were near there when Jesus asked them if they had caught anything to eat.

**v. 5**
**"They answered Him, No." -**
They did not realize that it was the Son of God talking to them, and they replied, "No."

It hurts fishermen to have to admit this. To not even catch one fish is an embarrassment.

Even though the disciples here were fishing for actual fish, this event can have a spiritual application.

Jesus said that those who followed Him would become "fishers of men" – a person who is witnessing for the Lord Jesus (a "soul winner" in other words).

If a Christian has a desire to win others to the Savior, it can only be done by the Savior working through out efforts. A person can fish consistently and desperately for souls, but God gives the increase, and it is a bountiful one to those who trust Him and allow Him to work through them.

## C. Peter's Risen Lord would both <u>Catch & Cook</u> all the Fish he needed (v.6-14)

### 1. The Supernatural <u>Catch</u> (v.6-8, 11)

Jesus told them to try the other side of the boat, and they did. The multitude of fish that they caught was so great that they couldn't lift it out of the water.

**v. 6**
Peter no doubt remembered the amazing catch Jesus had made on a previous occasion: SEE Luke 5:4-11

Something in the Apostle John's mind clicked when he saw this miracle, because he told Peter, **"It is the Lord."**

V. 7 – in this verse John refers to himself as **"that disciple whom Jesus loved."** John restrains from naming himself personally in this Gospel, but simply refers to himself by describing his special relationship with the Lord.

**v. 7 "For he was naked" –**
Peter had something like a bathing suit on; he had been "stripped for work."

Perhaps in his heart Peter knew he was not where he should have been, so he rushes to go be with his Lord, as if to say, "Lord, you see, this fishing is not nearly as important to me as You are."

When Peter found out that it was the Lord, he responded in a manner typical of his personality: being abrupt, impulsive, ardent, a man of action, he paused only long enough to cover himself decently—wrapped himself with his fishers-coat and jumped into the sea to rush toward the Savior while the others went about the business of hauling the boat and fish into shore. (**V. 8 –** states that they were 200 cubits or 300 feet (the size of a football field) away from shore.

**2. The Supernatural <u>Cookout</u> (v.9-10, 12-14)**

As the disciples dragged in their fish, they noticed that Jesus already had fish cooking and bread for them to eat. The coals, fish and bread are spoken of in such a way as to suggest that they were provided supernaturally. The Lord provides as He will, through human labor naturally, or otherwise.

**v. 9**
The supernatural catch and cook-out are Jesus' way of saying to Peter, "Peter, I will supply your needs! You don't need to worry about how you will eat! Just do my will!"

In verse 10, Jesus asked them to bring some of the fish that they had caught, so Peter immediately went down to aid in bringing up the net (which John points out was not torn despite the strain on it).

**v. 11**
"If there is any symbolism connected with the unbroken net, it is to be the effect that those who are won through Christ-directed service will not be lost, but will be preserved to reach the heavenly [shore]" (Wycliffe Bible Commentary, p. 1121).

Jesus then bids His disciples to **"come and dine**." The word "dine" in the Greek is *aristao*, which means "to take of the principle meal" (breakfast).

As the disciples ate, still amazed to see Jesus, they did not dare to ask who He was, because they knew it was the Lord.

Verse 13 is interesting, as we see for the first time in Scripture that Jesus did not bless or offer thanksgiving for the food as He customarily did. This time Jesus was the only provider of the food, and in His resurrected form all things were given into His hand.

**v. 13**
Note: Incidentally, fish must be okay for us to eat, since Jesus gave it to His disciples. Bread and fish! No wonder I so enjoy those tuna fish sandwiches!!

## II. STARTING THE NEW MINISTRY OF <u>FEEDING GOD'S SHEEP</u> (V.15-24)

### A. Feeding God's Sheep requires a Supreme <u>LOVE FOR THE CHIEF-SHEPHERD</u>

*("Lovest thou me?" - v.15-17)*

The first 14 verses of John 21 set the stage for a penetrating search into the heart of the Disciple Peter.

Peter, who had boasted in Mark 14:29 that "although all shall be offended, yet will not I," but later denied the Lord 3 times, now was put to the test of how much he really did love the Lord.

Perhaps Jesus asked the question three times because Peter had previously denied Him three times.

**v. 15** – Jesus asked, "Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou Me more than these?"

This question can be interpreted to mean "more than these do"—in which case Jesus would be reminding Peter of the proud boast he had made before the crucifixion.

Or the question may imply "more than anything else" – such as the fishing business (i.e. "Do you love me more than these fish?").

Peter's answer was, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus replied, "If you love me, feed my lambs."

The word that Jesus used when he questioned Peter's "love" comes from the Greek *agapao*, which expresses a more loyal, unconditional, volitional, God-produced, higher type of love and devotion.

In Peter's reply, he uses the word *phileo*, which denotes an affectionate love without the deep, sincere devotional qualities that *agapao* has.

**v. 16**

**"Lovest thou me?" -** This time Jesus drops the "more than these" as if to question Peter's love at an even more deep and basic level. "Do you even love Me, Peter?"

By the third time that Jesus questions Peter's love, He uses the word *phileo*, which is regarded by scholars as the reason why Peter was grieved. It seems that Jesus was doubting whether Peter even felt the lesser form of love for Him.

Peter, though, realizing that Jesus knew the thoughts and intents of the heart, replied, "Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee."

Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (v. 17)

**v. 15-17**
In order for any pastor, preacher, teacher to be an effective chef and waitress "serving God's Word, we must have a love for Christ. A love for Him that is greater than our love for any other business activity or recreation.

**B. Feeding God's Sheep requires a ministry to People with VARYING LEVELS OF MATURITY** *("Lambs (Arnia – v.15)…."Sheep" (Probaton – v.16-17) )*

Jesus' response to Peter changes from "Feed my lambs" to "feed my sheep."

The word *arnia* (v. 15) means "little lambs," and the word *probata* (v. 16-17) means "sheep."

Lambs = young converts

Sheep = older saints of the faith

Roman Catholicism teaches that the "lambs" refer to ordinary, secular believers, and that "sheep" refers to priests, all of whom are under the sovereignty of Peter.

**C. Feeding God's Sheep requires DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF MINISTRY**
*("Feed" (basko – To Feed Food - v.15)…"Feed" (poimaino – Lit. to Shepherd Sheep by providing attention, protection & direction - v.16-17)*

Jesus gave three admonitions to Peter: "Feed my lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," and "Feed my sheep." Both the lambs and the more mature sheep need feeding and leading, and that is the task of the spiritual shepherd. It is an awesome responsibility to be a shepherd of God's flock! (1 Peter 5:2) There are enemies that want to destroy the flock, and the shepherd must be alert and courageous (Acts 20:28-35). By nature, sheep are ignorant and defenseless, and they need the protection and guidance of the shepherd." (Wiersbe, p. 398).

Ezekiel 34:1-10 and Jeremiah 23:1ff describe God's indictment of unfaithful shepherds, the leaders of Judah.

**D. Feeding God's Sheep requires a willingness to FOLLOW CHRIST NO MATTER WHAT! (v.18-24)**

**1. We must Follow Christ no matter what <u>the Cost</u> (v.18-19)**

In V. 18-19 Jesus tells Peter how his latter life will glorify God. Jesus said to Peter that during his youth he went and did as he pleased, but from now on he was to bring glory to the Father, even through his death.

**v. 18-19**
**"Stretch forth thy hands. . . death** (v. 19)" - History says that Peter was crucified; however, not feeling worthy to die as his Lord did, Peter requested to be crucified upside-down.

Peter's death would not be a tragedy. It would "<u>glorify</u> God!"

Christ's last words to Peter in the Gospel of John were, "Follow thou Me."

**2. We must Follow Christ no matter what <u>Others Do</u> (v.20-24)**

**v. 21**
**"What shall this man do?" –** What about John? Lord, will he also die as a martyr for you?

**v. 22**
In effect, Jesus says: What happens to John is none of your business. If I keep Him alive till My return, that has nothing to do with you; you must just focus on following Me!

*Don't worry about what others are doing or not doing, just follow Christ.

Don't become disturbed by envy or discouragement by what other Christians do or do not do. Just follow Christ!

**v. 23**
Some have offered the suggestion, that John may be one of the two witnesses (Rev. 11) who will minister just prior to Christ's return (but this is only speculation).

**v. 24**
John, being an <u>eye witness</u> of Christ and His resurrection gives a true testimony of all that He wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: v.25

John did paint for us a beautiful description of the nature, character, life and key teachings of Christ, but so much more could have been said (hence there are three other Gospels).

Jesus' nature, character, words, work, His life and ministry displayed so much profound wisdom and grace and blessing, that if John was to record every detail, both of events and application of these events, every library in the world could not house the volumes that would be written.

Note: John 20:31-31