

Exalting Jesus Christ

"I'm going fishing!"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. I had a good friend who loved to go fishing, especially when he needed a break from all the pressures associated with his work.
 - A. It wasn't so much that he wanted to catch fish, as much as it was just to get away for a while.
 1. In fact, he would occasionally say he was going fishing without a hook.
 - a. He wasn't actually trying to catch fish.
 - b. He just wanted to be by himself on a calm lake somewhere, or sitting beside a stream listening to the water cascading over the rocks.
 - c. To him, that kind of therapy was much better than actually catching fish.
 2. Maybe this is why some of the Lord's disciples decided to go fishing as well – just to get away from all the pressures of the recent past.

- II. This morning, in our series, "Exalting Jesus Christ," we're going to begin looking at the last chapter in the gospel of John – chapter 21.
 - A. It's in this 21st chapter that we find one of the last and certainly one of the most significant appearances of Jesus to His disciples.
 - 1. Immediately after His resurrection, the Lord sent word to His disciples to meet Him in Galilee.
 - 2. But the eleven disciples were still hiding behind closed doors in Jerusalem – afraid to go anywhere.
 - a. So to reassure them, the Lord appeared to them twice.
 - B. When we come to the 21st chapter of John we find the worried and confused disciples in Galilee patiently waiting for the Lord.
 - 1. In the meantime, Peter did what we would expect any troubled fisherman to do – he told his fellow disciples, "I'm going fishing."

BODY:

- I. The Bible tells us Jesus appeared to His disciples on several occasions.
 - A. We probably don't have a record of every appearance of Jesus.
 - 1. But, in his prologue to the Book of Acts, Luke says Jesus *"presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."* (**Acts 1:3**).

2. However, it seems there were also periods of time during those forty days when the disciples didn't see Jesus at all – perhaps for days or maybe even weeks at a time.
- B. No doubt, during those interludes the minds of these troubled men were filled with questions for which they had no answers – like, "What are we supposed to do now?"
1. Jesus had not yet given them the "Great Commission" to "go into all the world," so perhaps they were wondering what happens next?
 2. I also imagine they were still feeling threatened by the Jewish and Roman authorities.
 - a. After all, Jesus had warned them: **Luke 21:12** – ". . . *they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons.*"
 - b. Those aren't the most reassuring words for a group of men who had been hiding behind closed doors.
 3. So, leaving Jerusalem behind and returning to Galilee to spend time at home was just what these troubled, confused men needed.
- II. I'm sure the Sea of Galilee brought back many fond memories to the minds of these men.

- A. It was here that Jesus had first approached some of them and chose them to become His disciples.
1. Speaking of Jesus: **Mark 1:16-20** – *And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 17 Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 They immediately left their nets and followed Him. 19 When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. 20 And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.*
 2. Although they didn't realize it at the time, some of the ones Jesus had chosen that day to be His disciples would later play a major role in the early days of the Lord's church, while others would write some of the books of the New Testament.
- B. Over the next three years these fishermen-turned-disciples saw Jesus do things that no ordinary man could do.
1. They were eyewitnesses of one dramatic miracle after another.
 - a. They observed how He calmed a deadly storm by uttering three simple words: "Peace! Be Still!"

- b. They watched Jesus as He defied the laws of physics and nature by walking on water.
 - c. They saw Jesus heal diseases of all kinds, and even demonstrate His power over Satan by casting out demons from those who had become possessed.
- C. During those same years they also heard the most profound teachings the world had ever known.
- 1. It all began with a sermon the Lord preached on the gentle slopes of a mountain in Galilee – the sermon we know today as the "Sermon on the Mount."
 - 2. They were also privileged to hear Jesus preach to crowds both large and small about the coming "kingdom of heaven."
 - a. Jesus was preparing His followers, and especially His chosen disciples, for the spiritual kingdom – the church – which He would soon establish by His death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven.
 - 3. And when they were in Jerusalem, these men heard Jesus boldly challenge the leading rabbis and teachers of the Law among the Pharisees and Sadducees.
 - a. He exposed their hypocrisy, condemned their traditions, and refuted their false doctrines.

4. And finally, these chosen disciples were with the Lord in the upper room as He taught them one last time on the night before His crucifixion.
 - a. His final words gave them hope and encouragement, even though they were deeply troubled when they heard Jesus say He would not be with them much longer.
- D. But so much had happened since that night.
 1. Just a few hours after celebrating Passover, Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, scourged and crucified.
 - a. All but one of them fled and hid in the shadows, fearing they might be next.
 - b. Only John had courage enough to stand at the foot of the cross, with the mother of Jesus and the other women, as Jesus breathed His last words.
 2. The Lord was then quickly buried in a borrowed tomb, only to rise from the dead three days later.
 3. On the day of His resurrection Jesus appeared to these same disciples as they hid behind closed doors.
 - a. Thomas was not there on that occasion – and when the other disciples said they had seen the Lord, Thomas didn't believe them.

- b. Eight days later Jesus appeared again to His disciples – this time Thomas was present and saw for himself the wounds in the hands and in the side of the resurrected Christ.
- E. And now the disciples waited in Galilee for Jesus to appear to them a third time.
 1. We don't know how much time has passed since Jesus had last appeared to His disciples – as we said earlier, perhaps it had been several days or even weeks since they last saw Jesus.
 2. So, it only seems natural that, after returning to Galilee, those among the Lord's disciples who were fishermen would go back to doing what they did best – fishing.
- III. As we turn to the 21st chapter of John we come to the third recorded appearance of Jesus, and the last one mentioned by John.
 - A. As the scene opens, we find the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius, which is also known as the Sea of Galilee
 1. **John 21:1-3** – *After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, 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 are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.

3. I don't know about you, but as I read these words it seems the disciples had grown somewhat impatient.
 - a. Perhaps it had been a while since they first arrived in Galilee.
 - b. Most likely they had been waiting for Jesus to appear again and answer the most pressing question on their minds – like, "What happens now?"
 4. But as days or perhaps weeks had gone by with no sign of Jesus, Peter appears to have become restless.
 - a. Men who have spent their whole life working hard every day are not the kind to sit around day after day with nothing to do.
 - b. So, Peter did something he knew would take his mind off the troubles of the past – he would go fishing.
 5. Thomas, Nathanael, and the sons of Zebedee (who were James and John) and two other unnamed disciples also joined Peter.
- B. However, after spending the whole night fishing on the Sea of Galilee, Peter and the other disciples came up empty-handed.
1. But as the morning dawned, things were about to change.

- a. Some unknown man, standing on the shore about a hundred yards away, caught their attention
 - b. **John 21:4-6** – *But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No." 6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.*
2. As they struggled with the net, it was John who first realized the man calling to them from shore must be Jesus.
 - a. **John 21:7** – *Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea.*
3. Struggling with a net full of fish probably reminded Peter of a similar incident three years earlier.
 - a. Speaking about Jesus: **Luke 5:1-8** – *So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, 2 and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them*

and were washing their nets. 3 Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. 4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

4. So now, three years later, as the Lord's disciples strained at the oars to bring this net full of fish ashore, Peter couldn't wait to get to Jesus.
 - a. He jumped into the water and swam for shore!

- b. **John 21:8** – *But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish.*

IV. This appearance of the Lord was not like the previous meetings.

A. When they all reached shore, they discovered the Lord had already made preparations to sit down together with them and enjoy breakfast.

- 1. **John 21:9-14** – *Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught." 11 Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?" — knowing that it was the Lord.*

13 Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. 14 This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

- 2. We can only imagine how this meeting with Jesus thrilled the hearts of these disciples.
 - a. Jesus had not abandoned them.

- b. They were still on the Lord's mind and in His heart.
 - c. He was still with them.
- B. But rather than prove to His disciples once again that He been raised from the dead, Jesus seems to have had another reason for this meeting.
- 1. It seems Jesus appeared to His disciples on this occasion mostly for the benefit of one man - Peter.
 - a. Jesus used this opportunity to restore Peter's confidence and self-esteem.
 - 2. On the night Jesus had been arrested Peter faced the greatest challenge of his faith.
 - a. The man who boldly said he would die for the Lord actually denied knowing the Lord – not once, but three times.
 - b. That night began with Peter drawing his sword ready to take on an entire legion of soldiers, but ended with this same Peter cowering in the shadows, weeping bitterly and filled with shame.
 - 3. And so, in the next lesson we're going to see what Jesus did to restore Peter's shattered confidence and self-esteem.

- a. We'll also see how Jesus prepared Peter for the persecution and suffering he would experience in the years ahead as an apostle of Jesus Christ.
 - b. And finally we'll see how the Lord helped Peter refocus on the task at hand – the task of reaching a lost world with the gospel of Christ.
- V. However, before we leave this seaside reunion there is an important lesson here for us.
- A. If there is anything we can learn from this story, it's not to second-guess the Lord, or assume we really don't need His help when facing disappointments or setbacks.
 1. As the disciples grew impatient for the Lord's appearance, and struggled all night to catch fish, it seems they had forgotten the lesson Jesus taught them on the night before His crucifixion – the lesson about bearing fruit?
 - a. **John 15:5** – *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."*
 2. How many times have we made the same mistake?

- a. How many times have we become frustrated, maybe even a little depressed, when things didn't quite work out as we planned?
 - (1). So we decided to launch our own boat hoping to land some new blessing, only to turn up empty-handed?
 - b. How many times have we grown impatient and decided to take matters into our own hands only to discover that we failed because we forgot one crucial ingredient in the equation – Jesus?
3. If these disciples were thinking they were going to return to their old jobs, the Lord had a surprise waiting for them.
- a. Jesus not only wanted these men to see how helpless they were without Him, He also wanted to remind them that their mission had never changed.
 - b. He had chosen them to become "fishers of men," not fishers of fish.
- B. During the darkest days of Israel's history, when the Jewish people found themselves thousands of miles from home, languishing in Babylonian captivity, God sent them a message.
1. It came through the prophet Jeremiah who wrote them these reassuring words from God:

- a. **Jeremiah 29:11** – *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you," says the Lord, "thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."*
 2. However, the future God planned for these captives would not be realized for quite some time – seventy years, in fact. Look at the preceding verse:
 - a. **Jeremiah 29:10** – *For thus says the Lord: "After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place."*
 3. The Lord promised to bring them all home again. But in the meantime, all they could do was to remain faithful and wait – wait for the Lord to fulfill His plan in His way and in His own time.
- C. So, what's the lesson for us?
1. The next time you begin thinking the Lord is not only distant, but seems too busy to answer your prayers. . .
 2. And the next time you begin thinking maybe it's time to simply take matters into your own hands. . .
 3. Consider these three simple, but important passages:

- a. **Hebrews 13:5** – *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*
 - b. **Psalms 27:14** – *"Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!"*
 - c. **John 15:5b** – *". . . for without Me you can do nothing."*
3. If the Lord was busy planning a bright, prosperous future for the children of Israel as they waited in captivity; do you think the Lord has anything less planned for your future?
 4. So, wait... don't run ahead of God... let Him do His will in His way and in His own time.

CONCLUSION:

- I. I don't know what the Lord has in store for your immediate future, but I can tell you one thing He has planned.
 - A. You can be absolutely certain of this one fact:
 1. **2 Corinthians 5:10** – *. . . we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*
 - a. That time is coming for you and it's coming for me.
 - b. It's absolutely certain, and it's absolutely inescapable.

2. For some, that moment will be greater and more wonderful than any experience we could possibly imagine.
 - a. Some will experience more joy than they've ever known – pure, unadulterated euphoria.
 - b. They will forever be with the Lord in heaven.
 - c. Words simply can't describe the excitement and joy they will experience.
 3. However, for others, that moment will be filled with unimaginable fear and terror.
 - a. They will suddenly come face to face with the Jesus whom they've either denied, or whom they've pushed out of their lives so they could do their own thing.
 - b. They will be forever condemned to spend eternity in hell – the place of torment God prepared for the devil and his angels.
 - c. There will be no hope – just an eternity filled with dread, despair and desolation.
 4. It has never been a question of whether you and I will appear before the judgment seat of Christ – we will!
 - a. The question is whether we are ready for that day.
- B. There's no need for me to tell you whether or not you're ready – you already know.

1. You know if you've surrendered your life to Christ in obedience to the gospel, and you know if you've been baptized into Christ for the remission of sins.
 2. You also know if you have remained faithful – if you have continued living every day a life that is totally and completely dedicated to serving the Lord.
- C. But here's something I can tell you:
1. I can assure you the Lord has a wonderful future planned for those who are prepared for that day, and an unspeakably terrifying future for those who are not prepared.
 2. I can also assure you the Lord is letting you to choose for yourself.
 - a. Your eternal destiny is in your own hands.
 - b. You will choose for yourself where you will spend eternity.
 3. My only question is this: which eternal destiny will you choose?