

# The Third Revelation of the Resurrected Jesus

**John 21:1-14 (ESV)**

## Introduction

Today is the third Sunday of Easter. Last Sunday we considered the second time the resurrected Jesus revealed himself to his disciples as they were gathered together. The first time Jesus appeared to them, Thomas was not with them. However, the second time he appeared to them, Thomas was with them. Jesus appeared the second time to solidify Thomas' faith. Today we will consider the third time Jesus appeared to his gathered disciples after his resurrection.

The first two appearances took place in Jerusalem. The third appearance took place in Galilee on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, which is also called the Sea of Galilee.<sup>1</sup> The Sea of Tiberias is located 76 miles north of Jerusalem, which is about a three day journey on foot from Jerusalem. The second appearance took place eight days after his resurrection. This third appearance, thus takes place around two weeks after Resurrection Sunday morning.



The shoreline of the Sea of Tiberias.

## Why Go to Galilee?

Why did they leave Jerusalem and return to Galilee? The short answer is because Jesus told them to return there. On the night he was betrayed, when they went out to the Mount of Olives and entered the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told them, *"After I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."*<sup>2</sup> Then, on Resurrection Morning, the angel said to Mary, *"Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is also referred to as the Sea of Kinneret.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 14:28.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 16:7.

Galilee had been home base for Jesus' ministry. Galilee was where Peter, James, and John lived. It was their hometown. Peter's house was there. Thus, after celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem, they returned home to Galilee to await the revelation of Jesus.

If we think of this third resurrection appearance as a play, there are two acts. The first act (vs. 1-8) takes place in the darkness of night in a boat out on the Sea of Galilee. The main characters are seven of the eleven disciples; Peter, James, John, Thomas, Nathanael of Cana, and two other disciples who are not named. The second act (vs. 9-14) takes place on land on the shore of the Sea of Galilee just after morning has dawned. The main character here is Jesus as he interacts with his seven disciples.

## The Revelation of Jesus

The main point of this portion of Scripture is the fact that Jesus **revealed** himself to his disciples. This word is used twice in verse one. *"After this Jesus **revealed** himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he **revealed** himself in this way."*

Then, we see this word again at the conclusion of this scene in v.14, *"This was now the third time that Jesus was **revealed** to the disciples after he was raised from the dead."*

This passage is about Jesus revealing himself to his disciples. He showed himself to them and allowed himself to be seen. Jesus abundantly and repeatedly presented himself to his disciples in order to allow the reality of his resurrection from the dead to sink into their minds.

Everything was changing for the disciples. Given the fact that Jesus truly had been raised from the dead, the world would never be the same. It couldn't ever be the same. Thus, John records for us, a third time that Jesus revealed his resurrected self to his disciples.

This is important because it is a sign<sup>4</sup> that John thinks will be important for all subsequent followers of Jesus. He is adding further evidence to help us believe in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God, ...so that we will have life in his name" (20:31). As we last week read verses 30 and 31, it appeared that John was wrapping up his epistle. It's almost as if he laid down his pen saying, "There's so much more that could be written, but what I have written will help you believe in his name." Maybe he sat and thought for while asking himself, "Is there anything else that I need to include?" Or maybe he slept on it and awoke then next day and realized that he should include a third appearance of Jesus. So, he picked up his pen and wrote more. Since we know that *"all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit,"*<sup>5</sup> we know that this final appearance recorded in this gospel, this third time that the resurrected Jesus revealed himself to his disciples, is significant and is needed to support a firm faith in the crucified, risen, Son of God.

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<sup>4</sup> John 20:30.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Ptr. 1:20-21.

## **Act I - In the Boat on the Sea of Tiberias (vs. 2-8)**

Act One has two scenes, both of which take place on the boat as the seven disciples were fishing. The first scene takes place overnight. The second scene takes place at sunrise. Let's get the scene before us.

### **Scene I - Futile Fishing in the Dark (v. 2-3)**

Simon Peter, James, John, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and two other unnamed disciples "were together." Perhaps the other four disciples had not yet arrived from their journey from Jerusalem. Whatever the case, these seven are together. They were close friends. They had been through a lot together. Peter, James, and John had been business partners together before Jesus had called them to be his disciples. Together they had owned a small fishing business.<sup>6</sup>

Peter says, "*I am going fishing*" (v.3). The other seven respond, "*We will go with you.*" There is nothing in the text that indicates that there is anything wrong with what they were doing. Peter has frequently been painted in a bad light because he goes fishing, as if he is abandoning his calling and returning to his previous employment. However, he's not alone. There's six other disciples with him. There's no textual reason here that in any way condemns Peter or the other six disciples who went fishing with him. They are simply waiting for Jesus to arrive. They had obeyed his command to return to Galilee and wait to meet him. That's what they have done. Perhaps Peter is hungry. His house and his family is there. Maybe this is nothing more than Peter and the disciples going out to get breakfast.

*They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing (v.3).*

They fished all night in the dark and their efforts were futile. They caught nothing. This happens occasionally. Anyone who has ever been fishing knows that sometimes, the fish just aren't biting. Futile fishing does not necessarily mean that God is punishing you for your sins. Sometimes it means you arrived after the fish ate breakfast or you're just in the wrong spot. This kind of fruitless fishing is incredibly frustrating. There few things more maddening than laboring all night and taking in nothing for your work. And frustrating situations are only made worse when you're tired and hungry. Everything seems worse when you're hungry. However, things are about to turn around.

### **Scene II - Fruitful Fishing in the Light (v.4-8)**

Just when things appear they can't get any worse, a ray of hope begins to shine. These seven laboring fishermen are tired, hungry, and most likely somewhat irritable. The dark night begins to give way to growing light of dawn. Suddenly, someone on the beach begins to call out to them.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 5:7, 10.

*<sup>4</sup> Just as the day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No."*

It's barely light. From v. 8 we know that their boat is 100 yards off shore. The sun is just beginning to come up and they are the length of a football field away from Jesus. They cannot see who he is. To them in the boat, he's just a guy calling out from the beach.

The word translated 'children' (NIV 'friends'), is like when the British say 'lads,' or when we say 'guys' or 'boys.'<sup>7</sup> The construction of the sentence expects a negative answer. It's as if he was saying, "Hey boys, you haven't caught anything have you?" They answer, "No, nothing." Jesus responds.

*<sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.*

Who is this guy? What difference will tossing the net 15 feet to the right make? Maybe he too is a fisherman. Maybe he's seen a school of fish swarming on that side. But how could he see that from so far away? What do they have to lose? They do as he says and toss their net over the right side of the boat.

Suddenly this day was not so bad after all. The sun came up, the light was shining, and the fish are now awake and swimming into the nets. Peter is focused on food. He and almost all of the disciples were reeling in the nets and rejoicing in this great catch. But one disciple immediately perceived what was happening.

*<sup>7</sup> That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.*

The "disciple whom Jesus loved" refers to John, the author of this gospel. This is the way he consistently refers to himself throughout the gospel. He immediately perceived what was unfolding, most likely because he had a flashback to the day that Jesus first called he and Peter to be his disciples (see Luke 5:4-6). Almost the exact same thing had happened.

On that day, about three years ago, they had spent the night fishing and had caught nothing. However, Jesus gave them instructions to try again and this time they caught so many fish their nets were breaking and they filled two boats with all the fish. I think this came back to John and he immediately knew who it was giving them instructions from the shore. He couldn't see Jesus' face from so far away in the dim light of the dawning morning, but he didn't need to see him. He knew there was only one person who commands fish and they obey. There is only

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<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*.

one person who can tell you to do what you've already been doing and then suddenly it yields different results. He is one of a kind. There is none who compare with him. He is Jesus. So John leans over and says to Peter—who is singly focused on the fish—“***It is the Lord!***”

This is the crux of the passage. This is the turning point. This is the point at which Jesus—the Christ, the resurrected Son of the living God—is revealed. Jesus revealed himself not by showing his face, but by manifesting his power. John recognized him by the result of his actions, rather than by the features of his face. Recognition of who Jesus truly is comes from spiritual insight, not physical sight.

Hearing the words, “***It is the Lord!***” changed everything for Peter. He immediately grabs his shirt and jumps in to swim to Jesus. He had taken off his shirt to work on the fish, but now he grabs it and put it on since in just a moment he would be standing before Jesus. Peter is so eager to see Jesus, that he can't even wait for the lads to gather the fish and row the boat back to shore. Peter thinks nothing of swimming a hundred yards in order to quickly be in Jesus' presence. Peter left the other disciples alone to haul the fish to shore.

So, without Jesus, they endured a futile night of fishing in the dark. But when Jesus arrived, at the dawn of the day, they enjoyed a fruitful catch of large fish (v.11).

## **Act II - On the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (vs. 9-14)**

Act II begins with the arrival of the other disciples back on land at the shore.

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<sup>9</sup> When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they arrived on shore, Jesus has already prepared everything they need. The fire is going, the fish are cooking, and bread is ready. They've spent the whole night laboring and toiling for fish. They are exhausted and hungry and the kindness of Jesus is revealed as he has prepared food for them and he invites them to “***come and have breakfast.***” He has anticipated their hunger and everything they need is supplied. He has everything under control.

Once again Jesus is serving them. He served them on the night before his crucifixion. He served them bread during the Passover meal. He served them by humbly washing their feet.

He served them by suffering and dying for them. He is serving them again on this morning. He served them by telling them on which side of the boat where the fish. And Here he is serving them breakfast on the shore. Jesus is taking care of their needs.

The essential act of this scene is service. Jesus is the resurrected king of the universe, yet he serves fish to his friends. He is the messiah of God, and yet he is serving bread to his exhausted followers. He is sovereign Son of God, who possess "all authority in heaven and on earth,"<sup>8</sup> and yet he, in his kind hospitality, serves up a warm fire for these wet and weathered fishermen. In his serving, his true identity is revealed. None of the disciples had to ask him who he was. They knew who he was because of how he served them. Even in the exalted resurrected state, Jesus is still serving. We might expect this of him prior to his crucifixion in order to be an example to his followers, but here, after his resurrection, after he has defeated Satan and death, after he has risen victorious conquering all enemies, after even all this, he is still serving his people!? Jesus is an amazing person. Who can forget his words, *"For even the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mk. 10:45).

This is how Jesus revealed himself to his gathered disciples for the third time. There is no doubt that this is the same Jesus whom these men had been following for the past three years. He's behaving after his resurrection just as wonderfully and amazingly as he did before his crucifixion.

## Conclusion

So what are we to take away from this.

First, Jesus makes a habit of revealing himself to his disciples. He does not hide himself from those who are eagerly waiting to see him. Jesus revealed himself for the third time to his disciples, beside the Sea of Galilee. He did not reveal himself to scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees in Jerusalem. He did not appear suddenly to the religious leaders in the midst of the Sanhedrin, but he did appear suddenly to his disciples in the mist of the morning. Jesus reveals himself to those who love him and are looking for him, but he conceals himself from those who refuse to receive him.

Second, Jesus reveals himself by transforming the impossible in to the possible; the improbable into the actual; the unseen into the seen; and nothing into something. I don't think Jesus allowed the disciples to endure a long night of futile fishing in the dark because he was angry at them, but rather because he wanted to reveal himself to them in power. Sometimes we must endure the spiritual darkness so that Jesus can reveal himself to us through the light of spiritual insight. The apparent power of the problem will, by faith in Jesus, give way to the

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<sup>8</sup> Mt. 28:19-20.

sovereign sweetness of the Son. Don't give up hoping in Jesus. Stay strong in your faith. Keep waiting for him and pray daily for him to reveal himself in power on your behalf.

Third, Jesus reveals himself by exposing our weakness and inability. Remember that without him we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). Our best efforts are fruitless unless we are trusting in him and abiding in him. Fruitful lives flow from abiding in him daily and abiding in him is same as obeying his word (Jn. 15:7-10). Oh let us love to do his will and his word and increasingly surrender our will to his.

Fourth, Jesus reveals himself by what he provides, not by what he demands. His true character is revealed in the way he serves us, not by his demand to be served. He served us by offering his life as a ransom to set us free from slavery to sin. This salvation is a gift he offers to any who will receive it. Jesus does not demand that you go out and do great deeds for him in order to be rewarded with a salvation that you have earned. No. This is not the gospel. The gospel is that Jesus alone accomplished salvation and then in kindness, grace, and mercy, he offers this great gift to all who will go to God through him. We "ought never to serve God as though he needed anything since he himself gives to us life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:24).

This is how Jesus has revealed himself to his disciples. He served them. He saved them. He will save all who will place their faith and trust in him. None can compare with him. None. No one is like him.

Won't you trust him? Won't you praise him?

### **Optional Discussion Questions**

Discuss as few or as many as you please.

1. Do you think the disciples were wrong to go fishing? Why or why not?
2. Why do think John was so quick and Peter so slow to recognize that it was Jesus on the shore?
3. What do you think the conversation between Jesus and the disciples over breakfast might have been like? What would you have wanted to talk about had you been one of the disciples there that morning?
4. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?