



When Jesus Speaks: Through His Miracles, Week #5  
The FISH Catch More Miracles SIGNS from John

**Miracles break this 400 years of “silence”** (mindsets were created as well as civic structure):

- God’s silence is broken by John the Baptist’s declaration of Jesus’ miraculous birth.
- His miracles force us to say “yes” or “no” to Him.
- They authenticate His ministry.
- They reveal His character.

1. **Jesus turns water to wine.** John 2:1–11
2. **Jesus heals a nobleman’s son.** John 4:46–54
3. Jesus provides a great catch of fish. *Luke 5:1–11*
4. Jesus heals a demoniac in a synagogue. *Mark 1:21–28; Luke 4:31–37*
5. Jesus heals Peter’s wife’s mother. *Luke 4:38, 39; Matthew 8:14–15; Mark 1:29–31*
6. Jesus cleanses a leper. *Mark 1:40–45; Luke 5:12–15*
7. Jesus heals a paralytic. *Luke 5:18–26; Matthew 9:2–7; Mark 2:3–12*
8. **Jesus heals a cripple at Bethesda.** *John 5:1–18*
9. Jesus heals a withered hand. *Luke 6:6–10; Matthew 12:9–14; Mark 3:1–6*
10. Jesus heals a centurion’s servant. *Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10*
11. Jesus raises a widow’s son. *Luke 7:11–17*
12. Jesus stills a storm. *Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25; Matthew 8:23–27*
13. Jesus delivers a demoniac in Gedara. *Luke 8:27–39; Matthew 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20*
14. Jesus heals a hemorrhaging woman. *Luke 8:43–48; Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34*
15. Jesus raises Jairus’s daughter. *Luke 8:41–56; Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:22–43*
16. Jesus heals two blind men. *Matthew 9:27–31*
17. Jesus casts out a dumb spirit. *Matthew 9:32–35*
18. **Jesus feeds 5,000 people.** *John 6:1–14; Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17*
19. **Jesus walks on water.** *Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52; John 6:15–21*
20. Jesus heals a Syro-phonician girl. *Matthew 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30*
21. Jesus heals a deaf and dumb man. *Mark 7:31–37*
22. Jesus feeds 4,000 people. *Matthew 15:30–38; Mark 8:1–9*
23. Jesus heals a blind man. *Mark 8:22–26*
24. Jesus delivers a demonized boy. *Mark 9:14–29; Matthew 17:14–21; Luke 9:37–43*
25. Jesus provides money in a fish’s mouth. *Matthew 17:24–27*
26. **Jesus heals a man born blind.** *John 9*
27. Jesus heals a woman bound by Satan. *Luke 13:10–17*
28. Jesus heals a man with dropsy. *Luke 14:1–6*
29. **Jesus raises Lazarus.** *John 11*
30. Jesus cleanses ten lepers. *Luke 17:11–19*
31. Jesus heals Bartimaeus. *Matthew 20:29–34; Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43*
32. Jesus curses a fig tree. *Matthew 21:17–22; Mark 11:12–14, 20–24*
33. **Jesus replaces Malchus’s ear.** *Matthew 26:51–56; Mark 14:46, 47; Luke 22:50, 51; John 18:10, 11*
34. **Wonders at Calvary.** Mt 28, Luke 24, Mark 16, John 20
35. **Jesus provides a catch of fish.** *John 21:1–14*

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<sup>1</sup> Richards, L. (1998). *Every miracle in the Bible* (pp. 163–165). Nashville: T. Nelson.



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Water to Wine, John 2:1–11

Official’s Son Healed, 4:46–52

Paralytic Healed, 5:1–13

Blind Man Healed, 9:1–12

Lazarus Raised, 11:38–44

Great Catch of Fish, 21:1–14

**What is Jesus saying to us in this Miracle?  
Do my beliefs about Jesus and His power need to change?  
How, then, should my actions change?**

**5<sup>th</sup>. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.**

**Jesus has Power over death.**

**4<sup>th</sup>. Jesus heals a man born blind**

**Jesus is the only one who can give light to those lost in darkness** (spiritually as well as physically).

(He can create what is not there.)

**3<sup>rd</sup>. Jesus heals an unbelieving invalid at Bethesda**

**Jesus and the Father are ONE.** (Master of Time?)\*

As Jesus went to find the man to let him know it was Christ who had the power to heal an unbeliever

Jesus is the one who can bring Salvation. **Jesus and the Father are ONE:**

- Grace bestowed on anyone He chooses (believer or unbeliever)
- Even on the Sabbath (He is LORD of the Sabbath)
- Power over the hopeless. (38 year invalid)

**2<sup>nd</sup>. Jesus heals a nobleman’s son.** John 4:46–54

**Jesus’ Words are the Power of God** [Jesus spoke and what He says is Truth]

- The greatest demonstration of God’s deity is His ability to create everything by the power of His word. That’s who He is. That’s what He does. **His words are not just informative; they are performative.** Divine words spoken long-distance from over eighteen miles away had caused the terminally sick boy to recover.

**Jesus Says:**

- Believe and inherit eternal life. **John 3:16**
- Your sins are forgiven. **Mark 2:9**
- Faith comes through hearing God’s Word. **Romans 10:17**
- His Word exposes our inner thoughts. **Hebrews 4:12**
- His Word cleanses. **Ephesians 5:25-26**
- His Word Sanctifies. **John 17:17**
- His Word bears much fruit when it grows in our life. **John 15:7-8**
- His Word defeats the Enemy of our souls. **Ephesians 6:17**

**1<sup>st</sup>. Jesus turns water to wine.** John 2:1–11

**Jesus Transforms**

John’s Gospel **describes Jesus’ miracles as explanatory signs** (σημεία, *sēmeia*); the text never calls them “miracles” (δύναμεις, *dynameis*; Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic*, 88).

Roberts, R. D. (2016). *Miracle*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

**What is Jesus saying to me in this Miracle?  
Do my beliefs about Jesus and His power need to change?  
How, then, should my actions change?**



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Chapter 2 opens a new section of the gospel, containing John's account of the public ministry of Jesus from its commencement in Galilee to its climax in Jerusalem. It is organized around seven miracles. John's word for them is 'signs' (*semeia*), which is his alternative to 'miracles' or 'wonders'. John does not of course have any reservation about the operation of the supernatural in respect of these mighty works of power. He is concerned, however, to see beyond the miracles to their significance; they are signs, *i.e.* **special actions by Jesus which reveal his glory to those who believe and which confront others with the need to decide about Jesus.**

It is worth observing that this understanding of Jesus' miracles is somewhat different from that of the synoptic evangelists. Their favourite words for the miracles, *dynameis*, acts of power, and *terata*, portents, miracles, occur in John not at all in the former case, and only once (4:48) in the case of the latter.

The distinction can be put in this way: for the synoptic writers Jesus' miracles are actual occasions of the incursion of the kingdom of God. 'Fundamentally [they] are acts by which Jesus establishes God's reign and defeats the reign of Satan.' **For John, the miracles, though no less real as historical acts of supernatural power, are more symbolic; they point beyond themselves to Jesus and his significance.** Put more succinctly, the synoptic miracles are essentially eschatological, John's essentially christological. For John, faith based on miraculous signs is not regarded as satisfactory.<sup>2</sup> It is, however, at least a step beyond those who willfully refuse to even see the signs.

One other aspect of the 'signs' is worth noting. Jesus commonly refers to them as 'works' (*erga*). 'Works' can also include his words (*cf.* 14:10). The use of 'works' directly links the ministry of Jesus to that of the Father—'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working' (5:17). So close is the union of Son with Father that the works of Jesus can be considered as the Father's works in him (14:10). Thus the signs, like the entire gospel, confront us with Jesus and the inescapable challenge, 'Who are you?' (8:25).

There is some consensus among commentators that the two events in chapter 2, the changing of the water into wine at Cana, and the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, establish the terms of Jesus' ministry. They also anticipate Christ's future work. 'To attend a marriage feast and to cleanse the temple were among the first acts of our Lord's ministry at his first coming. To purify the whole visible Church and hold a marriage supper will be among his first acts, when he comes again.'<sup>2</sup>

### **John 20:30-31**

#### **The Purpose of This Book**

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**[CREATE ALL MIRACLE HANDOUT FOR END OF AUGUST]**

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<sup>2</sup> Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (pp. 62–63). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



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**Last of the Johannian Signs**  
**JESUS CAUSES A GREAT CATCH OF FISH**

**JOHN 21:1-14**

**Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples**

*21 After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. <sup>2</sup> Simon **Peter**, **Thomas** (called the Twin), **Nathanael** of Cana in Galilee, the **sons of Zebedee**, and **two others of his disciples** were together. <sup>3</sup> Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. <sup>4</sup> Just as 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(LADS)**, **do you have any fish?**” They answered him, “No.” <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. <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. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards<sup>[a]</sup> off. <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.*

NOTE:

**John 21:3** the disciples caught no fish. Their best efforts were futile, even though they were expert fishermen.

**John 21:6** reveals that by following Jesus’ instructions they caught a “multitude of fish.”

**John 21:9** while the disciples were still out on the lake, Jesus was already preparing for them fish which they had not caught.

- This is a POST resurrection sign/miracle
- The beginning of THE mission we now live in
- Some say this is a latent added chapter, however, manuscript evidence is uniform AND it is included in the oldest known versions AND perfectly fitting epilogue: Restoration of Peter, the prophetic words of Peter and John’s future, ends with the developed Christological mission of the disciples beginning work (the synoptics do the same).
- Calling them children = (best translation is LADS! Youngins!)
- THEY GO FISHING: What would I have done at this time?

**Where do I ‘go’ after exasperating circumstances/experiences?**

**‘Never has a fishing trip been so severely judged!’**

- ⇒ The synoptic writers record a message from the angel telling the apostles to return to Galilee: **‘there you will see him’ (Mt. 28:7; Mk. 16:7).**
- ⇒ Old familiar surroundings of the Sea of Galilee was **therapeutically ideal.**
- ⇒ The High of Palm Sunday to the depths of despair on Good Friday to the glory of the resurrection.
- ⇒ the disciples must still eat!’
- ⇒ The Galilee Seven: Peter. Thomas. Nathanael. James. John. (Andrew & Philip)

Luke 6:12-16 (MT. 10:2-4; MK 3:14-19)

**The Twelve Apostles**

<sup>12</sup>In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup>And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles:<sup>14</sup> Simon, whom he named **Peter**, and **Andrew** his brother, and **James** and **John**, and **Philip**, and **Bartholomew**, <sup>15</sup>and **Matthew**, and **Thomas**, and **James the son of Alphaeus**, and **Simon who was called the Zealot**, <sup>16</sup>and **Judas the son of James**, and **Judas Iscariot**, who became a traitor.



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- Did they know who it was? What was causing the pause in verse 12?  
"Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?"
- Personalities show: John – he sees Jesus in a moment of revelation. Peter – he feels summoned to react.
- The significance of the provided breakfast is? Is this a miracle within the miracle?
- The bridge to being Fishers of Men:

**Mark 1:16-17** Jesus Calls His First Disciples

<sup>16</sup>Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, "**Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.**" Mt. 4:18-22; Luke 5:2-11; Jn 1:40-42

**Luke 5:10-11** (follows a different miraculous catch of fish)

<sup>10</sup>and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." <sup>11</sup>And when they had brought their boats to land, **they left everything and followed him.**

**John 17:18** As you sent me into the world, **so I have sent them into the world.**

**John 20:19-21**

**Jesus Appears to the Disciples**

<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,<sup>[a]</sup> Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>20</sup>When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. **As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**"

- This sign is a parable of their assignment to be His Disciples.
- Fishing is symbol of what they are to do now with men.

**Small Group ASK:**

- **There are at least TWO things** Jesus is underlining, teaching, reminding His Disciples in this sign – what do you think they could be? (Just remember....)
- **What is John communicating about Christ in this Miracle?**  
(About Jesus' Divinity and His unique Mission).

**"Special actions by Jesus which reveal his glory to those who believe and which confront others with the need to decide about Jesus."**

**Two Things Jesus Is Teaching Them:**

**#1. Illustrates the secret of effective missions**

**John 15:5**

<sup>5</sup>*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for **apart from me you can do nothing.***

- a. What has me all up in hopelessness? Overwhelmed? Imagine the situation that has its grip on you. Now, see Jesus sitting right next to you. He grabs your hand. I. AM. HERE.
- b. **What do I trust in to help me DO the Loving of Others for Him?**  
(we trust in what to share the gospel?)

My knowledge of the gospel? How much of the bible I have read?

Prophetic training? Leadership training?

**"The level of our prayer life will equal the level of our effectiveness."**



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Dying to ourselves means more of Jesus in us

**John 3:30** He must increase, but I must decrease.”

**Mark 9:29** And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

### #2. The scope of mission work

- c. There are so many stinkin’ fish!
- d. There are so many large fish!
- e. The net never broke! (A great harvest and it can be accommodated. How do we accommodate for a great harvest of people who need to know the love of Jesus?)

### Reconfirmation of Peter Vs.15-19

#### Jesus and Peter

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” <sup>16</sup> He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” <sup>19</sup> (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”

- Why did Jesus do this with Peter?
- It was in front of the other Disciples that were present.
- This may be the very beach where the first call to ‘follow me’ came.

### Jesus and John Vs. 20-24

#### Jesus and the Beloved Apostle

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” <sup>23</sup> So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

<sup>24</sup> This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

- Why did Jesus do this with Peter and John?  
Show He has a plan, a different plan, for each of us as we follow Him.

<sup>25</sup> Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.



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## 6<sup>th</sup> The Large Catch of Fish

**Apart from me, you can do nothing and I am STILL HERE with you.**

5<sup>th</sup> Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

**Jesus has Power over death.**

4<sup>th</sup>. Jesus heals a man born blind

Jesus is the only one who can give light to those lost in darkness (spiritually as well as physically).  
(He can create what is not there.)

3<sup>rd</sup>. Jesus heals an unbelieving invalid at Bethesda

Jesus and the Father are ONE. (Master of Time?)\*

As Jesus went to find the man to let him know it was Christ who had the power to heal an unbeliever  
Jesus is the one who can bring Salvation. **Jesus and the Father are ONE:**

- Grace bestowed on anyone He chooses (believer or unbeliever)
- Even on the Sabbath (He is LORD of the Sabbath)
- Power over the hopeless. (38 year invalid)

2<sup>nd</sup>. Jesus heals a nobleman's son. John 4:46-54

Jesus' Words are the Power of God [Jesus spoke and what He says is Truth]

- The greatest demonstration of God's deity is His ability to create everything by the power of His word. That's who He is. That's what He does. **His words are not just informative; they are performative.** Divine words spoken long-distance from over eighteen miles away had caused the terminally sick boy to recover.

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Jesus Transforms

### SELF REFLECTION:

What is Jesus saying to me in this Miracle?

Do my beliefs about Jesus and His power need to change?

How, then, should my actions change?

### Notes:

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee and caused a great catch of fish.

**Background of the miracle.** This is the second miraculous catch of fish reported in the Gospels. (John 1:35-51) **The first was associated with the calling of the disciples as Jesus' followers (see p. 176).** This extraordinary catch of fish is related to the **recommissioning** of Peter and Jesus' call to "follow Me."



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**Parties to the miracle.** The parties to this miracle were the resurrected Jesus and his disciples, with the focus on Peter.

**Jesus.** This was the third time the disciples had seen Jesus following his resurrection. The other two took place in Jerusalem. This appearance was by the Sea of Galilee.

**Peter.** Back in Galilee, Peter took the lead and announced that he was going fishing ([John 21:3](#)). A man of action, Peter may have been unable to wait patiently for Jesus to come to them (see [Matt. 28:7](#)). Peter must have been uneasy as well. On the night before Jesus was crucified, Peter had denied the Lord three times.

Peter was so eager to see the Lord that he leaped into the water and swam to shore when Jesus appeared. Then he lingered behind to drag the full nets ashore and count the catch.

After a shared meal on the shore, Jesus spoke to Peter, asking three times about Peter's love for him. After each response, Peter was told to tend or feed Christ's sheep. Peter was thus recommissioned for the ministry to which all the disciples had been called.

But the spiritual significance of this miracle is not Christ's dialogue with his disciple. It is found in a miracle within the miracle.

**How the story unfolds.** The disciples had returned to Galilee. Peter announced he was going fishing, and the others went with him. Although they fished all night, they caught nothing.

Then as morning dawned, a person was seen on the shore. The figure called to them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. When the fishermen obeyed, they caught a school of large fish so heavy it could not be pulled into the boat.

At this point, John said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" ([John 21:7](#)). Peter grabbed his outer garment and leaped into the sea to swim to shore. The other disciples brought the boat into the shallows, dragging the heavy net. When they reached the shore, they saw that Jesus had a fire going, with bread and fish already laid on the fire.

Jesus instructed them to bring some of the fish they had just caught. The net was pulled on shore and the catch counted. They had caught 153 large fish. Christ called them to the meal, serving them the bread and fish he had prepared.

After this meal, the dialog with Peter occurred.

**"They caught nothing" ([John 21:3](#)).** The disciples were professional fishermen. But this night their best efforts were futile.

**"Cast the net on the right side" ([21:6](#)).** Some interpreters have suggested that Jesus could see from the shore the school of fish that the disciples could not. Given the conditions, and the fact that Christ himself was only an indistinct figure in the dawning light, this theory is as absurd as it is unnecessary.

Before his resurrection, Jesus had directed the path of fish in the seas (page 176). He was surely able to cause this school of fish to swim into the net of his disciples.

**"A fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread" ([21:9](#)).** This is a miracle within the miracle. Jesus caused the disciples to catch fish. But before they brought their catch ashore, he was already preparing fish for them to eat—fish they had not caught, fish which Jesus obtained and prepared for his followers.

**The significance of the miracle.** The meaning of the miracle lies in three verses that speak of fish.

[John 21:3](#) indicates the disciples caught no fish. Their best efforts were futile, even though they were expert fishermen.

[John 21:6](#) reveals that by following Jesus' instructions they caught a "multitude of fish."

[John 21:9](#) tells us that while the disciples were still out on the lake, Jesus was already preparing for them fish which they had not caught.

As the disciples set out on their mission to spread the gospel of the risen Christ, they left their old occupations. However skilled they were at these jobs, there was nothing more in them for persons called to guide Christ's church.

Jesus' instructions to the disciples to cast their nets in the path of a school of fish remind us that Christ is able to make us successful in any chosen pursuit, as long as we are obedient to him.

The meal Jesus served the disciples was a promise that they could rely on him to supply all their needs as they carried out their mission. This miracle within a miracle—Jesus' supply of fish which the disciples did not catch—



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was the most significant miracle of the two. Both miracles speak to us today. We learn from one that our success depends on living by Christ's Word. And we learn from the other that we are free to obey him completely. We can rely on his ability to meet our every need.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. The beginning of the mission

#### 21:1–25

##### 1. Fishing with Jesus (21:1–14)

Chapter 20 appears to conclude John's account of Jesus, with the confession of Thomas and the declaration of the evangelist's purpose (20:30–31). Many scholars accordingly see this twenty-first chapter as a kind of addendum composed at a later point, possibly even by another hand. It needs to be said, however, that the manuscript evidence uniformly supports the unity of the twenty-one chapters. If this chapter *was* added later, it was soon enough afterwards to preclude the publication of the gospel without it. Besides, the content of chapter 21, as we will see in a moment, is perfectly congruent with the earlier chapters and represents a fitting epilogue to all that has been described in chapters 1–20.

For one thing, this chapter serves the important task of recounting the rehabilitation of Peter. It also supplies important information about Peter's later ministry and that of John, especially valuable if Peter had died by the time the gospel began to circulate. It also develops Jesus' teaching about the disciples' mission, a basic theme of the closing chapters. In this connection Hoskyns helpfully comments that 'a Christian gospel ends properly, not with the appearance of the Risen Lord to his disciples, and their belief in him, but with a confident statement that his mission to the world, undertaken at his command and under his authority, will be the means by which many are saved.'

The setting of this further appearance is the *Sea of Tiberias*, better known as the Sea of Galilee. This location has led to the disciples coming under suspicion. Why were they back here in their old haunts, and about their old business, when Jesus had died and risen and had sent them on their new task, 'beginning in Jerusalem'? Accordingly this whole expedition is commonly interpreted as expressing the disciples' disobedience and apostasy. As G. R. Beasley-Murray trenchantly observes, 'Never has a fishing trip been so severely judged!'

In defence of the disciples, however, it needs to be noted that the synoptic writers record a message from the angel telling the apostles to return to Galilee: 'there you will see him' (Mt. 28:7; Mk. 16:7). It has also to be said that in terms of their psychological and emotional well-being a fishing expedition back in the old familiar surroundings of the Sea of Galilee was therapeutically ideal. The last few days had been an emotional roller-coaster. In a matter of a week they had been lifted up to the giddy heights of Palm Sunday, sent spiralling down into the utter depths of despair on Good Friday, and then been swept up again to the heavens by the glory of the resurrection. A good night's fishing was probably just what a doctor would have ordered. Besides, 'Even though Jesus be crucified and risen from the dead, the disciples must still eat!'

Seven disciples are involved (2), notably all from the Galilee region, unless we except the two *other disciples*; but they could well have been Andrew and Philip, in which case the group comprised 'the Galilee Seven' within the apostolic twelve. It is noteworthy that Thomas is no longer inclined to forsake the fellowship of the others—wisely, as events proved.

Peter is as ever the initiator (3). Night was a favoured time for fishing the Sea of Galilee, but the trip proved fruitless. As they return to shore in the dim early morning light a stranger hails them from the shore (4f.). It is Jesus, but again he is not recognized (*cf.* comment on 20:15). His challenge is colloquial; we could render it, 'Hey, lads ... haven't caught any fish, have you?... Try there on the right side of you and you'll catch some!' (5–6).

Experienced fishermen are not noted for their ready appreciation of the advice of strangers, particularly one still on land, but there is something about Jesus' tone which inspires confidence. They do as he bids them, and at once make an astonishing haul (6).

Peter and John react rather as they did in the previous chapter to the news of the emptiness of Jesus' tomb. For John there is a moment of revelation: *It is the Lord!* (*cf.* 'he saw and believed', 20:8). For Peter there is a summons to action: *As soon as he heard him say 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him ... and jumped into the water* (7). (*cf.* 'then Simon Peter, ... arrived and went [straight] into the tomb', 20:6.) Peter's girding himself probably implies that he was lightly clad for his work and simply tucked the garment up around him so as not to impede his swim ashore. There may also be just a hint of the proprieties of worship which both Old and New Testaments mention (Ex. 20:26; 1 Cor. 11:2ff.). Peter is about to meet his 'Lord and God'; he will be suitably clad.

Coming ashore they discover that Jesus has provided for them. A cooked breakfast awaits them on the beach; exactly right after a long, fruitless night on the Sea (9). Graciously Jesus invites them to contribute from 'their' catch (10) which they have struggled to land and bring ashore, with notable assistance in the final stage from Peter (11).

<sup>3</sup> Richards, L. (1998). *Every miracle in the Bible* (pp. 246–249). Nashville: T. Nelson.



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The catch is counted (how could fishermen have resisted the temptation! 153 whoppers!) and the net has been able to hold them all.

Jesus invites them to breakfast as a sense of holy wonder falls upon them. ‘In awestruck silence they eat. They dare not ask, “who are you?” for the answer could only be “I AM”. So they eat what the Lord gives them and the sharing of the meal is the unveiling of his presence.’

The account of this *third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead* (14) is replete with symbolic inference. Jesus himself earlier declared fishing to be a basic symbol for his service (*cf.* Mk. 1:16–17, ‘Come, follow me, ... and I will make you fishers of men’; Lk. 5:10, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men’). The reference in Luke 5 is particularly notable since it follows a miraculous catch of fish, again at Jesus’ instigation (Lk. 5:1–11), following which ‘they ... left everything and followed him’ (Lk. 5:11).

Due to the obvious points of similarity between the two miracles, some scholars have seen a single incident underlying the two accounts and suggest that John has simply reworked an earlier story to serve his purpose of anticipating the post-resurrection mission of the disciples.

Apart from the basic questions this would raise about John’s historical reliability, the differences between the two stories are considerable. The earlier incident, however, *is* important background for interpreting and applying the present passage, for it makes clear that in the minds of Jesus and the disciples, ‘fishing’ was a symbol for their mission. With Jesus now raised from the dead and his ascension impending (20:17), the hour of that mission is at hand (17:18; 20:21). This incident therefore becomes a parable of their impending work, and ours. Actually, the very geographical setting would in itself have stirred the memories of that initial calling, for the miracle is set possibly on the very stretch of shore beside which Jesus had walked when first they fell under his spell.

Two features are worthy of note.

1. First, Jesus illustrates *the secret of effective mission*. There is a stark contrast between the results when the disciples went out on their own initiative, and *caught nothing* (3), and when they fished at the direction of Jesus and the boat was *full of large fish* (11); ‘apart from me you can do nothing’ (15:5).

This story has much to say to current practice in evangelism. The church in the western world has never had such an array of helps, resources and methodologies as at present. The psychological and sociological sciences, as well as the fruits of the technological and communications revolution, have been plundered for secrets of successful mission. Sadly, although much time and money are often spent acquiring these tools or attending the inevitable conferences and seminars where they are unveiled, the long-term results are commonly meagre. One recent responsible survey of the evangelical churches in a major Canadian city showed that, after the dust has settled on the often frenetic struggle to employ ‘successful’ strategies of evangelism, these congregations reach on average only 1.9 genuine outsiders for Christ per year!

Interestingly, by contrast, the churches of the Third World are, by and large, uninformed concerning these new discoveries and ‘success’ methodologies. In their poverty and weakness they have to rely on prayer for the power of God and the simple direct sharing of the gospel. The results are often remarkable. Christianity in some Third World areas appears to be growing almost out of control. Obviously there are massive generalizations involved in these observations (though they are made from first-hand experience on several continents). The trouble with the ‘know-how’ of the western churches is not the knowledge in itself, in most cases, but the insidious temptation *to trust in it*. It is there that the breakdown occurs, and where this story speaks so relevantly. There was nothing wrong with the disciples’ fishing ‘know-how’; it simply did not bring them any fish when they relied upon it. When they followed Jesus and relied on him, to some extent in defiance of the instincts of their experience, the harvest was overwhelming.

In this context prayer is a reliable barometer. The level of our prayer ministry will be the level of our dependence on the Lord. Not surprisingly, prayer is generally at a low ebb in many North American, and western churches, whereas it is the very life-breath of many churches in the underdeveloped world. ‘This kind is not cast out except by prayer’; the secret of effective mission lies on the other side of a discovery of our own utter impotence to produce ‘fruit that will remain’ no matter how learned or technically equipped we are. What we can do without Jesus is not ‘a little’; we can do *nothing* (3; *cf.* 15:5). It is by dying to our reliance on ourselves and our abilities that we discover resurrection life and the harvest of the kingdom.

2. This passage also speaks concerning *the scope of mission* work. The catch was an astonishing one, far beyond any expectations that the disciples might have had. The impressiveness of the catch is clearly stressed in the story: *they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish* (6); *the net was full of fish* (8); *It was full of large fishy 153, but even with so many the net was not torn* (11).

The disciples’ missionary expectation, now that Jesus was demonstrated to be the promised Messiah of Israel, was still centred in Israel. Acts 1:6 gives a pertinent indication of their mind-set: ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel’ (Acts 1:6). Jesus may be hailed as the Saviour of the world in Samaria (4:42), and



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have ‘other sheep’ among the nations (10:16), but the disciples retain an Israel-centred vision. It may indeed have been part of Jesus’ purpose in directing them away from Jerusalem to Galilee to try and open them to the larger dimensions of his mission, for Jerusalem with all its profound nationalistic associations was less fertile ground for such thinking than Galilee with its window to the larger world to the north, west and east.

The scope of the mission may perhaps also be indicated by the number of the fish caught, though this is disputed. John may simply tell us the number of fish because to a fisherman the size of the catch was important; a not unimpressive eye-witness detail. The most celebrated attempt to interpret the 153 symbolically was by Jerome, who cited authorities to the effect that there are 153 species of fish in the sea. Hence the catch is representative of the mission to all the nations. Difficulties have emerged in confirming this number, however, among the authorities cited by Jerome, and the number of species alleged is of course quite arbitrary in the light of today’s knowledge of marine life. Other ingenious interpretations are on offer, for which any of the major commentaries may be consulted. Sufficient to say that none has to date enjoyed major support. The application can be made, however, without discovering any arcane significance in 153—the catch is vast, though even then (unlike the incident in Lk. 5 when the disciples were called), the net does not break. The mission will involve a great harvest among the nations, though one that will never be too great to accommodate.

The scope of the apostolic mission is something we can appreciate today as could almost no other generation before us; in our era Christianity has become truly a faith for all the nations. ‘It is only rarely that it is possible in the history of the Church, or in the history of the world, to speak of anything as being unmistakably new. But in the twentieth century one phenomenon has come into view which is incontestably new—for the first time there is in the world a universal religion, and that the Christian religion.’

Today a massive vindication of the claims of Jesus Christ is taking place before our eyes, for whenever he is freed from the grave-clothes of western cultural perspectives and allowed to stand in his own authentic reality within the biblical witness to him, Jesus Christ exercises an incomparable attraction. ‘There is no need of the human heart which Jesus Christ cannot meet ... that is why the Christian faith belongs to east and west, and why no greater than Jesus will ever come ... no one else is required.’ The fields can rarely have been whiter. The world waits to hear of, and respond to, its redeemer.

The passage also vividly illustrates our communion with Jesus. The invitation to share a meal has larger significance in the east than a simple social pleasure. It implies an invitation to fellowship, to the communion of hearts. Jesus had promised his disciples that after the ‘little while’ he was taken from them he would come back to be with them (16:16–22), This new relationship, they are learning, cannot be in the same tangible terms as before. But it is nonetheless real and satisfying; indeed it is part of the ‘better’ thing that the Holy Spirit will bring at his coming (16:7). Jesus himself will come and make his home among them (14:23); they are not to be abandoned like orphans (14:18).

This passage illuminates this new relationship which is still available. It is based on his initiative, as we noted (12). It is a practical relationship, expressed amid the everyday, concrete realities of hard work, professional skills, the search for food and the preparing of meals. Jesus’ provision for them is thoroughly practical also. Just as in the upper room he took a basin and towel and ministered to their practical needs, so by the lake-shore his provision is similarly down-to-earth. ‘My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 4:19).

To speak of Jesus’ provision, however, inevitably links this celebration meal with the one they had shared only a few days before in the upper room (*cf.* Mt. 26:26–29). There Jesus had taken bread and a cup, as now he took bread and fish, and distributed it to them. That meal, he taught them, expressed the sacrifice of his body and blood on the cross. What they had dimly understood then, they now saw with new clarity. Jesus’ provision had been supremely the giving of himself for them on the cross, to cleanse away their sins and to nourish them with the new life of the kingdom of God. Jesus still invites his disciples to eat with him (Rev. 3:20; also 1 Cor. 11:23–26).

Come and dine! the Master calleth, come and dine!

You may feast at Jesus’ table all the time.

He who fed the multitude,

Turned the water into wine,

Says to hungry, thirsting sinners,

Come and dine!

*Anon.*

The graciousness of that communion with Jesus is also indicated. These are ordinary men whom Jesus invited to his table of fellowship that day; public failures like Peter, known doubters like Thomas, loyal and faithful souls like Nathanael, men of irascible temperament like the sons of Zebedee, and two others who do not even rate having their



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names mentioned, ‘background’ folks like the *two other disciples*. To that deeply human company Jesus opens the riches of his friendship—also, therefore, to us.

The meal shared together had another dimension, for the communion celebration is also a symbol of the glory of the coming kingdom, the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9), when people will come ‘from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God’ (Lk. 13:29). To respond to his invitation now is to secure our participation in the celebration then; that day when, as Maclaren beautifully puts it, ‘in the morning light we shall see Him standing on the steadfast shore. The “Pilot of the Galilean Lake”; who will guide our frail boat through the wild surf that marks the breaking of the sea of life on the shore of eternity; and when the sun rises over the Eastern hills we shall land on the solid beach, bringing our “few small fishes” with us, which He will accept. And there we shall rest, nor need to ask who is He that serves us, for we shall know that “It is the Lord!”’.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Following Jesus (21:15–25)

We come to the final paragraph of the gospel. Appropriately it stakes out the path for those who, having become convinced that Jesus is indeed ‘the Christ, the Son of God’, now wish to commit themselves to ‘believe’ in him (20:31). Jesus takes us back to an image of the Christian life which surfaced in the very first chapter where Andrew and an unnamed disciple of John the Baptist are directed to Jesus by John, and so ‘they followed [him]’ (1:37). Later Jesus finds Philip and says to him, ‘Follow me’ (1:43).

Now, as the gospel closes, Jesus instructs the leader of the new disciple community, *Follow me!* (19) ... *You must follow me!* (22). The words echo the terms in which Peter himself had been called by Jesus at the first: ‘Come, follow me, ... and I will make you fishers of men’ (Mk. 1:17), **and the setting, as we have suggested, may indeed have been the same stretch of shore.**

So, as Jesus brings the disciples back to where it all began, seeing it now through eyes which have been opened by the experience of the years with Jesus and above all by his death and resurrection, he calls them to **reaffirm that first commitment**, and then go on with him in the power of the coming gift of the Holy Spirit for the remainder of their earthly pilgrimage.

Five things are implied in following Jesus then and today.

#### a. A barrier to be removed (21:15–17)

The breakfast on the beach leads to a confrontation with Peter, though one to which the others are apparently party. The public nature of the conversation is important, for part of what Jesus is doing here is to reinstate Peter after the public disgrace of his denials. *Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?* (15). Note that Jesus does not address him as Peter, the rock, for he had failed to live up to that name. Jesus is facing Peter with his own limitations so that he might entrust himself in a new way to Christ’s leadership. Simon on his own will always be Simon. He has no capacity to rise beyond that. But Simon trusting in Jesus is Peter-the-rock, from whose witness and leadership the church will receive its earliest foundation.

The question has been raised: what does *more than these* refer to? Almost certainly Jesus is noting the other disciples gathered around. Peter’s boast had been, ‘Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will’ (Mt. 26:33). In replying now, however, he significantly makes no reference to what he can or cannot do; he is thrown back on Christ and Christ’s knowledge of him, *Yes, Lord, ... you know that I love you* (15). The question is asked twice more: *do you truly love me?* (16), *do you love me?* (17). Each time Jesus commissions Peter with respect to ministry in the church.

The word used for ‘love’, both in Jesus’ questions, and in Peter’s answers, switches between *agapaō* and *phileō*. This accounts for the distinction in the NIV translation between *truly love* (rendering *agapaō*), and *love* (rendering *phileō*). Attempts to identify subtle distinctions between the two verbs fail to carry conviction. John has a habit through his gospel of using pairs of terms interchangeably, and, for example, in this very passage he has two different Greek words for *take care of and feed* (16–17), for *lambs* and *sheep* (15–16), and for *know* (17), both

<sup>4</sup> Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (pp. 309–315). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



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of which NIV, in common with other versions, renders *know*. The *lambs/sheep* distinction may have some significance, but it is difficult to see what points can be made from the others. Classical studies have shown that the two Greek verbs for *love* were used fairly interchangeably in most contexts. The likelihood that no major distinctions are intended is rendered the more credible by the lack of a clear consensus among those who want to make a distinction. It is probably therefore wiser to see this as a Johannine stylistic feature rather than as the basis of a major exegetical truth.

The true significance of the incident lies in Peter's being confronted with the last occasion on which he had warmed himself at a charcoal fire (9; *cf.* 18:18), and being called to undo his denials with these three public reaffirmations of his love and loyalty to Jesus. Until that has been done Peter is not ready to be a follower of Jesus; the barrier of failure and sin has not been removed.

Behind the specifics of Peter's situation lies a principle of universal application. Before Jesus can be followed and served, the sin in our lives has to be addressed. Jesus is insistent on this, even to the point of Peter's being hurt (17), and probably also embarrassed on account of the public forum of Jesus' insistence on full repentance. 'Without holiness no-one will see the Lord' (Heb. 12:14).

Peter did not forget this principle when he proclaimed the gospel to others. 'What shall we do?' ... 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, ... for the forgiveness of your sins' (Acts 2:37-38). A relationship with Jesus begins when, in his presence, we face up to all that grieves and contradicts God's holy will in our lives, whatever this may cost us.

This principle applies in a special way at the beginning of Christian life; but it is continually applicable. As Peter discovered, and as Paul was to find later (*cf.* 1 Tim. 1:12-16), no matter how desperate our failure, or how deep-seated our shame, he can forgive and renew us and then use us in his service. Failure is never final with God. 'You ask me what forgiveness means; it is the wonder of being trusted again by God in the place where I disgraced him' (Rita Snowden).

### *b. A responsibility to be accepted*

The experience of being forgiven clears the way for serving Jesus. Peter restored is Peter recommissioned. Jesus' concern here is not just for Peter's welfare and self-confidence; he is also genuinely concerned for his fledgling church. So Peter is directed to his work: *Feed my lambs, Take care of my sheep, Feed my sheep* (15-17). Following Jesus and loving Jesus mean accepting responsibility for Jesus' people, a truth which is in need of rehabilitation at the present time. Commitment to Christ involves commitment to the church of Christ. Jesus Christ is not a 'single' person in the sense that he comes to us without other attachment. He is a 'married' person; he comes to us with a bride, whom he loves and for whom he sacrificed himself (Eph. 5:25). To be in relationship to Christ while ignoring or even despising his bride is no more acceptable than such behaviour would be in human contexts when relating to a married friend; far less so, because the relationship with Jesus has infinitely greater dimensions. Genuine New Testament conversion means not only turning to and accepting Christ. It also means turning to and accepting his bride, the church. Jesus' love for his church remains undiminished even though the church be torn, illclad, dirty in places, and generally malnourished and diseased. The church is still his bride, the people for whom he died, and who are therefore the burden of his concern. So he speaks his word today to those who will hear it: *Feed my lambs, Take care of my sheep, Feed my sheep*.

### *c. A cross to be carried*

Peter, having accepted his commission, is immediately confronted with its cost (18-19) as Jesus prophetically prepares him for his eventual martyrdom. He will serve into old age and in the end die with hands outstretched, a euphemism for crucifixion. The details are not known with certainty, but there is fairly reliable tradition that Peter followed his Lord in the form of his death, probably in Rome under the Emperor Nero in the early sixties of the first century. This literal 'carrying' of the cross would be preceded by an experience in which Peter's self-will would be thwarted as he is led where he does not want to go (18).

This principle applies all the way along the path 'following Jesus'. The road of discipleship is the road of the cross, as Jesus had earlier made clear. 'The man who hates [*i.e.* views as secondary] his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me' (12:25-26; Mk. 8:34-35). The Christian life is in this sense a



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'continual mortification' (Calvin), in which, daily and in a thousand ways, we die to self-will and do the will of the Lord. 'Not I, but Christ' (see Gal. 2:20) is the essence of the Christian walk. This is negative in form, inevitably so because our hearts are naturally inclined to rebellion. But, in experience, it is the most positive of lifestyles, for death *for* Christ is the door to living *with* Christ. As with Jesus, crucifixion leads to resurrection, death to life. Peter, and we with him, by dying bring glory to God (19).

### *d. A partnership to be maintained*

Having received the Lord's recommission and an insight into his own future, Peter, seeing *the disciple whom Jesus loved* close behind, asks concerning *his* future ministry, *Lord, what about him?* (21). Jesus rebukes Peter over this. *What is that to you?* (22) really means 'Mind your own business!' Peter, having got 'in the know' about his own future, now wants to use the privileged position he has obtained with the Lord to find out about others.

It is so very human, but, as Jesus indicates, also so very wrong. The personal relationship between the Lord and individual Christians, including issues like the future form and sphere of their service, the degree of their obedience, or the quality of their contribution, is 'holy ground', sacred to the individuals concerned. We may not walk there unless with express invitation or clear obligation, and even then only with the greatest sensitivity and reserve. The ministries of Peter and John would be different. Peter would be the shepherd, John the seer; Peter the preacher, John the penman; Peter the foundational witness, John the faithful writer; Peter would die in the agony and passion of martyrdom, John would live on to great age and pass away in quiet serenity.

Peter is faced here, as we all are, with the fact of partnership in following Jesus. There are many others on the road with us, as truly Christ's, as surely commissioned, as deeply loved, as greatly valued. Their calling and gifts may be different; their instincts, and even their convictions in certain matters, may not coincide with our own; but we can thank God for them and at times be inspired and challenged by their example. In the end, however, our focus must remain on Jesus himself. 'Keep following me.' Jesus alone is our Master; to him we belong, to him we must give account; we are to live 'looking unto Jesus' (Heb. 12:2, AV).

### *e. A destination to be attained*

In these concluding verses of the gospel, Jesus articulates the full terms of the Christian's hope for the future by referring to his 'return' (22–23). One of the marked features of the teaching of Jesus as John records it is the stress upon the presence of the kingdom of God in the here and now. *Now*, by faith in Jesus Christ, we enter the kingdom, *now* we receive eternal life, *now* we escape from the world, *now* we pass from darkness into light. The eschatology is realized in the present. But that does not exhaust the Christian's hope. 'A time is coming ... when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God ... a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out' (5:25, 28–29); 'I will come back and take you to be with me' (14:3). In harmony with the other New Testament writers, John reflects the conviction that Jesus will return in tangible majesty at the end of this age, to complete his work, to judge all people and to inaugurate the everlasting age of glory. The King is coming, and that crowning encounter is the ultimate destination of the Christian disciple and the pilgrim people of God.

Jesus' comment on John's future provoked controversy *among the brothers*, as reflected in verse 23. John is careful to underline that Jesus spoke hypothetically only to deflect Peter's mistaken inquisitiveness. The Lord did not commit himself categorically to return within the lifetime of John.

The trustworthiness of the evangelist's witness is then affirmed (24). Who are the *we* who pronounce this accreditation? Conceivably this is a testimonial by the elders of the church in Ephesus where John was resident. Alternatively, and perhaps preferably, it is an editorial *we* on the part of the author himself, rather as he had expressed himself at the beginning of the gospel: 'we have seen his glory'. If so, it forms a fitting conclusion.

The glory of Jesus Christ, which has been unveiled chapter by chapter through the gospel, finally points us forward to our ultimate destination, when he returns and the glories discerned by faith will be replaced by the glories opened to sight. Until then we 'follow him'.

The earliest reference to this image in the gospel beautifully blends these two perspectives. Like the disciples (1:37), we follow him until that moment, whether before or after our earthly death, when he will 'turn round' and look at us, and we will see him face to face. We will ask him where he is staying, and he will take us there, in



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fulfilment of his great prayer, 'I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory' (17:24).

But that will not be the end of our journey. For, as John's last words underline, there is no limit to the greatness of Jesus Christ. He has done *many other things as well* (25), not only during these few brief years among us, but as the pre-incarnate Word through whom all things were made (1:3), as the upholding Word who sustains the life of the universe (1:3), and as the everlasting centre of all the redeeming purposes of God. He is literally infinite, and hence no conceivable library in earth or heaven can adequately or fully 'tell the story' of Jesus Christ (25). So in eternity our exploration will go on in ways at present beyond our imagining as we discover more and yet more of 'the unsearchable riches' of Christ.

The stars shine over the earth,  
The stars shine over the sea,  
The stars look up to the Mighty God,  
The stars look down on me;  
The stars will live for a million years,  
For a million years and a day!  
But Christ and I shall live and love  
When the stars have passed away.

*Anon.*

But although no book can ever tell it all, we thank God for the book that John wrote, more than nineteen hundred years ago, which we can take in our hands today. By reading it we begin to see 'the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father' (1:14).<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Miracle of the fish. 21:1-14

**21:1. Showed he himself** (Gr *phaneroō*, to reveal or make known; show or manifest). Jesus now reveals His glory to the disciples at the **sea of Tiberias** (Galilee).

2. Peter, Nathanael, James, John, and two other unnamed disciples were together.

**3-4.** Again Peter is the man of action. **I go a fishing.** Although the Greek present tense (I am going to fish) is used here and normally denotes continual action, this does not necessarily mean that Peter intended to return permanently to his former occupation. As they arrive at the shore after a frustrating night, they see Jesus, but for some providential reason, they do not recognize Him.

**5-6. Children** (lit., lads). This question and negative answer was a blow to these fishermen's egos. Fishermen would not usually respond immediately to this unusual request by a stranger on the shore. However, there was something compelling about this Stranger that caused them to obey without an objection.

**7-8. It is the Lord.** John finally recognizes that this Stranger is the Lord. Peter again is the first in action; he puts on his coat, for he **was naked** (lit., "stripped" of his overcoat). Peter's enthusiasm to be with the Lord would indicate that he was not fishing in disobedience to the Lord's command. The rest of the disciples now join the Lord and Peter.

**9-11.** Christ had already prepared a meal when they arrived. It consisted of **fish and bread. Bring of the fish.** They count the number of fish and discover that although there were one hundred fifty-three fish, **yet was not the net broken.**

**12-13. Come and dine.** Christ invites them to breakfast. The disciples are speechless in the presence of their risen Lord.

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<sup>5</sup> Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (pp. 315-321). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



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**14. Shewed himself** (see notes on 21:1).<sup>6</sup>

**JOHN 21:6**

The miraculous catch of fish when Jesus met his disciples in Galilee after his resurrection illustrates the use of the trammel net. Similar to the situation described in Luke 5:1–11, the disciples have spent a night fishing and with no success. Jesus appears on the shore and directs them to “Throw your net on the right side of the boat” (John 21:6 NIV). Following his instructions, they have such success that they cannot get the net into the boat and must drag it ashore with the miraculous catch of fish. Peter was so stirred by this experience that he counted out the fish, and John records that they numbered 153 “large fish” (John 21:11).

While the three layered trammel net appears to have been used for this catch, Nun suggests that the net may have been used to encircle the fish and then the cast net used to capture the fish within the enclosure. He points out that the net that Peter drew ashore himself with the 153 fish could have only been the cast net.

Christian tradition places this event near the warm springs at Tabgha where schools of musht fish gather during the winter months. A small Franciscan chapel called The Church of the Primacy of Peter marks the traditional place where Jesus served his disciples breakfast and instructed Peter to “shepherd my sheep” (John 21:15–17).<sup>7</sup>

**Other Miracles in John and the Synoptic Gospel:** (Is there a meaning when the miracle is in all four?)

**JESUS RESTORES MALCHUS’S EAR**

*[Matthew 26:51–56](#); [Mark 14:46, 47](#); [Luke 22:50, 51](#); [John 18:10, 11](#)*

**JOHN 18:10-11**

<sup>10</sup> Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant<sup>[c]</sup> and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) <sup>11</sup> So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

**NotES:**

When Peter struck a member of the mob that had come to take Jesus, he cut off part of the ear of a man named Malchus. Jesus touched the ear and healed it.

**Background of the miracle.** Jesus’ last miracle before his death was performed on the night of his capture and trial, just hours before his crucifixion. A mob led by Judas arrested him on the Mount of Olives in the garden of Gethsemane.

Only John, who was from a wealthy family which maintained a large house in Jerusalem, names Malchus. He was “the” servant of the high priest, an important official in his own right and clearly a person whom John knew. **It is ironic that Jesus’ last miracle of healing was performed for an enemy who had come with the mob to make sure Christ was arrested.**

<sup>6</sup> Hindson, E. E., & Kroll, W. M. (Eds.). (1994). *KJV Bible Commentary* (pp. 2123–2124). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> Laney, J. C. (2016). *Fishing the Sea of Galilee*. In B. J. Beitzel & K. A. Lyle (Eds.), *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels* (pp. 173–174). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



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**Parties to the miracle.** The miracle is not the focus of the story, but it seems almost an aside. Judas led a mob to Gethsemane to take Jesus prisoner. Peter, named only in John's Gospel, resisted the arrest and struck out with his weapon, cutting off part of Malchus's ear. Jesus restored the ear, then told his disciples not to resist and left with the crowd as they went back to Jerusalem.

**Jesus.** Although he was being arrested, Jesus was clearly in command of the situation.

**Peter.** Frightened by the crowd, Peter drew a weapon and struck one of the mob that had come to take Jesus away.

**Malchus.** As an important official of the Jewish high priest, Malchus was probably in charge of the detail which had come to bring Jesus in for trial. He was accompanied by a mob carrying torches and weapons.

**How the story unfolds.** Jesus had finished a time of prayer and returned to his disciples when a mob led by Judas appeared. Judas pointed out Jesus. As the mob surged forward to seize him, Peter drew a weapon and struck at the group. He cut off part of the ear of the servant of the high priest, whom John identified as Malchus.

Jesus told Peter to put his sword back in its place. Jesus could have called legions of angels to defend him. But the Scriptures had to be fulfilled, so it was necessary that he be taken away.

**"Drew his sword" (Matthew 26:51).** The word for "sword" and "knife" are the same in Greek, so we can't be sure what kind of weapon Peter drew. It is clear that he attacked the crowd with it in an attempt to defend Jesus.

**"Cut off his ear" (26:51).** Mark uses the diminutive Greek word *otarium* for ear, suggesting that perhaps only the ear lobe was cut off. This would explain why [Luke 22:51](#) indicates that Jesus healed the ear rather than reattaching it. In any case, this was a gracious miracle which he performed for an enemy.

**"Put your sword in its place" (26:52).** [Luke 22:38](#) indicates the disciples had two swords, and [22:49](#) points out that other disciples were only awaiting Jesus' word to fight back. But Peter didn't wait for Jesus' command; he drew his weapon and struck! This was so like Peter.

Pacifists have argued for nonresistance from this passage, while their opponents have noted that Jesus told Peter to put his sword back, not throw it away. But this account of Jesus' capture is hardly one on which to base arguments over pacifism. Jesus himself said he could have called on legions of angels to fight for him, if this had been God's will.

Christ allowed himself to be taken so "the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus" ([Matt. 26:54](#)).

**The meaning of the miracle.** This last miracle, taking place just before Jesus was arrested and sentenced to death, is a striking reminder. Christ was not *forced* to the cross. He was never overpowered by his opponents. He could have escaped the fate they intended for him at any time.

Jesus' last miracle was actually a warning to his accusers, who refused to believe his claims to be the Christ—in spite of the evidence of his signs and wonders. As Jesus warned them during his trial, "I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" ([Matt. 26:64](#)).

Those who refuse to accept healing at Jesus' hand will surely face his judgment.

Richards, L. (1998). *Every miracle in the Bible* (pp. 246–249). Nashville: T. Nelson.

### Consecration (John 18:1–19:42)

#### a. The arrest (18:1–11)

In the circumstances leading to the apprehension of Jesus, it has already become clear that the whole scenario was anticipated, even planned, by him. **There is a strange sense of inevitability about his arrest and conviction.** Jesus has come from the Father into the world. He goes from the world to the Father. His mission



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will not have a happy and triumphant conclusion in the eyes of the world. Its wicked rebellion against the claim of God will reach its awful climax in the murder of the Son of God. Only in this way, however, can the darkness be overcome, and the Father's love for the world truly disclosed.

The account of the arrest is narrated in a simple and direct paragraph. After the conclusion of his teaching and his prayer Jesus leads the disciples from the house of the last supper out into the Jerusalem night. If the traditional sites are to be relied upon they faced a journey of about a mile, first northwards and then east past the great looming shadow of the temple. As they passed along the streets they would have glimpsed, through lighted windows, groups of pilgrims celebrating the feast, just as they had done a few minutes before. Jerusalem was teeming with visitors, and it would have been a relief to find themselves at last at the city gate and able to move out into the fresher air beyond. Their track led first downwards and then across the low valley of the Kidron stream, rising gently upwards as they ascended the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. A short climb would have brought them to their destination, an olive grove which was part of the garden area of the city.

Passover law forbade a journey of any length on that evening, but this was permissible. Besides, it was a familiar spot (2). Jesus clearly had a rich benefactor who made his garden available on such occasions. More importantly, on this particular night it was where Judas would know where to find him. Having sent Judas on his foul errand (13:2), Jesus had deliberately sprung the trap and was now offering himself as the bait in a setting ideal for his capture, in the darkness of night with no thronging crowds to rise in his support.

The synoptic writers fill in other details here—Jesus' renewed sense of heaviness, the exhortation to the disciples to pray, and then Jesus' own lonely vigil through the long hours of the night as he agonized over his terrible obedience and found at length angelic strengthening (Mk. 14:32–42; Lk. 22:39–46).

At last through the darkness came the noise of tramping feet as a throng approached with lights and commotion (3). Judas is there at their head. The Jewish temple police are prominent since they must make the arrest, but a Roman force has also been provided (3). Normally garrisoned at Caesarea on the coast, the Roman troops were brought up to the capital at feast times and stationed (where Jesus would meet them during his examination) in the fortress of Antonia to the north-west of the temple complex. **The word translated detachment (3) could mean a force of a thousand. Such is unlikely here, but it was probably a considerable number. Jesus' popularity with the crowds was known and the Palm Sunday demonstration would not have gone unnoticed by the Romans.**

Significantly, it is Jesus who takes the initiative. **John summarizes the whole event, and indeed the whole passion story: Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out (4).** The reference to 'going out' may imply that the grove was walled and Jesus emerged alone at the doorway. **Who is it you want? (4). John omits Judas' kiss. It is unnecessary to his account. Jesus' I am (5, *egō eimi*) contains the by now familiar ambiguity. It could be no more than an identification for purposes of arrest. But the reader is being invited to appreciate a deeper meaning, the sacred name for God in the LXX, with clear overtones of Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 40–55.**

The effect of his words is striking. *They drew back and fell to the ground (6).* 'We are the world to whom our God comes forth in the person of Jesus the Nazarene saying, "Who is it you want?" The world is groping after its true leader: he offers himself, and the world, after yielding for a moment to the impact of his divinity, arrests him and crucifies him.' Whether something of Jesus' divine majesty breaks in upon them for a moment, as Temple suggests, or they experience a sudden wave of terror as they are faced with actually laying hands on one whose supernatural powers were already legend, we are not told. Either way there is a perceptible loss of control on the authorities' part. Jesus, however, relieves the tension of the moment by re-identifying himself and then requesting an assurance of safe passage for the disciples (8), in fulfilment of the word Jesus had spoken (9; 6:39) some months before. Interestingly Jesus' words are cited in a way identical to the Old Testament quotations studded through the gospel.

No doubt immensely relieved at being able to take Jesus without a struggle, the authorities are apparently happy enough to accept his terms. There is a moment of minor scuffle. Peter has probably newly awakened. Overwhelmed with a sense of needing to do his loyal duty by Jesus, and showing no small degree of courage in view of the considerable armed presence, he swings the sword he has brought along and catches the high priest's servant on the side of the head, taking off his right ear (10). The Greek word used by John, and Mark, could imply that it was only the lobe of the ear that was cut off and not the whole organ. The fact that it was on the right side is an interesting eye-witness detail which Luke also notes (Lk. 22:50). 'The blow was as clumsy



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as Peter's courage was great; the tactic was as pointless as Peter's misunderstanding was total.' Jesus staunches the bleeding with a touch (Lk. 22:51) and is led away into the darkness, to drink the cup the Father has filled and placed in his hands (11).

Several things stand out in this account.

### (i) *The regal poise of Jesus (18:1–7)*

**Throughout the whole episode he occupies the centre of the stage and directs the events.** The soldiers by contrast are background figures. The key statement is at verse 4: *Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen ... went out.* Similarly, this happened *so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled* (9). The sense of Jesus' control is especially prominent in his *I am*. Significantly, in the Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin, which John does not detail, it is this phrase, unpacked in terms of the Son of Man of Daniel 7, which triggers the frenzied response of the court and the unanimous capital charge of blasphemy (Mk. 14:62f.). On the utterance of these words the temple snatch-team fall backwards, by their posture expressing the overwhelming nature of the revelation of divine majesty. Thus the forces of evil in that sinister confederacy—personal treason in the person of Judas, corrupt religion expressed by the temple police, political ruthlessness embodied in the Roman soldiery, and behind all, the malignant form of the prince of this world—all fall back before this meek monarch who offers himself up to their will.

The relevance of this to our world needs no elaboration, for these same forces and many another are still abroad. The hour of darkness lingers, but its mastering is proclaimed here. What is described in these chapters is not simply one more skirmish in the unending conflict between light and darkness, good and evil, so that Jesus' victory, though impressive in its way, gives no guarantee that next time, or some time in the future, the roles may reverse and the outcome be different. John's point in writing his gospel is to share the great and glorious good news that this is the decisive conflict, the critical encounter, the outcome of which determines the whole war for ever. That and nothing less is the significance of Jesus' poise and mastery.

O love of God! O sin of man!

In this dread act your strength is tried,  
And victory remains with love,  
For he, our Lord, is crucified.

*F. W. Faber*

This truth is as applicable to our personal world as to the larger universe. No matter what dark threat hangs over us, it is less than him who fought and mastered it in his Easter victory. For 'the devils we meet were all foredamned in the Satan Christ ruined. The devil is in the end a bull in a net, a wild beast kicking himself to death.'

### (ii) *The caring heart of Jesus*

As he faces the ultimate challenge of his life it is moving to observe Jesus' deep concern for the disciples. The scene is set for this in 13:1: 'Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own ... he now showed them the full extent of his love.' That same caring heart beats here as Jesus requires that the disciples be freed: *let these men go* (8). He draws the full enmity of the enemy to himself in order to deflect it from them, and this in the context of his *knowing all that was going to happen to him* (4).

That caring heart is our security. Because of it he will not lose one of those the Father has given (9). The good shepherd has committed himself to his sheep. When the wolf comes he will remain and defend the flock he loves. Whatever the wolf may represent in our lives today—guilt and shame from past failures, the accusing voices of criticism, sudden paralysing feelings of inadequacy as they come snapping and snarling at our heels—the good shepherd is there to meet them and to issue his word of command, 'Let my disciple go!'

The action of Jesus in drawing the enmity upon himself for the freeing of the disciples is, more generally, a depiction of his whole work of atonement. He takes our place, absorbing our guilt and all its implications, that we might go free.

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned he stood.

*Philipp Bliss*

### (iii) *The awesome submission of Jesus*

Nothing shines clearer in this account than the fact that Jesus goes willingly to his arrest. He who might have summoned twelve legions of angels, whose regal majesty could send his enemies reeling to the ground, accepts



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his arrest, trial and death in willing submission. His words to Peter unveil his heart: *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?* (11). This saying picks up the language of his prayer in the garden as the other evangelists record it: ‘Abba, Father, ... everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will’ (Mk. 14:36). What does the cup signify? For one steeped in the Old Testament prophets as Jesus was it can have only one meaning. The cup is the symbol of the judgment of God; it is the cup of the wrath of God against human sin. ‘In the strange mercy of God the cup of his righteous wrath is given into the hands, not of his enemies, but of his beloved Son. And he will drink it, down to the dregs until the moment comes when “I thirst” gives place to “It is finished”.’<sup>1048</sup>

### Jesus feeds 5,000 people

*John 6:1–14; Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17*

#### John 6:1-14

##### Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

**6** After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. **2** And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. **3** Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. **4** Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. **5** Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” **6** He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. **7** Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii<sup>[a]</sup> worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” **8** One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, **9** “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” **10** Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. **11** Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. **12** And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” **13** So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. **14** When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

Jesus fed a large crowd which followed him into the wilderness, using only a few small loaves and fishes.

**Background to the miracle.** It was the responsibility of the head of each Jewish family at mealtime to look up to heaven while thanking God, and then to break and distribute bread for the meal. One of the most common of such mealtime prayers was, “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”

In performing this miracle, Jesus assumed the role of head of the family as well as the role of God, bringing forth bread to meet the needs of his people.

The Gospel writers followed Jewish custom in counting only the men when reckoning the crowd. While the ideal woman of rabbinic lore stayed at home, it is clear from the Gospels and from various references in early rabbinic literature that women went to the market and worked in the fields with their husbands at harvest time. Some have estimated that the crowd Jesus fed, if the women and children were added, might have been fifteen or twenty thousand.

This is an especially significant miracle, for it is reported in all four of the Gospels.

**Parties to the miracle.** The significant figures in this miracle account are Jesus, the disciples, the thousands who had followed Jesus into a wilderness area, and a boy who shared his lunch.

*Jesus.* Jesus’ revealed his deity by creating bread, as if in answer to the usual mealtime prayer.

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<sup>8</sup> Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (pp. 252–256). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



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*Jesus' disciples.* The disciples showed sensitivity to the needs of the crowd for food and shelter (Matt. 14:15). But their solution, to “send them away, so they can buy bread,” was not acceptable to Jesus. The disciples were stunned when Jesus ordered, “*You* give them something to eat” (Mark 6:37).

*The crowds.* Great crowds had followed Jesus into a “deserted” (uninhabited) area. They had come hastily, without bringing food to eat on the way. Jesus saw them as sheep, wandering aimlessly, helpless without a shepherd.

*The boy.* The boy who provided the food Jesus multiplied is mentioned only by John (6:9). How strange that in many Sunday school lessons, he is made the focus of this story rather than Jesus.

*How the story unfolds.* Jesus had been surrounded and harried by crowds of people coming and going. He told his disciples it was time to rest, so they set out by boat to find a deserted place.

But other people recognized him as the boat passed. By the time the boat landed, a new multitude had gathered to greet him. Jesus couldn't escape, even for a moment. Rather than being irritated, Jesus was deeply moved; these ordinary people to him were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them.

When evening drew near, the disciples reminded Jesus that it was late, and they were in an uninhabited area. Jesus needed to send the people away soon, so they could “buy themselves bread.” Jesus shocked the disciples by his reply: “*You* give them something to eat” (Mark 6:37).

Confused, the disciples objected. It would take at least eight month's wages to buy enough bread for such a crowd, even if that much bread were available. Jesus asked, “How many loaves do you have?”

The disciples reported they could come up with five loaves (each about the size of a modern dinner roll) and two small fish. Jesus told the disciples to have the crowd sit down in groups, as they would at mealtime. Christ then blessed the bread [i.e., said the prayer used before eating] and began to break the bread and fish into smaller pieces. The food was miraculously multiplied. After everyone had eaten, twelve flat wicker baskets of food were left over.

Jesus then sent the crowds away. While he went up into the mountains to pray, the disciples set out by boat to cross the sea.

*Sheep not having a shepherd (Mark 6:34).* Jesus' imagery has deep Old Testament roots. Moses prayed that God would provide a successor who “may lead them [Israel] out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd” (Num. 27:17). God's answer in that situation was to set apart Joshua—which is the Hebrew version of the name “Jesus.”

Even more significant is the use of the image in Ezekiel 34. In that passage, the prophet condemned the false shepherds who mistreated God's flock and who led them astray. God promised,

“Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them.... I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God. “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick” (Ezek. 34:11–12, 15–16).

What happened that day by the Sea of Galilee identified Jesus with the Lord God of the Old Testament, whose concern was for the well-being of the flock. In Christ, God was seeking out and feeding Israel not only with bread but with truth as well.

*“You give them something to eat” (Mark 6:37).* Jesus didn't expect the disciples to perform a miracle. But the command, with its emphatic “you” in the Greek, is significant.

*Jesus challenged the disciple's solution.* The disciples had been concerned for the crowd. But their solution was to send them away so they could “buy themselves bread” (Mark 6:36). But Jesus did not come to send people away. He came to draw them to him. He came because the people could not “buy themselves” what they required to meet their deepest need. Only Jesus could meet that need, and he did so supremely on Calvary.

*Jesus challenged the disciple's vision.* Jesus was training his disciples so they would be able to meet the needs of the shepherdless. “*You* give them” was a challenge to help them catch a vision of the mission for which they were being prepared.



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*Jesus challenged the disciple's understanding.* The answer to their confusion on how to fulfill Jesus' command was not to buy bread but to look to Jesus. Christ never asks us to do anything without providing the needed resources to complete the task.

The miracle that followed illustrates this principle. Jesus took what the disciples had and multiplied it. No matter how limited our resources, God's ability to multiply them is as unlimited as they were on that day in the wilderness.

***Twelve baskets of fragments (Mark 6:43).*** The Gospel writers report that everyone in the crowd ate and were filled, after which they took up 12 baskets of fragments. Some have seen significance in the number 12. There were 12 tribes of Israel. Messiah's provision was so generous that even his scraps can supply the needs of Israel, as represented by the 12 surplus baskets.

***"Take him by force to make him king" (John 6:15).*** John adds a detail not mentioned in the other Gospels. After the meal, the enthusiastic crowd decided that Jesus must be the prophet promised by Moses (Deut. 18:18). Why not then acclaim Jesus king?

Jesus later commented on their motive. "You seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled" (John 6:26). The people had not seen the meaning of the miraculous sign which identified Jesus as the Lord God, their Shepherd. All they knew was that he was someone who could feed them. Self-interest, not faith, lay at the root of their enthusiasm. No wonder they were ready to proclaim Jesus king.

How ironic are the phrases "take him by force" and "make him" king. Those who acclaim a person king will be willing to submit to his will. The crowd intended to make Jesus submit to their will, thus robbing him of his royal authority. Let's be careful not to do the same. When we come to God in Jesus' name, may our prayers be for that which is in his will. As true followers of Christ, we should not attempt to cajole him into doing our will.

***Miracle and message (John 6:26–66).*** John's Gospel follows a pattern noted before (p. 186). He describes a miracle, then records a lengthy teaching of Jesus which is related to it. That lengthy teaching in John 6 has been called Jesus' "Sermon on the Bread of Life."

In this sermon, Jesus pointed out the selfish motives of the crowds who followed him. But Christ himself is the true bread, the source and sustainer of life. He is the true bread of heaven, who has been sent by the Father to give eternal life to everyone who believes in him. The ancestors of his hearers who had eaten manna in the wilderness were all dead, but those who would appropriate Christ—figuratively eating his flesh and drinking his blood—would live forever.

John notes that after this sermon "many of his disciples [used here in the sense of loose adherents] went back and walked with him no more" (John 6:66). They had eagerly received the bread that sustained physical life, but they rejected the Word that promised eternal life.

Some people today preach a false gospel, which promises material prosperity to those with enough faith. How eagerly the crowds in Jesus' day would have welcomed such a gospel. And how quickly we turn away from the true gospel as well. The authentic gospel promises us new life, but then it calls us to live this new life not for ourselves but for the Lord.

***The meaning of the miracle.*** Commentators tend to follow many side trails in discussing the feeding of the 5,000, but we must not forget this miracle's central message. In each Gospel, this miracle is an acted-out parable. Jesus declared himself to be the Lord God, come to shepherd his people, as he had promised through the prophet Ezekiel.

Richards, L. (1998). *Every miracle in the Bible* (pp. 246–249). Nashville: T. Nelson.

### **9. The fourth sign—feeding the five thousand (6:1–15)**

The time-link to the previous section is vague: *Some time after this* (1). The reference to the Passover in verse 4 gives an indicator of duration. A year has passed since the cleansing of the temple (2:13f.). During this time Jesus has ministered largely in and around Galilee, as described by the other three evangelists. This sixth chapter is the only section of teaching in this gospel which is set in the Galilee region. The Galileans were a distinct type, peasants living close to the soil and labouring hard for a subsistence wage. The primary issues for them are the down-to-earth matters of food and the means of livelihood. This was in contrast to the more



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sophisticated audiences Jesus had encountered in the south, whose concerns were more theoretical: the fulfilment of scriptural prophecies, wrangling about the law and the theological implications of Jesus' claim.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only 'sign', other than the cross and resurrection, to appear in all four gospels, indicating its importance in the minds of the first Christian witnesses. Like the audiences in the south, the Galileans are also attracted by Jesus' miracles (*cf.* 2:23f.; 4:48).

As the synoptics make clear (*cf.* Mk. 6:31), Jesus is seeking privacy at this point. The disciples have just returned from a highly successful preaching tour and are also in need of rest. Jesus takes them to the hills to the east of the sea of Galilee, the area known today as the Golan Heights. Verse 3 refers to *the* hillside, which may imply an often visited spot.

The crowd get wind of Jesus' whereabouts and follow him round the head of the lake. Jesus is seated among the disciples as they approach. The reference to the Passover (4) is critical for the interpretation of this section. 'The movement from the miracle to the discourse, from Jesus to Moses, and above all from bread to flesh is almost unintelligible unless the reference to the Passover picks up 1:29, 35, anticipates 19:36, and governs the whole narrative.' We should also note that the Passover was a great patriotic festival which stirred the Jews' sense of national identity.

Jesus accepts the invasion of his vacation and ministers to the crowd (*cf.* Mk. 6:34). The passing of time raises acutely the question of food and provides Jesus with an opportunity to test the disciples, Philip in particular. He was from nearby Bethsaida and was perhaps the spokesman conveying the disciples' consensus that they had a major problem on their hands. Alternatively, knowing the district better than the others he would be cognizant of the fact that there was no local food source to draw upon. Philip thinks only in terms of the immediate reality of limited resources and makes his calculations accordingly. *Eight months' wages* would buy only a morsel all round (7). Over against Philip's gloomy estimate, Jesus remains unperturbed since *he already had in mind what he was going to do* (6).

This comment is capable of the widest application. Our Lord still surveys the needy world with compassion, just as he surveys the micro-world of our personal affairs. He is not without plans. He 'already has in mind what he will do' in our time and generation, and just as surely with the tangled threads of our personal present and future.

Andrew comes into the picture, to somewhat greater effect than Philip, producing *a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish* (9). The lad has brought a meal with him, the loaves being small rolls or scones, and the fish no more than titbits. John alone mentions the boy in this personal way, a nice eye-witness touch recalling another one in Mark (the 'green' grass, Mk. 6:39), which later detail incidentally confirms the time as around Passover, the only 'green' period of the year in Palestine. Beside the crowd, which with five thousand males alone would probably have totalled at least double that number, such a resource is pitiful in the extreme, as Andrew is not slow to point out (9). But on the basis of this tiny contribution the Master proceeds to make arrangements for a general feeding of the multitude. After thanksgiving the miracle happens. He *distributed ... as much as they wanted* (11). The multitude is fed, and satisfied too! The word for 'giving thanks' in verse 11 is *eucharistein*, from which 'Eucharist' is derived, a common term for the Lord's Supper. Too much should not be read into that, however, as it is a fairly common word and John uses terms with some freedom.

Jesus commands that the scraps not be wasted and twelve baskets are filled (12f.). Preservation of this kind of leftovers was a Jewish custom. Jesus here, however, gives his dominical support to a concern for conservation which has many points of application today. Whatever the immediate stimulus, Jesus' directive underwrites our revulsion at the destruction of excess food in a hungry world, as at the wastage of human skills and energy in unemployment, and also more general concerns to reduce waste through recycling. It is a sombre comment on our world that it has taken the threat of environmental pollution, and our planet's diminishing ability to sustain life, rather than a moral repugnance at waste in general, to awaken a concern for conservation.

The twelve baskets may be a fortuitous indicator of Jesus' ability to more than meet the needs of his whole people (*cf.* the twelve tribes of Israel), but more generally makes the point that 'after all have been satisfied there is more left over than there was at the beginning'. Jesus' resources are without limit; he can meet all our needs and more.

The sequel to the miracle is significant and anticipates the dialogue which will follow. The crowd, buoyed up in their nationalistic aspirations by the Passover celebration, see in Jesus the fulfilment of Deuteronomy 18:15–19, *Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world* (14). While this Old Testament passage



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anticipates a prophetic figure rather than the messianic King, they immediately cast Jesus in the later role (15). The Passover had been instituted during Israel's wilderness wandering, when God had fed his people supernaturally with manna from heaven. The setting was again a 'wilderness' area, where Moses had spoken of the 'prophet' who would come. Surely this was he, a 'second Moses', their long-awaited deliverer. 'It was the custom of Messianic pretenders in Jesus' time to seek credibility by either re-enacting or matching O.T. miracles.'

Jesus, however, will have none of it and *withdrew again to a mountain by himself* (15). Some manuscripts read 'fled back', which a number of commentators think is probably the original reading, copyists arguably making the change to tone down the embarrassing picture of Jesus in flight. Certainly Jesus' rejection of their attempts to set him at the head of a revolutionary mob is an abrupt and decisive one. We can perhaps detect here an echo of the earlier temptation (*cf.* Mt. 4:8f.) to pursue a political route to his kingdom, or perhaps at a deeper level, a messiahship which would by-pass the cross and leave the dominion of darkness intact. We can recall a similar revulsion at Peter's commendation of just such a course at Caesarea Philippi: *cf.* Matthew 16:23, 'Get behind me, Satan!' The disturbing effect of this experience may be reflected also in Jesus' desire to be alone again with the Father as he 'sends' the disciples away, probably to protect them from the insidious influence of this nationalistic fervour.

The application of the miracle is made in the discourse which follows, where Jesus presents himself as the bread of life, the satisfier of the hunger of the human heart (6:25–59).

At this point, we note how vividly this story expresses the ministry challenge facing the disciples of Christ in our generation. Today, as never before, we are confronted by the crowds. World population levels will explode through the six billion mark by early next century, and the sheer human reality of the needy masses is an everyday fact for ministry, particularly in the teeming cities and mega-cities of the globe. It is therefore significant to note that Christ faces the crowd and makes his disciples face them also (5). We regularly struggle against that. J. H. Bavinck touches something deep in most of our hearts when he writes:

People wish to remain quiet, in the peaceful little Church under the high Gothic arches; they would brood about God and be preoccupied with the needs of their own souls. They do not want to be shocked by the bewildering idea that there are still many hundreds of millions of people who have never heard the gospel.

But Jesus will not let us brood, he challenges us with the need, both for the 'bread of life' as in Bavinck's quotation, and also for material bread, and every other kind of need that cries out to be met.

Faced with the need, Jesus still asks us individually, and also as church communities, *Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?* (5). This is a *test* of Philip (6); nor is that accidental. Jesus regularly tests his people. We cannot simply 'amble along' with Jesus, for he is concerned more for our growth than for our comfort. To walk with Jesus means climbing.

Sadly, our response to the Lord's testing is too often the same as Philip's. We measure the need, quantify our inadequate resources, and resign in hopelessness. It is all beyond us; the need cannot be met. Even when, like Andrew, we identify some limited resource, the possibilities are not significantly improved. *How far will they go among so many?* (9). But this assembling of our resources is a key to the divine provision, for Jesus is not discouraged, as we are, by what we have to offer. Indeed, if we will put it into his hands he will still 'give thanks' for it, a wonder in itself. Our instinct is to put ourselves down and demean what we have to give, particularly when measuring it against raw human need. But Christ is thankful for us! And if we will believe sufficiently in his gifting to trust him with our whole selves, he will take us, break us as need be (Mk. 6:41), and offer us to the Father as in his hands the miracle is repeated, the resource multiplied, and a multitude fed.

The key, beyond our believing in God's ability and will to use us, lies in the wholeheartedness of our surrender to him. William Booth's secret is an open one. Asked to explain the phenomenal impact of his life, he replied, 'For the last eighty years God has had all that there is of William Booth.' Through him Christ fed a multitude.<sup>9</sup>

### **JESUS WALKS ON WATER**

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<sup>9</sup> Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (pp. 103–109). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



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*Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52; John 6:15–21*

Jesus walked on a stormy sea and joined his disciples in their small boat.

**Background of the miracle.** After Jesus fed the 5,000, he “made” his disciples get in their boat and go on ahead of him (Matt. 14:22). The strong Greek verb in this passage is often translated “compelled.”

What was the urgency?

- Jesus may have sent the disciples ahead to help diffuse the crowd that wanted to make him king (compare John 6:15).
- Jesus wanted to escape both the crowd and the disciples, to get some rest (Mark 6:31–32).
- Jesus definitely wanted to spend some time alone with his Father in prayer (Matt. 14:23).

The separation of Jesus from his disciples provided the occasion for this miracle.

When the disciples first saw Jesus approaching them on the lake, they mistook him for a ghost. Their fear reflected the common first-century belief that ghosts were hostile beings, the shades of malevolent men who had died, and who would harm human beings.

**Parties to the miracle.** Jesus is the central figure. The others involved are the twelve disciples, with the emphasis on Peter.

**Jesus.** After resting and praying Jesus was walking on the surface of the Sea of Galilee, apparently crossing it to join the disciples who had gone on ahead by boat. The miracle displayed Christ’s control of the forces of nature.

**The disciples.** The disciples’ initial reaction of fear was transformed to worship as the miracle impressed them with the fresh realization that Jesus was “the Son of God” (Matt. 14:33).

**Peter.** Peter is both a good example and a bad example in this miracle account. He alone had faith enough in Jesus to step out of the boat into the stormy sea. But once on the waters, his gaze was torn from Jesus and fixed on his surroundings. We are also asked to risk in response to Jesus’ call. Peter’s experience reminds us not to take our eyes off Jesus in difficult situations.

**How the story unfolds.** Jesus hurried his disciples into a boat and away from the crowds. It is likely that he told them to wait for him until a fixed time and if he had not arrived by then, they should set out to cross the lake. But the sea was stormy and the wind was in their face. By four o’clock in the morning, the disciples were only halfway across the lake.

When they noticed a figure walking on the water, the disciples were terrified, assuming it must be a ghost. But Jesus called out and identified himself. Peter then asked the Lord to tell him to join him on the waters. Jesus did, and Peter stepped out into the stormy waters. He walked a few steps toward Jesus but was distracted by the raging winds and began to sink.

Jesus caught Peter’s hand and lifted him up, calling him a “little-faith” person and asking, “Why did you doubt?” (Matt. 14:31). When Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the winds and the sea calmed down.

Amazed, the disciples worshiped Jesus. For the first time in Matthew’s Gospel, they expressed the belief that Jesus was “the Son of God” (Matt. 14:33; see also Matt. 16:16; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54).

**“The fourth watch of the night” (Matt. 14:25).** The Romans divided the night into four watches, the Hebrews into three. The Roman system was adopted by all the Gospel writers. Thus, Jesus approached the boat between 3:00 A.M and 6:00 A.M

**“It is I” (14:27).** The Greek phrase is *ego eimi*, and it may reflect the Old Testament name *Yahweh*, meaning “I AM.” No wonder Jesus could encourage his disciples to “take courage” [rendered “be of good cheer” in our text], and “do not be afraid.” Since God was with them, they had no reason to fear.

**“Command me to come to You” (14:28).** The incident with Peter offers an interesting commentary on Jesus’ words of encouragement.

**“Lord, if it is You” (14:28).** The conditional here has the meaning, “Since it is You.” Jesus had announced, *ego eimi* (“it is I”). Peter had confidence that Jesus truly was Lord.

**“When Peter had come down out of the boat” (14:29).** Jesus said, “Take courage.” Peter showed his courage by stepping out boldly into the surging waters.



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*“He was afraid, and beginning to sink” (14:30).* Jesus had said, “Do not be afraid.” Out on the waves alone, Peter did fear. And he began to sink. Fear may overcome us also when we take our eyes off Jesus and concentrate on our circumstances.

**“O you of little faith” (14:31).** It is far better to be a “little faith” person than a “no faith” person. But best of all is to be a person of “great faith.”

**“Why did you doubt” (14:31)?** At first, the answer seems obvious. Peter doubted because the circumstances were fraught with danger. But the question encouraged Peter and the disciples to look deeper. Jesus had announced “It is I.” No matter how hazardous the circumstances may be, there was no reason to doubt when Jesus was present.

This is one of the most important messages of this miracle for us today. We can become so obsessed with difficulties and dangers that our doubts overwhelm us. Yet if Jesus, the Son of God, is with us, he is in control of every circumstance. We need to be as bold as Peter in walking through our stormy waters, yet wiser than Peter by never forgetting Jesus’ presence in our lives.

**“They had not understood” (Mark 6:52).** Mark’s account of this miracle displays a slightly different emphasis than Matthew’s. Mark draws our attention to the disciples’ hardened hearts. The phrase indicates an underlying attitude which accounts for their amazement at Jesus’ ability to walk on water and at the immediate calming of the waters when Jesus entered the boat. They had just seen Jesus feed 5,000 people. They should have recognized his claim to be the Lord, come to offer himself as Shepherd to his people (see p. 208f.).

While this emphasis is different from Matthew’s, the two accounts are actually in complete harmony. The private miracle performed on the Sea of Galilee taught the disciples what the feeding of the 5,000 had not—that “truly, You are the Son of God” (Matt. 14:33).

**The meaning of the miracle.** With this miracle, we have evidence that the true identity of Jesus was beginning to dawn on his disciples. They would grasp the full meaning of that confession—“You are the Son of God” (Matt. 14:33)—only later, after the Cross and the Resurrection.

Looking back from that perspective today, we can see in this miracle more evidence that Jesus was who he claimed to be. We can see something of what it means to live in relationship with the Son of God.

The life of faith calls for a boldness like Peter’s. He was willing to risk leaving the security of the boat to walk alone on the stormy lake. Faith also calls for a continual awareness that Jesus is with us. This will dispel our doubts, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.<sup>10</sup>

### **10. The fifth sign—walking on the water (6:16–24)**

Before the miracle of the loaves is discussed, a further ‘sign’ takes place, which also appears following the feeding miracle in the synoptic gospels (Mt. 14:22–36; Mk. 6:45–52). The disciples are alone in the boat in the darkness when a storm blows up, as was frequently the case on the lake of Galilee. There is a mood of discouragement underlined by John’s observation that *it was dark* (17).

Here is discipleship without the discerned presence of the Lord, and, recalling the traditional image of the church as a boat, it is not difficult to make application. In many parts of the world today, particularly in the West, it would be difficult to find a more telling picture of the church. Here is a small handful of people, seemingly remote from the land where most people live their lives, apparently irrelevant to the great issues confronting the world. It is tossed by the winds of secularism without and controversy and uncertainty within, out of touch with its point of departure, unsure of its whereabouts, and with no clear destination ahead. All the while its members, like the disciples in the story, strain at the oars of good works and ministry, making no apparent headway in the process. Crucially, they have no manifest conviction that Jesus, the Head and Lord of the church, is anywhere in sight. ‘It is dark.’

Suddenly, Jesus is seen, or at least an approaching figure is observed walking on the waves towards them (19). Some commentators, who have difficulty with the miraculous, think they find a ‘let-out’ here, as the Greek of verse 19, *walking on the water*, can be rendered ‘by the water’. The suggestion is that the boat has never gone far from shore and Jesus appears walking along the shore line to encourage them. The difficulty with that interpretation lies in its complete inability to account for their terror (19). Besides, if this is not a

<sup>10</sup> Richards, L. (1998). *Every miracle in the Bible* (pp. 208–213). Nashville: T. Nelson.



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miraculous appearance of Jesus, then it is difficult to see why the incident is included at this point, bearing in mind the theological undertow of the story. The traditional interpretation is much to be preferred, not least because it corresponds to the accounts in the other gospels where the ambiguity in meaning does not arise (*cf.* Mt. 14:24; Mk. 6:47). At first the disciples do not recognize him and are terrified, experienced sailors as they are. Clearly something extraordinary is occurring. The disciples are apparently more afraid of the Saviour than they are of the storm.

There are occasions when Jesus' coming seems only to intensify our troubles. That was to be Peter's experience later as Jesus faced him, painfully, with his failure (21:15ff.). It was Paul's experience when he responded to the call of Christ to go to Macedonia and found himself a bloodied victim in a Roman prison (Acts 16:9 with 24). Christ's coming can divide as well as unite (Mt. 10:34–39); it can bring rejection rather than acceptance (15:18–21).

So Jesus comes to them (19). They have never been out of his sight, even if he may have been out of theirs (Mk 6:48). His commitment is unconditional; the church, whatever its limitations, will never be abandoned. He stills the disciples' fear with his word of greeting, *It is I; don't be afraid* (or, more literally, 'stop being afraid', 20). The words *It is I* translate the Greek *egō eimi*, which in other contexts is the divine self-affirmation so often reproduced in this gospel, 'I am'. The words would of course be natural enough in this context as a means of Jesus' identifying himself. It is difficult, however, to believe that John does not intend us to see more here, particularly if we recall the Passover background. The deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt led to the wilderness wandering and their supernatural sustenance by means of the manna. That wilderness experience, however, was reached by way of the Red Sea and the supreme demonstration of the majesty of God as he parted the waters for his people (Ex. 12–14). Jesus appears here as Lord of the waves and the seas, the personal manifestation of the Almighty who walked upon the waters at the Red Sea. 'The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; ... Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters' (Ps. 77:16, 19). A similar passage in Psalm 107 concludes, 'He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven' (29–30).

This 'arrival' is apparently a further miracle, for *immediately* on Jesus entering the boat they find themselves at their destination (21). The appropriateness is well caught by Godet:

One can scarcely imagine, indeed, that after an act of power so magnificent and so kingly as Jesus walking on the waters he should have seated himself in the boat and the voyage have been laboriously continued by the stroke of the oar. At the moment Jesus set foot on the boat he communicated to it the force victorious over gravity and space, which had just been so strikingly displayed in his own person.

So Christ's presence brings renewed hope and power to his dispirited church, and, where needed, to individual lives. The last word does not lie with the world, no matter how threatening its manifestations. Jesus still comes walking upon the waves, and in a recovered experience of his presence, the church, for all its internal failings, may yet sweep upon its way, and at the last be carried by its triumphant Lord on to that 'eternal shore' for which we are destined.

Verses 22–26 relate the surprise of the crowd at not finding Jesus on the east side of the lake where the miracle of the loaves had taken place. Only one boat had made the crossing and Jesus had not been aboard when it set sail, of that they were sure. He plainly was no longer in the vicinity, however, and so they return to Capernaum, his place of residence at this point, to try and find him. They go, the text says, *in search of Jesus* (24), and that helpfully sets the scene for the long discourse which follows in which the mystery of<sup>11</sup>

### WONDERS AT CALVARY

Jesus performed no miracle while on the cross, but his death was accompanied by wonders.

It is appropriate to note several wonders associated with the death of Jesus on the cross. These, like his miracles, were extraordinary events with a religious purpose caused by God.

***The cross is one focus of fulfilled prophecy.*** It is a wonder indeed that hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth, his crucifixion was described in great detail.

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<sup>11</sup> Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (pp. 103–109). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



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Psalm 22 was acknowledged to be messianic long before Christ was born. It contains the following verses:

“My God, My God, why have  
You forsaken Me” (22:1).  
They shoot out the lip, they shake  
the head, saying,  
“He trusted in the LORD, let Him  
rescue Him;  
Let Him deliver Him, since He  
delights in Him” (22:7, 8).  
They pierced My hands and My feet (22:16).  
They divide My garments among them,  
And for My clothing they cast lots (22:18).

As we read the Gospels, we discover that each of these verses describes something that was said or something that happened at Calvary.

Isaiah 53 describes Jesus’ death in the company of criminals (Isa. 53:9, 12), predicting that he would be buried in a rich man’s tomb (Isa. 53:9). Psalm 34:20 predicts that none of Jesus’ bones would be broken. This is a striking prediction, for the legs of the thieves with whom he died were broken to hasten their deaths (John 19:32, 33).

These and other prophecies fulfilled at Calvary on the day Jesus died are one of the wonders of God’s Word. They remind us that the Cross was always a central element in God’s plan and that the death of Jesus was decreed by the Father, not by human beings.

To find the meaning of the Cross, we must understand it not as a tragedy, but as the key to God’s triumph over Satan, sin, and death.

***The wonder of the torn veil.*** Matthew reports that at the moment of Jesus’ death the veil of the temple was “torn in two from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:51). The same event is reported in Mark 15:38 and Luke 23:45.

The veil that hung between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the temple was a thick, woven tapestry of multiple colored strands. No known force could rip it apart.

The veil was also spiritually significant. Only once a year could the high priest go behind this veil—and then he carried sacrificial blood to sprinkle on the cover of the sacred ark of the covenant as an atonement for Israel’s sins.

The writer of the book of Hebrews reveals that the veil which separated the two inner rooms of the temple indicated that “the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest” (Heb. 9:8). The veil cut off not only the people but even the priests from direct access to God. It was a symbol of the reality that no avenue of approach to God existed in Old Testament times.

But with the death of Christ, a radical change took place. He took our sins upon himself and opened the way to God through his sacrifice. And so the writer of Hebrews declares, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

The wonder of the torn veil symbolizes the end of one age and the beginning of another. In this new age, all believers can enter the holiest of all boldly and with confidence, knowing that God’s throne is a throne of grace for all.



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***The wonder of the opened graves (Matt. 27:52, 53).*** Matthew alone reports this extraordinary event. He indicates that an earthquake struck the area at the moment of Jesus' death, opening a number of graves. Many of the saints were restored to life and seen in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection.

The implications of this wonder are clear. Jesus' death brought life to some who had been dead. What a symbol of victory over death, and of the resurrection life that Jesus offers to all who trust him as Savior. Richards, L. (1998). [\*Every miracle in the Bible\*](#) (pp. 246–249). Nashville: T. Nelson.

### **EASTER MIRACLES—AND BEYOND**

Each Gospel devotes much of its space to the story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. Yet each Gospel account ends on a note of triumph. Jesus has been falsely accused and foully murdered. Yet death cannot hold Jesus. In an unmatched exercise of the power of God, Jesus is raised from the dead!

The account of events on and beyond the first Easter focus our attention on a number of wonders associated with the Resurrection, which is the greatest wonder of all. As we look first at the associated wonders and then at the Resurrection itself, we realize how utterly central the bodily resurrection of our Lord is to authentic Christian faith.

### **WONDERS ASSOCIATED WITH THE RESURRECTION**

***The tomb's stone seal was rolled away (Matt. 28:2; Mark 16:1–3; Luke 24:1–2).*** The tombs of wealthy first century Jews like Joseph of Arimathea, where Jesus' body was placed, were hewn into rock cliffs. Such tombs generally had several niches carved into the rock, where the bones of several generations of the family could be stored. These tombs were sealed by large stone "wheels," which would be rolled along a track cut into the rock to seal the tomb. When on the first Easter morning several women set out for Jesus' tomb to wrap His body in linen strips interwoven with sweet-smelling spices, they worried. How could they roll away the heavy stone that sealed the tomb?

When they arrived at the tomb, they discovered the tomb already opened! Matthew tells us that an earthquake had jolted the stone from its track, and an angel had moved it away from the tomb's opening!

***The guard posted at the tomb was unconscious (Matt. 28:4).*** The Jewish leaders had asked Pilate, the Roman governor, to put a military guard at the tomb. They remembered that Jesus had promised a return to life, and while they did not believe Him, they thought His disciples might try to steal the body.

But the appearance of the angel and the earthquake shocked the military guard into unconsciousness. Later, when they awakened, some of the guard reported what had happened to the chief priests. These religious leaders who had conspired to see Jesus executed then bribed the soldiers with "a large sum of money" to say that the disciples stole Jesus' body while they were asleep.

The leaders must also have promised the soldiers protection, for the penalty for a Roman soldier who slept while on guard was death. And, of course, if the disciples had actually stolen Christ's body while the soldiers slept, the soldiers could hardly have been credible witnesses. How would they know *what* happened, if they were asleep? Like most political cover-ups, this attempt to confuse the population about Christ's resurrection was destined to fail.

***Angels informed visitors to the tomb that Jesus had risen from the dead (Matthew 28:3; Luke 24:4–7; John 20:12–13).*** This is a third wonder associated with the Resurrection. One or more angels appeared to groups of women who came to the tomb, and testified to Jesus' resurrection. In each case the angels appeared in their natural, radiant state, rather than as ordinary persons. There could be no mistaking the supernatural character of these witnesses to the raising of Jesus.

***The undisturbed graveclothes (John 20:2–10).*** When Peter and John heard that Jesus' tomb was empty they ran to see for themselves. Peter stooped and stepped into the tomb and was stunned by what he saw.



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In biblical times bodies were loosely wrapped in strips of linen, and a cloth was placed over the head of the deceased. What Peter saw was the cloths in which Jesus had been wrapped, still in the shape of the body around which they had been done up! But there was no body inside! Jesus had somehow passed through the grave cloths, leaving them as an empty husk!

The apostle John tells us that when he saw this, he believed (John 20:8)!

***Mary saw Jesus Himself (John 20:12–18).*** Even after Mary had seen the angels at the tomb, she wept uncontrollably. She was still convinced that “they” had taken Jesus away.

Then through her tears Mary saw a figure standing nearby. Supposing him to be the gardener she asked the figure where the body of Jesus had been placed. Jesus then spoke only one word to Mary: her name. Immediately Mary recognized His voice.

***Jesus appeared unrecognized to two disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13–35).*** Another striking incident is reported in Luke. As two disciples return to their home in Emmaus from Jerusalem they are joined by an unknown man. The man questions them, and when they share their vanished hopes that Jesus might have been the Christ, the man leads them through the Old Testament prophets, showing from Scripture that it was foretold that the Christ would suffer as Jesus had!

On arriving home the two travelers invited the stranger to take a meal with them. As the stranger broke the bread and gave thanks for it, in the traditional Jewish table blessing, they suddenly realized that their companion was Jesus Himself, raised from the dead. Jesus then disappeared, and the two hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive.

***Jesus appeared in a locked room (Luke 24:36–43; Mark 16:14).*** The text tells us that Jesus came to His disciples and spoke with them personally shortly after the Resurrection. Luke adds a fascinating detail. The room where the disciples had gathered was a locked room, where the disciples were hiding for fear of the religious leaders who had manipulated Jesus’ death.

The sudden appearance of Jesus in the room is one of the proofs that the resurrection body is not limited in the way our mortal bodies are limited. Jesus appeared and disappeared at will, most likely freely crossing the barrier between the material and spiritual universes which no mortal can cross.

***Jesus’ resurrection body bore the marks of crucifixion in its hands and side (John 20:24–31).*** The disciple Thomas had not been present the first time Jesus appeared to the gathered disciples. He would not believe the report of the others that Christ had shown Himself to them, alive. Thomas bluntly stated that he would not believe unless he touched Jesus’ hands and side, and confirmed that the One who now lived was indeed the same One who had been crucified.

Yet when Jesus did appear, and invited Thomas to touch His wounds, Thomas found he did not need this confirmation after all. Thomas knew Jesus, and fell down before him, confessing “My Lord and my God.”

These events, each closely linked to that first Easter morning, were wonders indeed. Yet they pale in comparison to the event with which they are associated: the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION: *Romans 1:4;*  
*1 Corinthians 15*

Some contemporary “theologians” have argued that it doesn’t matter whether the resurrection of Jesus was literal and historical or not. They claim that a “spiritual” resurrection is all that is required. What mattered is not whether or not Jesus’ body was raised and transformed. What mattered is that the disciples *believed* that Jesus was raised. What mattered is that they experienced Him in a different way than when He lived among them.

But the Bible makes it very clear that the resurrection of Jesus was a literal resurrection of the material body, and that the Resurrection took place in space and time as a true historical event. Romans



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1:4 reminds us that by His resurrection Jesus was “declared to be the Son of God with power.” The Resurrection is the capstone miracle, which confirms once and forever Jesus’ claim to be God the Son and Son of God.

The apostle Paul provides a thorough discussion of the Resurrection in chapter 15 of his first letter to the Corinthians. Tracing that discussion we gain some insight into both the nature of Jesus’ resurrection, and its significance to our faith.

***Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection are all historical events prophesied in the Old Testament (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).*** This is significant, as prophecy which has been fulfilled has invariably been fulfilled literally. We can conclude from this that the death of Jesus was a real death, and the resurrection of Jesus was a real, historical resurrection.

***Christ was seen alive after His resurrection by many witnesses who knew Him, and who could not have been deceived (1 Corinthians 15:5–11).*** Paul not only mentions the Twelve, but also some 500 others, most of whom were alive when Paul wrote the Corinthian letter.

***Christ’s was raised as the first of many (1 Corinthians 15:12–20).*** Christian faith promises resurrection to all who believe in Jesus. If Christ was not raised, this critical promise is an empty one. On the other hand, because Jesus did experience a bodily resurrection, our own future resurrection is assured.

***The Resurrection is a critical element in God’s eternal plan to destroy death itself (1 Corinthians 15:21–28).*** Adam’s sin introduced death. Biblically “death” is not only the cessation of biological life; it is also that corruption of human moral nature which separates human beings from God and brings them under divine judgment. In dying Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. In His resurrection Jesus provided eternal life for those who believe in Him. When God’s plan reaches its culmination believers will be resurrected also, and the last taint of sin and death will be forever done away.

The dynamic power of Jesus’ resurrection life will accomplish the resurrection transformation of believers, that once again God may be all in all.

***While mortal and resurrection bodies are related, the resurrection body is of a different order (1 Corinthians 15:35–48).*** The great apostle struggles to find analogies that will help us understand resurrection. In a real sense, we will never understand the glorious prospect God holds up to us until the final resurrection comes. Yet Paul does suggest a series of contrasts which helps us sense something of the transformation that took place when Christ was raised, and that will take place when we are raised from the dead.

***Corruption vs. incorruption (1 Cor. 15:42).*** The natural body is subject to dissolution. The resurrection body is not.

***Dishonor vs. glory (1 Cor. 15:43).*** The contrast is explained in the verse. Our natural body is weak and subject to all sorts of disabilities. The resurrection body is infused with power.

***Natural body vs. spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44).*** This contrast points out that our mortal body is governed by principles implicit in the material universe. In contrast, the resurrection body operates on principles that are supernatural, i.e., “spiritual.”

***Earthly source vs. heavenly source (1 Cor. 15:47–49).*** The first man, Adam, was molded from the earth, and his material body was infused with life by God. But Christ’s origin is heaven itself, as is the origin of the transformation that produced His resurrection body. In the same sense the essence and origin of our resurrection bodies will be heavenly. In the resurrection “we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.”



## When Jesus Speaks: Through His Miracles, Week #5 The FISH Catch More ~~Miracles~~ SIGNS from John

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is most certainly one of the three Grand Miracles of our faith, as described on pages 15 through 17 of this book. The literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus also serves as a miraculous confirmation of our own destiny, and as such is foundational to authentic Christian faith.<sup>12</sup>

### Ephesians 1

#### Thanksgiving and Prayer

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love<sup>[a]</sup> toward all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

#### NLT

#### Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

<sup>15</sup> Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere,<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, <sup>17</sup> asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom<sup>[b]</sup> and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. <sup>18</sup> I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>19</sup> I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power<sup>20</sup> that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. <sup>21</sup> Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come.

Jesus Turns Water into WineNature [Jn 2:7-8](#)

Jesus Heals an Official's SonHealing [Jn 4:50](#)

Jesus Heals a Lame ManHealing [Jn 5:8](#)

Jesus Feeds 5,000 PeopleProvision [Jn 6:1-13](#)

Jesus Walks on WaterNature [Jn 6:19](#)

Jesus Heals a Man Born BlindHealing [Jn 9:7](#)

Jesus Raises LazarusResurrection [Jn 11:43-44](#)

Jesus Rises from the Dead [Jn 20:1-10](#)

Jesus Appears in a Locked RoomNature [Jn 20:19-23](#)

Jesus Appears in a Locked Room for ThomasNature [Jn 20:26-29](#)

Jesus Provides a Miraculous Catch of FishProvision [Jn 21:4-6](#)

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<sup>12</sup> Richards, L. (1998). *Every miracle in the Bible* (pp. 238–243). Nashville: T. Nelson.