

JESUS COMMISSIONS PETER

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

When Jesus died for the sins of men and then conquered death by His resurrection, His mission was completed. The mission of the disciples, however, was just beginning, but they did not seem to comprehend this fact. Six of the disciples joined Peter when he said he was going fishing (21:3). Perhaps Peter and the others had forgotten their earlier decision to forsake all and follow Christ (cf. Lk 5:11). Whatever their problem was, it was needful for Jesus to appear a third time unto them and make their mission absolutely clear (21:14).

Jesus met His disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee after they had fished all night without success. When Jesus met them, He showed His power over nature and His concern for His disciples by giving them a great catch of fish (21:4-11) and by providing them a breakfast of charcoal fish and bread (21:9-13). After breakfast Jesus took the opportunity to redirect Peter's thinking so that he would correctly understand his mission (21:15-17). This also was a lesson for the other disciples with Peter.

Peter also had some other lessons to learn. First, he was told of his coming martyrdom (21:18-19). Then he was told to be concerned about his own faithfulness to Jesus and not be meddling with Jesus' will for others (21:20-23). John concluded his book with a reference to the rich source of material from which he selected his writings (20:30-31; 21:25).

I. Appearance of Jesus — 21:1-14**A. Circumstances — 21:1-2**

21:1 — "Sea of Tiberias" - Jesus appeared to over half of His disciples who were back to fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

21:2 — There were seven disciples present: Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, the two sons of Zebedee (John and James) and two unnamed disciples, who were probably Andrew and Philip (cf. Jn 1:40-45).

B. Conduct — 21:3-4

21:3 — Peter and six other disciples decided to go back to fishing. Jesus was not setting up His Kingdom on earth at that time, but was going back to Heaven. So these disciples decided to go fishing. This was not a pleasure trip; it was their business. They were returning to their former occupation. They forgot or did not understand that Jesus had called them to follow Him and He would make them fishers of men (Mt 4:19).

Before Peter and his friends began to follow Jesus, He gave Peter and his fishing partners an illustration of what it meant to be fishers of men (Lk 5:1-11). One day Jesus found Peter washing his nets and asked permission of him to use his fishing ship to teach the people on shore. After teaching the people He told Peter to launch his ship and go out to the deeper water to catch fish. Peter was reluctant to do so because he had fished all night and caught nothing and he knew fishing during the day would be useless. Fishermen would fish at night because the fish would come near the surface of the water to eat bugs and smaller fish when the water was cool, but during the day the surface water would become warm and the fish would go deeper into the sea where the water was cooler. When the fish went down deeper into the sea, it was impossible to catch the fish with their nets. Nevertheless, Peter obeyed

the Lord and threw out his nets. In a moment the fish began to fill those nets. He caught so many fish that his nets began to break. He called for his partners, James and John, to come and help him. The two ships began to sink down into the water with the load of fish that they were catching. Peter and his partners were overwhelmed at the great amount of fish that they had caught. Peter fell down at Jesus' knees and admitted he was a sinful man and was not worthy to be in His presence. No doubt he felt guilty that he had been so reluctant to obey Jesus to go fishing during the day. Jesus used this experience to tell Peter that he would now learn how to catch men. This experience caused these fishermen to follow Jesus for the next three and a half years.

Jesus had trained these fishermen to be fishers of men, but they had gone back to fishing for fish. So Jesus used a similar experience to remind these fishermen of the time that they decided to leave their nets and follow Him.

21:4 — The disciples saw a man standing on the shore, but they did not know the man was Jesus. He would not leave them because they went back to fishing. He would go after them and remind them of His call to be fruitful (Jn 15:16).

C. Command — 21:5-6

21:5 — Jesus asked the disciples a question to get them to admit their failure. He asked, "Have you any meat?" that is, "Have you caught any fish?" When they answered, "No," they revealed the weakness of their self-effort. Without Him, they could do nothing that was profitable (Jn 15:5).

21:6 — Jesus gave them a command: He told them to cast their nets on the right side of the ship and promised they would catch fish. They obeyed and caught so many fish they could not draw in their nets. That experience reminded them, especially Peter, James and John, of their earlier fishing experience when Jesus gave them the instructions as to where to catch the fish.

D. Comprehension — 21:7-9

21:7 — John was the first one to comprehend that the Lord was the man on the shore. As soon as he realized it, he told Peter. Peter, as impetuous as ever, jumped into the sea so that he could swim to shore and reach Jesus first. His actions showed his emotional excitement for the Lord. Deep inside of him, he wanted to be near the Lord. Peter experienced how his spirit was willing to put the Lord first, but his flesh was weak. He needed maturity to depend on the Lord constantly to overcome the weaknesses of his flesh.

21:8-9 — Following Peter, the rest of the disciples came to the shore by boat. When they arrived, they noticed that Jesus had prepared for them a meal of roasted fish. He, too, had been fishing, but without hook or net. He, no doubt, simply called the fish to shore and they obeyed. The fire He prepared was a charcoal fire, just like the one in the courtyard where Peter denied the Lord (18:18). Charcoal has a pungent odor and the smell of that fire may have brought memories back to Peter. It could have reminded him of the weakness of his flesh from which he was not fully cured. This fishing trip was evidence of that fact.

E. Catch — 21:10-11

21:10-11 — When the net was brought to land, there were 153 fish. This was the result of obedience to the command of Christ. That would teach them their need to obey Christ in fishing for men.

"Yet was not the net broken" — Christ gave them fish for their obedience to Him and the fish were preserved by Him as well. This also would be true of their spiritual ministry. They would bring forth fruit and their fruit would remain (cf. Jn 15:16).

F. Communion — 21:12-14

21:12-13 — Jesus invited the disciples to eat with Him. They seemed to feel a sense of awe in His presence, but they ate what He gave to them.

21:14 — This is the third appearance of Christ to His disciples as a group, but it probably was the seventh recorded appearance to His followers up to this time. First, He appeared to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:15); second, to the women (Mt 28:8-10); third, to Peter (1 Cor 15:5); fourth, to Cleopas and his companion on the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13ff); fifth and sixth, to His disciples and others with them in a room on two occasions in Jerusalem (20:19ff); and then this appearance to seven of His disciples by the Sea of Galilee. There were still more appearances after this (cf. 1 Cor 15:6ff; Mt 28:16-20; Acts 1:3-9). These appearances to individuals, small groups and to over five hundred at one time is strong evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead.

II. Admonition of Jesus — 21:15-23

A. Concerning Service — 21:15-17

1. Love

Peter had denied Jesus three times. This is possibly why Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him. First of all He asked, "Do you love Me more than these?" What was Jesus referring to when He added the words, "more than these"? Was He referring to his fishing business to which he had returned with six other disciples? Or, was Jesus comparing him with the other disciples, because he had said, "Though all men shall be offended because of you, yet I will never be offended" (Mt 26:33). Did he love Jesus more than the other disciples? Maybe Jesus was not specific, because Peter had weakness in both areas. Jesus was not trying to embarrass Peter; He wanted to strengthen Peter.

Now we will look at the words for "love." For the first two questions, "Do you love Me?" Jesus used the Greek word, *agapao*, for love. This word expresses the deepest sense of love; a love which involves some personal sacrifice; a love even for enemies. It is the word to describe God's love for sinners. To both of these questions Peter responded with *phileo* to say that he had a deep affection for Jesus, but the word usually does not express love as strong as *agapao*. This word usually expresses love among friends; a mutual love which says, "I am truly fond of you." However, this word is used once by John to describe God's love for His Son (Jn 5:20). But in this case Jesus is probing the depth of Peter's love for Him because he had said to Him, "I will lay down my life for your sake" (13:37). Peter truly meant it and even used his sword to cut off a man's ear in defense of Jesus, but Jesus had told him to put away his sword. Jesus knew it was His time to die, but He also knew that it was not the right time for His disciples to die. They would have to live to be His witnesses after He went to Heaven. However, the time would come when Peter would have to lay down his life for Jesus. Evidently Peter could not bring himself to use *agapao* at that time to express his love for Jesus. Due to Peter's response, Jesus used the word, *phileo*, for the third question, "Do you love Me?" Peter responded with *phileo* once again to express his love for Jesus.

Peter undoubtedly was afraid to say he would love Jesus to the point of personal sacrifice remembering how he had made such a claim before and then failed so miserably (Mt 26:31-35). But it grieved Peter that Jesus would ask the same question three times. No doubt it reminded him of his triple denial of his Lord.

2. Responsibility.

After each question about Peter's love for Him, Jesus told him what his responsibility would

be. He no longer was to be a fisherman. He was to take care of Jesus' "lambs" and "sheep." Jesus asked about his love for Him, because He wanted Peter to realize that his service for Him would depend upon his love for Him. After the first question, Jesus commanded Peter to feed His lambs. Feeding the lambs meant he was to give the Word of God to His people, especially to the young believers. After the second question, Jesus used the word, "tend," or "shepherd." Shepherding or tending sheep includes other aspects of caring for a flock than feeding them. It also involves medical care, discipline, guidance, and material assistance of them. After the third question, Jesus once again used the word, "feed." Feeding the flock of God from the Word of God is of foremost importance for a pastor or shepherd (cf. 1 Peter 5:2). "Sheep" or "lambs" refer to the whole flock of believers. "My lambs" and "My sheep" speak of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over all believers; they all belong to Him.

B. Concerning Sacrifice — 21:18-19

21:18-19 — There would be a sacrifice Peter would have to make to be a good servant. He would have to give up his personal freedom in order to serve Christ. He would even have to give up his life.

"Stretch forth your hands" — This indicated Peter would be crucified. Peter would follow His Lord by dying on a cross.

C Concerning Social Relations — 21:20-23

21:20-23 — Peter was concerned with John's responsibilities. Jesus told Peter it was none of his concern. Peter's responsibility was to serve Him in the way He had just given him. He had other plans for John.

III. Affirmation of John — 21:24-25

21:24-25 — John, who was an eye-witness, affirmed that these things which he had written were true, but that there were so many other things which Jesus did that it would be practically impossible to record all of it, at least by the recording methods of that first century. John is using a hyperbole to get his point across. He chose the things that would help sinners know that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah-King), the Son of God. If they believed these things about Jesus, they would have eternal life through Him.