

## Learning Discipleship from Jesus

In my previous article we began a new series from John 21 that touches on discipleship. We saw that—prior to his crucifixion and resurrection—Jesus had instructed his disciples to meet him in Galilee and the disciples eventually went there and met with Jesus. We saw that, one important aspect of being a disciple of Christ is that *Jesus claims our total allegiance*. In addition to this, we see next that:

### —Jesus Commands Our Dependent Obedience

This is just to say that Jesus commands our obedience and our recognition that everything in our lives—including our obedience—is dependent on God’s grace. In these next few verses (John 21:4-8), we see that Jesus now appears, but—at least initially—the disciples don’t recognize him. This could be the normal pattern that we’ve already seen where Jesus—after the resurrection—seems to be able to conceal himself at times (Luke 24:36-37). This could also be a perfectly natural occurrence because it was just breaking day and Jesus was about 100 yards away from them on the shore (vss. 4, 8). Either way, Jesus now says: “Children, do you have any fish?” Let’s pause here a moment and set this scene in place. First of all, we need to remember that, throughout the book of John we’ve seen that John records how Jesus will often use *earthly* things to teach *spiritual* lessons. For example, in John 3 Jesus is talking with Nicodemus and he says, “You must be born again.” When Nicodemus asks how a man can enter into his mother’s womb a second time and be born, Jesus teaches a lesson about *spiritual* birth.

In John 4 Jesus meets the woman at the well who is there to draw the needed daily water. After some conversation Jesus says to her, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.” This excited the Samaritan woman who says to Jesus, “Sir, give me this water.” Jesus then teaches her a *spiritual* lesson about the “water that he gives will become a spring welling up to eternal life.” One other example that I’ll give comes from the gospel of Luke. This is another time that the disciples are out on a boat and haven’t caught any fish. Jesus tells them to put the nets back in the water and they catch so many fish that the boats begin to sink. They were astonished at the obvious miracle that they had just seen. Jesus then declares, “Do not be afraid; from now on *you will be catching men*.” It was at this time that the text tells us that, “they left everything and followed [Jesus].” (Luke 5:1-11)

That being true, we’re not surprised to learn that Jesus is getting ready, once again, to take this *earthly* example of fishing to teach the disciples another *spiritual* lesson or lessons. Looking back at the text, we’re told that the disciples have been out all night (vs. 3). When Jesus asks if they have any fish they answer, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” Interestingly, the word translated, “cast” is a command. We’re not told why these seasoned fishermen *immediately* obeyed this man’s command. Remember, at this point they hadn’t yet recognized Jesus. Was there something in his voice that spurred a memory or that may have indicated genuine care and concern? We’re only told that the disciples did

exactly what this man commanded and when they cast their nets back in, the text says, “...they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish.”

Now it's been said that even though Peter is clearly a man of action, it's often true that John perceives and understands things more quickly than Peter. We saw this at the empty tomb. It was John who first realized that something special had happened (John 20:8). Peter was still, as it were, shaking his head not knowing what to believe. So, then, John's quick perception is exactly what happens now. John knows that a miracle has happened with this amazingly large catch of fish and he simply declares, “It is the Lord!” At this point Peter—the man of action—quickly puts on his outer garment and plunges into the sea! Peter just wanted to be near Jesus. At least in that moment, it may be that Peter was focusing on his *love for Jesus*, rather than his recent *betrayal of Jesus* (John 18:15ff). What are some other lessons on discipleship that we can glean from what happens in this portion of the narrative? Keep in mind that these spiritual lessons are not only for the first century disciples. These are lessons that all Christ's disciples, including 21st century Christians, must *continue to learn* as well. In my next article, we'll look further at lessons that this passage teaches about discipleship.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.