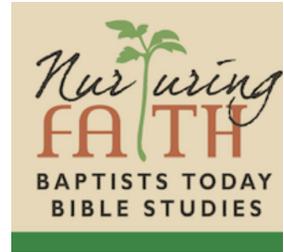


Adult Teaching Resources

April 10, 2016



Close Encounters of the Jesus Kind: Conversations with Jesus (April 3-May 8)

A Disciple We Can Like — John 20:19-31

One Shepherd to Another — John 21:1-19

Ask the Sheep — John 10:22-30

A Serious Summary — John 13:31-35

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One Shepherd to Another

John 21:1-19

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

What is one thing you've wanted to accomplish, but have been frustrated in your attempt to accomplish?

When you want to "get away from it all," where do you go, or what do you do, to escape?

Information

We have more pre-resurrection than post-resurrection stories of Jesus. John's Gospel, which has already told us that there were more stories about Jesus than there were books that could hold them, does give us half a dozen stories. One was the story we covered last week, the story of "doubting Thomas." Today's two stories focus more on the disciple, Simon Peter.

[Have a class member read John 21:1-3.] We know that when Jesus originally called Simon to be his disciple, Simon was in the business of catching fish to sell at market.

[Have a class member read Mark 1:16-18.] To put this story in context, by this time (in John's gospel), Jesus has risen from the dead, he has appeared to Mary Magdalene, he has appeared to the disciples without Thomas, then with him. What do the disciples know about the post-resurrected Jesus by this time? (Jesus has conquered death; Jesus body is different — he can appear in a room in spite of locked doors; Mary does not recognize Jesus until he calls her name; Jesus body is recognizable — he has scars from the nails and spear; Jesus comes and goes, so the disciples are not "following him" around the countryside as they had been pre-crucifixion; etc.)

We are not told why Peter decides to go fishing or why the others decide to join him. What do you imagine was motivating them? (wanting the comfort of doing something familiar; the need for money/food; want to stick together; an escape, etc.)

We can only imagine the conversation on the boat. What are some of the questions you might imagine the disciples were discussing among themselves? (What is our future? What is the future of our movement/sect? Do you think we'll see Jesus again? Etc.)

[Have a class member read John 21:4-8.] One of the disciples recognizes that the man on the shore is Jesus. We aren't told why the other disciples are clueless, but once Peter believes it is

Information *continued*

indeed Jesus on the shore, how does he react? What does this say about Peter? What does it say anything about the other disciples — that they did not dive out of the boat as well?

[Write on the board, “Jesus offers...”]

In this story, we are going to have three things that Jesus offers in his post-resurrection appearances. The first thing offered is his presence.

[Write “Presence” under the words, “Jesus offers...”]

What are some things about Jesus’ presence that we can surmise from this story thus far? (Jesus’ presence is unpredictable; Jesus’ presence indicates his concern for us; Jesus’ presence has power; etc.)

Another thing Jesus offers in this post-resurrection is Provision.

[Write “Provision” under the word, “Presence”]

What did Jesus provide the disciples? (lots of fish) Besides the fish, on a deeper level, what did Jesus offer and provide? (companionship, hope, assurance, Jesus knows more than we know, etc.)

[Have a class member read John 21:9-14.] Jesus has a little campfire with some fish and bread. Jesus is present and he is providing breakfast. But not *all* of breakfast. He asks the disciples to bring some of their fish to him.

[Write “Partnership” under “Provision.”]

Jesus offers us partnership. Could Jesus have made the disciples’ task easy by having the fish jump into the boat? Could Jesus have provided all the breakfast fish, cooked and ready to serve? Why do you think he did not do that?

How is partnership portrayed in this passage? What are some principles we can draw from it? (What we have are gifts from God; God expects us to bring something to the table; etc.)

Here’s an interesting factoid: Ancient persons thought there were 153 different kinds of fish. Each one was represented and included in the catch. God offers presence, provision, and partnership to everyone.

In our second story, the images change. We are going from one kind of animal to another. And, we are moving from what Jesus *offers* to us to what Jesus *asks* of us.

[Have a class member read John 21:15-17.] [Write on the board, “Jesus asks...”]

Jesus asks Peter a question. “Do you love me?”

[Write “Love” under the words “Jesus asks...”]

How many times does Jesus ask this of Peter? (three times)

Information *continued*

Why does he keep asking this question? (to make a real point; because Peter is not answering wholeheartedly; because Peter had denied Jesus three times, etc.)

Many commentators make much of the fact that in the Greek text, Jesus and Peter use different words for “love.” “Agapeo” is the word for an ultimate, self-sacrificial love. “Phileo” is the word for a deep friendship. Thus,

Jesus: *agapas me* (“Do you love me?”)

Peter: *philo se* (“I love you.”)

Jesus: *agapas me* (“Do you love me?”)

Peter: *philo se* (“I love you.”)

Jesus: *phileis me* (“Do you love me?”)

Peter: *philo se* (“I love you.”)

However, at least one scholar points out that John often uses these two words interchangeably.

“For example, both verbs are used to speak of ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ (*agapao*, 13:23; *phileo*, 20:2); God’s love of Jesus (*agapao*, 10:17; *phileo*, 5:20); God’s love for the disciples (*agapao*, 14:23; *phileo*, 16:27); and the disciples’ love of Jesus (*agapao*, 14:23; *phileo*, 16:27). There is no reason, therefore, to ascribe gradations of meaning to their usage here (as the NIV does). The Evangelist’s propensity for synonyms is also evident in the variation ‘lambs’ / ‘sheep’ and ‘feed’ / ‘tend.’” [Gail O’Day. *John*. The New Interpreters Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1996. p. 860.]

So, the point may not be the intensity of love. Jesus *is* asking for a love that will not deny him. Jesus is asking for love. And, he gives Peter a command, “feed my sheep.” Think of the context: Jesus has just fed his disciples — his sheep, his little flock — on the beach. Now, he asks Peter to be a partner in that feeding.

[Write “Partnership” under the word “Love.”]

The Gospel of John does not have a Great Commission, but this comes close to it. “Join me in my work, feeding my sheep.” In last week’s lesson, Jesus appears to the disciples and asks them to be partners in loving the world.

[Have a class member read John 20:20-21.] Jesus asks his disciples to love him with such depth that they will not deny him. Jesus asks his disciples to accept this commission — to go out into the world as Jesus was sent out into the world. In today’s story, we have one more “ask” from Jesus.

[Have a class member read John 21:18-19.] [Write on the board, “Follow me” under the word “Partner.”]

Following Jesus is an awesome experience, but it has consequences that are not always pleasant. Sometimes, we take stands that are unpopular. Sometimes, we are scoffed at for believing love is better than hate, peace is better than war, and that “it is better to give than

Information *continued*

to receive.”

Peter was martyred. That won't be the way our lives ends, probably. But there may be smaller sacrifices we are called to make as persons who love God, trust in God, and partner with God.

Transformational Exercise

Let's listen again to these two stories, paying attention to what God provides for us and to what God asks of us.

As I read, you may want to be looking at the board at these words, or you may want to focus on the reading while closing your eyes.

[Read John 21:1-19]

[Close in a prayer something like this: *In the season of Easter, we thank you God for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We thank you that Jesus did not simply rise, then disappear, but visited with his disciples many times. We pray you will give us pure, loving spirits that are eager to partner with you. Amen.*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The Sea of Tiberias — The northwestern end of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias (a Roman name) and Kinnereth, from the Hebrew word meaning “harp,” because of the lake’s roughly harp-like shape. This photo is taken from the shore near Capernaum.



Who’s up for fishing? — According to v. 2, the disciples who joined Peter on the fishing excursion included Thomas, Nathanael of Cana, “the sons of Zebedee,” along with two others who were not named. It’s interesting to note that Thomas is the first person named after Peter, though he had no previous association with fishing. His starring role in the previous account probably played into his prominence here. It’s not surprising to see “the sons of Zebedee” (James and John) mentioned, for they had also been fishermen when Jesus called them (Mark 1:19, Matt. 4:21). According to Luke 5:10, they had worked in a partnership with Simon Peter, and they would also be returning home.

Peter’s brother Andrew, his former partner, is not named. This is surprising, even if he was one of the two unnamed disciples, but Andrew is rarely mentioned after his initial call. Peter, James, and John became Jesus’ inner circle, leaving Andrew as one among the others.

Peter’s brother Andrew, his former partner, is not named. This is surprising, even if he was one of the two unnamed disciples, but Andrew is rarely mentioned after his initial call. Peter, James, and John became Jesus’ inner circle, leaving Andrew as one among the others.

The author may have considered the gathering of seven disciples to be significant. George R. Beasley-Murray concludes: “So seven disciples have come together, doubtless a symbolical number, representing the whole disciple group, and indeed the whole Body of disciples, the Church” (*John*, vol. 36 of Word Biblical Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 399).

Sound familiar? — The scene in v. 7 is reminiscent of John 20:4-8, where John and Peter together raced to the tomb to check things out for themselves. Here, after John tells Peter the stranger is Jesus, Peter leaps into the water in an impatient hurry to reach him.

St. Peter’s fish — Modern visitors to the Galilee often enjoy a traditional meal including a whole fried tilapia, known locally as “St. Peter’s fish.”

Pope Peter? — Jesus’ threefold commission of Peter to “feed my sheep” or “tend my lambs” has been interpreted in different ways. While Protestants tend to see Jesus challenging

Digging Deeper *continued*

Peter to a general pastoral role in evangelizing and caring for others, Catholic tradition holds that Jesus gave Peter authority over the universal flock, thus making him the first pope. The story in Matthew 16:19 about Jesus giving Peter the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” is generally cited in support of this view. A strong tradition holds that Peter was buried deep beneath what is today Saint Peter’s Cathedral, an integral part of the Vatican. In memory of Jesus’ command to “feed my sheep,” popes often appear in public holding a shepherd’s crook.

In what we know of him from the New Testament, however, Peter was clearly outspoken but did not exercise authority over others. James appears to have emerged as the leader of the church in Jerusalem, not Peter. And, the Apostle Paul did not hesitate to criticize Peter in Galatians 2, which recounts how Peter lapsed into refusing to have table fellowship with Gentile believers after being visited by representatives from James (Galatians 2), even though he had witnessed God’s acceptance of the Gentiles at Caesarea (Acts 10). If Jesus intended for Peter to rule the church, other early Christian leaders appear not to have acknowledged it.

Faithful unto death — An old church tradition holds that Peter was crucified during the persecutions of Nero, and that he asked to be put on the cross upside down because he was unworthy of being crucified in the same manner as Jesus. There is no evidence to show if that story is historically based, but there is no lack of testimony that Peter remained faithful and became a primary leader in the early church.

What do fishermen and shepherds have in common? — Notice that the overall story is built around two metaphorical occupations: fishers, and shepherds. Think back to the beginning of this story. The disciples had put forth the effort to go fishing, but caught nothing until Jesus helped them. Jesus did not catch the fish or cause them to leap into the boat. Jesus provided guidance, but the fishermen still had to throw the net and haul it in and clean the fish.

When Jesus first called these same disciples, he challenged them to fish for people. That was a call to evangelism, a call to a new kind of occupation. When we fish for fish, we are taking creatures from life to death, but when we fish for persons, we bring them from death to life. If lost and dying persons are to be brought to Christ, someone must go looking for them, someone must help them, someone must lead them out of the darkness and into the light. That requires effort on our part, but we are not alone. We do it together with Jesus.

The second image Jesus used was that of tending sheep. Three times the Lord asked Peter to confess his love, three times Peter declared it, and three times Jesus explained how Peter could truly show his love for God: “Feed my lambs,” “look after my sheep,” “feed my sheep.”

Jesus had often spoken of people as sheep in need of a shepherd. Earlier in John’s gospel, he had emphasized the lengths to which he would go to care for his sheep: “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (10:7-11). Now Jesus has

Digging Deeper *continued*

passed on the role of “shepherd” to Peter and to all believers. Shepherds care for the sheep by feeding them when they are hungry, and leading them when they don’t know the way. Shepherds provide shelter when it is cold, and protection when enemies are near. Loving shepherds search for sheep when they are lost, heal them when they are wounded, and comfort them when they are afraid.

Our task is not only to bring others into the kingdom, but also to care for them. One of the worst things we can do is lead someone to accept Christ as Savior and then leave them to figure everything out for themselves — or to show someone a great deal of attention and love until they join the church, and then ignore them.

Can you think of ways in which the shepherd’s work compares to the ministry of Christians? What are practical ways in which we can care for Jesus’ sheep?

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Is there a significance to the count of 153 fish?

Many Bible readers have wondered why the gospel writer bothers to tell us that the disciples' Jesus-aided catch totaled 153 large fish. The number seems unnecessarily specific, and commentators through the years have provided no end of speculation. Was there more to the number than a memorable count to go with a great fish story? The author of the Fourth Gospel had a penchant for finding significance in signs. Did he consider 153 fish to be a number of consequence?

One of the more popular suggestions goes back to the fourth century scholar Jerome, who translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, creating the Vulgate, the church's primary Bible for more than a thousand years. George R. Beasley-Murray quotes Jerome's statement, in a commentary on the stream of living water in Ezekiel 47, that "Writers on the nature and properties of animals, who have learned 'fishing' in either Latin or Greek (one of whom is the most learned poet Oppianus Cilix) say that there are 153 species of fish" (*John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987], 402; citing *Comm. xiv in Ezechiel*, Migne, PL 25, 474C). We know today that there are many more than 153 different species of fish, but if the gospel writer had been taught this, perhaps he imagined there was one of each kind in the net, and saw the catch as a pointer to the church's mission to all peoples.

Augustine, who lived during the same time period, proposed a complex mathematical solution, noting that 153 is the sum of the numbers from one to 17. When represented by a series of lines containing dots for each number (one dot for one, two for the number two, up to seventeen dots), the dots form a triangle. Since $17 = 10 + 7$, Augustine suggested that these represented the Ten Commandments and the "seven spirits of God," as in Revelation 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, 5:6. Ten and seven are also important numbers in Jewish tradition. Perhaps the sum of those numbers, when broken down and added to each other, was considered a symbol of perfection. Other writers have proposed other meanings, combining numbers in various ways (such as 100 for the Gentiles, 50 for the Jews, and three for the Trinity), arguing for their symbolic significance. Could the author have had something so complex and secretive in mind?

Another approach involves the practice of gematria, in which letters of the alphabet are assigned numerical values, the best known biblical example being 666, a number that probably represents a Hebrew spelling of the name Nero Caesar. Several scholars, believing Ezekiel 47 was in the back of the author's mind, have proposed a variety of terms related to place names of where people will "fish" in the messianic age, but these are unconvincing, as are the conclusions that the Hebrew spellings of "the church or love" or "the children of God" add up to 153. Even more complicated suggestions have been made, including

The Hardest Question *continued*

the reversal of some letters in a practice called “*atbash*,” but all of these efforts seem to be pressing far too hard to find a meaning that might not be there.

Beasley-Murray cites yet another suggestion from M. Rissi, who ties the miracle to the feeding of the multitudes, in which 5 fishes were used, with 12 baskets left over. Adding five and twelve gives 17, which renders 153 when triangulated, as Augustine noted. Thus, he concluded that there was a connection between the feeding of the multitudes in John 6 and the story in John 21: “The figure 153 thus builds a bridge between the feeding miracle of the ministry and that of the Resurrection, and enables the theological weight of the one to be carried over to the other. In the ancient world fish were a symbol of fruitfulness, life, and immortality. If the eucharistic taking of bread and wine celebrated Jesus’ *death*, the eating of bread and fish was a celebration of his *resurrection*, which made fellowship with the Lord after his death possible. So the eucharistic meal in chap. 21 depicts *an epiphany celebration of the risen Lord*” (Beasley-Murray, 404, citing Rissi in “Voll grosser Fische. . .,” esp. 81–86).

All of these suggestions may strike modern readers as an exercise in straining at gnats. Whether the author hid an esoteric meaning in the number 153 remains a mystery, but the testimony of a miraculous catch containing an apparent record number of large fish is quite significant enough, a note that adds historical flavor to the story.