

John 21:7–14 — It Is the Lord

Discernment, Energy, the Unbroken Net, and Communion at the Shore

Scripture Reading: John 21:7–14

“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, for he was naked, and did cast himself into the sea.

And the other disciples came in a little ship; for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits, dragging the net with fishes.

As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.

Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.

Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.”

Two Hundred Cubits: The Distance Was Real

A cubit is approximately eighteen inches. Two hundred cubits is therefore three hundred feet — one hundred yards, the length of a football field. The little ship was not right beside the shore as is perhaps often imagined. It was a hundred yards out. The Lord spoke to them from that distance, and they answered back.

The Lord's voice carried clearly to them; his question was audible and his direction to cast on the right side was received. And when the fish came in, the knowledge of the Lord Jesus was already on display: he knew exactly where the fish were. He directed the net to the right side of the ship, and the fish were there when it went in.

The Discernment of Love and the Energy of Love

It was John — the disciple whom Jesus loved — who discerned who it was on the shore. Six other disciples were there. None of them said it. John said it: It is the Lord. Appreciation of the love of the Lord Jesus is somehow bound up with discernment. It is the one who knows himself to be loved who recognizes the Lord. The message to Philadelphia speaks of the Lord causing those who oppose to know that he has loved his people — that word is objective knowledge, being made acquainted with the fact. To know oneself the object of the Saviour's love is of great importance to the soul, and here it produces recognition when the Lord was a hundred yards away and the evidence of the net had not yet been hauled in.

Peter's response was the energy of love. He had already had a private interview with the Lord — recorded in Luke 24, where it says the Lord appeared to Simon — and that private restoration of communion had already taken place. Now, free in his soul, the energy of love expressed itself characteristically in action. He girt his coat about him — for he was naked, which was not fit for the presence of the Lord — and he cast himself into the sea and swam to shore.

The order is significant. Love's energy did not make him hasty at the wrong moment. He clothed himself first, then went. The first thing the energy of love does is take note of what is due for the presence of the Lord — what is suitable for that presence. He was a hundred yards away and Peter was already thinking about that. Love ordered his actions even in its urgency.

The Net Not Broken: The Millennial Haul

The contrast with the earlier great catch in Luke 5 is instructive: there, the net broke. Here, with so many fish that seven fishermen could not lift the net, it was not broken. The difference has been understood to point to the great millennial gathering of the nations through Israel's testimony. In the present age — the church in its earthly testimony — the vessel breaks; Christendom has failed. But in the millennium the administration of blessing is in the hands of Christ himself, and there cannot be failure in his administration. His net does not break.

The number 153 has attracted much meditation. That it is divisible by 17 — a number connected in Scripture with the security of the believer, and the number of items in Romans 8 that cannot separate from the love of God — is at least suggestive. The historian Hengstenberg noted that there were 153 known nations in the world at the time of writing. Whatever the exact significance, the precision of the number matters: it is exact, recorded, and the net was not broken for all there were so many.

Peter alone drew the net to land. The same seven fishermen who could not lift it from the water while still in the boat — Peter managed it on the shore, with the Lord consciously present. This is not commented on in the text as something remarkable; it is stated as a plain fact. In the presence of the Lord Jesus, consciously close to him, the energy of love accomplishes what the combined effort in the boat could not. Spiritual weakness in ordinary conditions does not disqualify one from extraordinary service in the nearness of the Lord.

Come and Dine

The Lord had a fire ready, fish laid on it, and bread. He had not waited for their catch. He provided for them before they arrived — he is the servant of our needs, and his thought was on their behalf before they reached the shore. Then he said, Bring of the fish you have caught — so both his provision and their haul were on

the table together.

The invitation Come and dine echoes the words of John 1:39, Come and see. Both are invitations from the Lord Jesus himself. Here, in a gospel whose great theme is the deity of the Lord Jesus, he presides at the meal. The parallel in Luke is the great supper made by the father for the son, and the invitation going forth. In John, it is God the Son presiding over his own feast. None of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? — because to ask that would have been an affront to his dignity. Pilate dared to ask him that. Pilate turned his back on him. The disciples knew who he was — and the knowledge was not acquired by deduction from evidence but was wrought in their souls.

This third manifestation to the disciples as a group has a progressive significance. The first was Christian in character; the second, with Thomas, had a bearing on the Jewish remnant being brought to their Messiah; and this third — the millennial haul of the nations, the fire and the meal on the shore, come and dine — points to the millennial communion of the Lord with those who are his at the inauguration of that blessed age. Jesus cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. That is communion.

It is the Lord. Come and dine.