

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY APRIL 21, 2024
JOHN 20:24-21:14

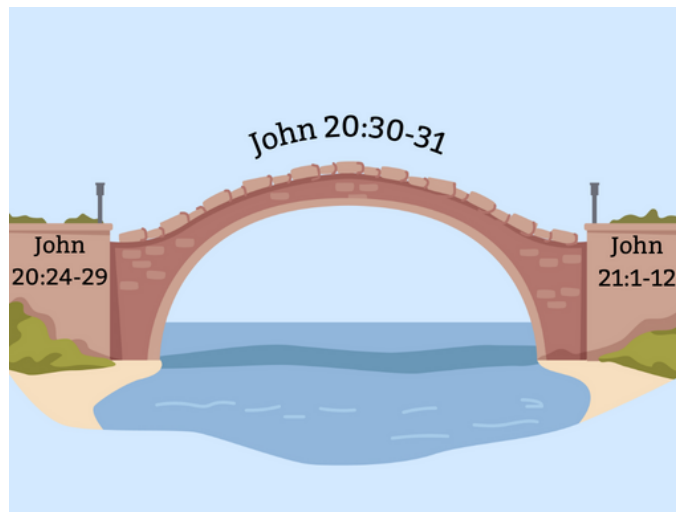
PASTOR DUANE MILLER

BLESSED TO BELIEVE & A FEW FISH



Today's scriptural text will be divided into three sections: **20:24 -29**, then **20:30-31**, and lastly **21:1-12**.

The middle verses, **v30-31**, will serve as a "bridge" between the two passages connecting them in purpose and message.



So we will start with **v30-31** as it will give us a lense by which to read and meditate on the other two passages.

The phrase "miraculous signs" or just "signs" has been used consistently throughout the book of John. A sign is something that communicates a message.



The “miraculous signs” John is referencing were not just miracles, they were “miraculous signs” done with purpose to communicate a message to the reader.

If you recall there were “seven” “miraculous signs” that John included in his gospel.

SEVEN MIRACULOUS SIGNS

- John 2:1-11 *Water to wine*
- John 4:46-54 *Healing a sick son*
- John 5:1-8 *Healing a lame man*
- John 6:5-13 *Feeding 5000*
- John 6:15-21 *Walking on water*
- John 9:1-7 *Healing a blind man*
- John 11 *Raising Lazarus*

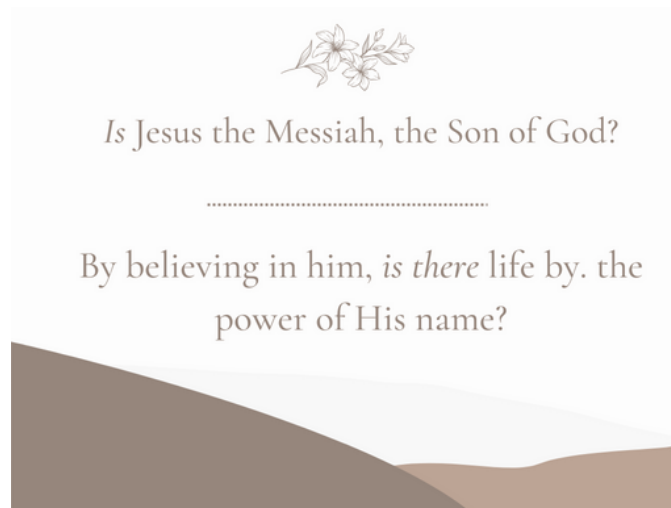
But John tells us in **v30** that there were “many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book”. And John is careful to not only individually attest to the “many other miraculous signs” but rather he includes the witness of the other disciples. “The disciples (plural including himself) saw..”. So think “multiple witnesses” who can verify what John witnessed.

In **v31** John says “but these are written..” So the “miraculous signs” that John included in his gospel specifically are written to support the purpose of John’s gospel which he gives us in **v31**.

If you are comfortable writing in your bible I encourage you to write the purpose of the Gospel of John, John 20:31, in the beginning of the gospel, so when you read this gospel in the future you know what John’s purpose is for his writing and you can read it thru that filter. And his purpose is clear, to persuade you and I, the readers, that “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name”.

Whether you have been persuaded of that already or have yet to be persuaded of that, John wants you to “continue to believe” or “believe for the first time” that, “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name”.

Today we are going to ask and answer these questions



“Is Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God?” And “By believing in him, is there life by the power of His name?” So with **v30-31** as the bridge between our two passages today let’s look at the first passage. **John 20:24-29**

In **v24** we learn that “Thomas” was not included when the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples as they were meeting in fear behind locked doors, on the same day as the resurrection. Now the text doesn’t tell us why he was “not with the others” when Jesus appeared, it just says he was “not with the others.” It would not be fair to assume anything related to his character as reason for him not being present, he could have been on a “DoorDash” delivery.

But the text tells us that the disciples, at some point in that first week, had contact with Thomas, because it says they told him “we have seen the Lord”.

What do we know about “Thomas” so far? The text here implies that he was a “twin”. Whether the other twin was a boy or girl, identical twin.. A follower of Jesus? still alive? It doesn’t tell us.

Thomas is the disciple who, after Lazarus already died and Jesus then decided to go to Bethany the home of Lazarus, Thomas famously said in **John 11:16** “Let’s go too - and die with Jesus.” Thomas clearly had an understanding that Jesus returning to the Jerusalem area meant that Jesus was likely to die. And he also understood the threat that they as disciples might die as well. What Thomas didn’t have an understanding of was that Jesus would rise from the dead on the third day. And his incomplete thinking continued into our passage today.

Thomas not understanding that Jesus would die, resurrect and return to the Father was evident in his question just days before. Jesus speaking to the disciples said in **John 14:4-5**

We know from other gospels that Thomas was included in the twelve that were chosen by Jesus to be “apostles” after Jesus spent a night in prayer. Apostle meaning “one who is sent”. **Mark 3:13-19**. So Thomas was chosen by Jesus to be an apostle, he was sent by Jesus, and sent with the authority of Jesus. Being sent with the authority of Jesus sounds like what we saw in the passage last week minus the anointing of the holy spirit.

Interesting when the risen Jesus appeared to the other disciples in **20:21-22** Thomas didn't just miss the appearance of the risen Jesus, he also missed the “commissioning” to be sent out by the authority of Jesus. He missed the “anointing” of the Holy Spirit when Jesus “breathed” on the disciples for them to receive the Holy Spirit. By this the disciples received new spiritual life, and they were “set apart for God, set apart for a work of God”. Thomas missed all of that.

So when after all that took place when the disciples tell Thomas “we have seen the Lord” in **v25**, Thomas responds “I won't believe it...”

Just a comment about what Thomas says here - sticking your finger into a wound is both gross and unsanitary, just sayin'.

Now in all fairness to the text the word that our bible translates as “wound” is probably better translated as “mark” or “scar”. The Greek word implies a permanent impression that is left after a significant blow or blows. The word is also used when they pound an image or seal or letters into metal - usually to communicate a message. Last year I added two scars to my repertoire, and I know what message my scars tell me, “don't be stupid next time”.

So Thomas is skeptical, or dubious, needs more proof. Whatever is going on in his thinking and heart is holding him back from believing. To me his response sounds “self -protective”. Maybe trust has been broken too many times already. Maybe it's hard for him to trust without seeing? Maybe he doesn't want to be “disappointed”, again. Maybe it's not an intellectual answer he needs, but rather a relational answer? I can relate to some of those questions, maybe you can too.

Obviously by Thomas' response about nail and side wounds, its clear that the other disciples had told Thomas that Jesus showed them his “wounds” in (**v20a** “as he spoke he showed them his wounds in his hands and his side”). The other disciples are no better than Thomas in regards to belief, they just saw the proof before Thomas did. I personally don't like the label of “doubting Thomas” - I think it mischaracterizes him, and creates an “unsafe or shameful” pathway for others like him, like me, like some of you to come to faith cautiously. The important thing is that one comes to faith in Jesus - not necessarily “the how they come to faith”. We already saw the variances in the faith journey of John, Peter and Mary Magdalene on the day Jesus resurrected. Let's not judge cautious faith, but encourage its growth.

So how does Thomas come to faith? **V26**. If this was a literal eight days after Jesus appeared to the disciples the first time, this would have been a couple of days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread was officially over. So the disciples, including Thomas, could have started their journey back to Galilee by now, but instead they were once again meeting behind locked doors. And then “suddenly”, just like back in **v19**, Jesus was standing among them.

And Jesus opens with the same line as before, “Peace be with you”. This is the third time, note third, that Jesus said “Peace be with you” to his disciples after he resurrected. Yes it is the standard Jewish greeting, but it's as if it's a reminder to all the disciples that Jesus had already given them the Holy Spirit. Meaning they already had what they needed to step forward despite their fears and come out from behind the locked doors. It is as if he Jesus is saying to them, “I already gave you my spirit to not be trapped by your fears, and I gave you my authority to go out into the world, why are you still here behind locked doors?” Note Jesus addresses that first in all of them, before addressing Thomas.

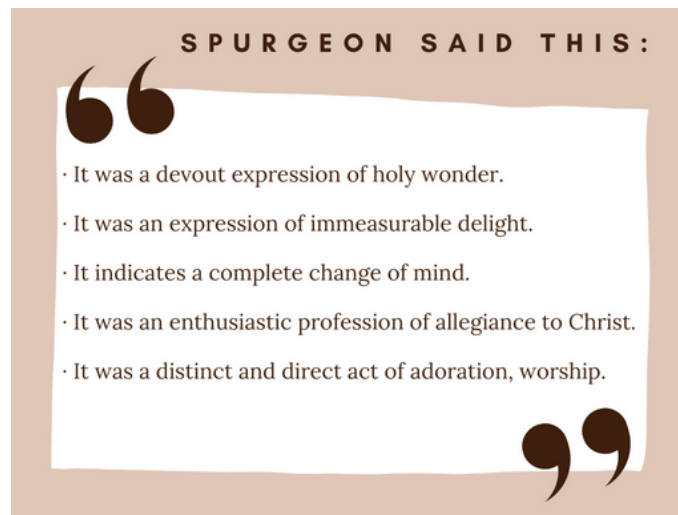
To Thomas specifically Jesus then says in **v27a** “Put your finger...side.” This is an “invitation”. Jesus invites Thomas personally, face to face, to believe in him and meets Thomas where he is on his faith journey. If these “wounds” are in fact “marks” or “impressions” that communicate a message, then perhaps Jesus was inviting Thomas to “read the message with his fingers”. Imagery of someone reading brail pops into my head here. With his fingers Thomas is reading the message that the crucified and buried Jesus is risen, which confirms what Thomas sees with his eyes, and hears with his ears. Yes, that is three witnesses to Jesus resurrection, the sense of sight, sense of touch, the sense of sound or hearing. We saw the witness of three senses already in Mary Magdalene in the garden, “hearing” Jesus call her by name, “seeing” him with her eyes, and “clinging” to him.

How many witnesses do you need to “believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him you can have life by the power of his name?”

John, the same author, also writes this in **1 John 1:1-3** The middle of that opening poem, the end of verse one, that all three senses point to is the phrase “He (Jesus) is the Word of Life”. Same word “life” as in **John 20:31** “..that you will have life by the power of his name”.

In **v28** we see Thomas’ response to Jesus’ invitation to believe.

Thomas’ words are, as one commentary put it, “an expression of absolute conviction of the deity of Christ.” Meaning yes, Jesus is God.



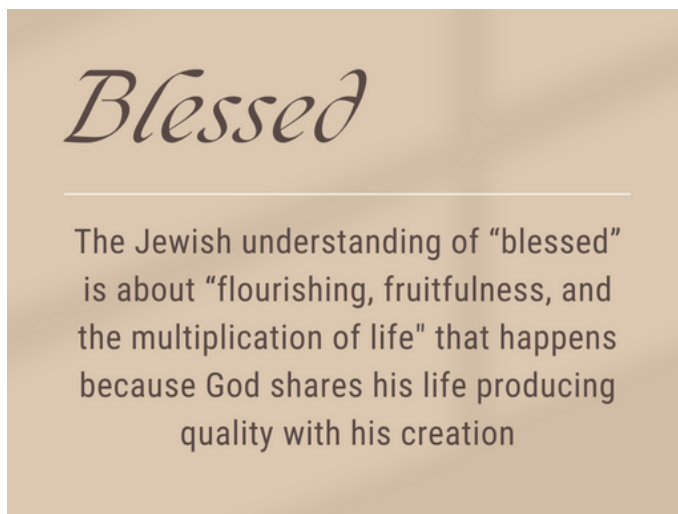
Jesus then said to Thomas in **20:29**. This is known as “The Last Beatitude”.



This first century generation of eyewitness who came to faith because Jesus appeared to them in person before ascension, who saw, touched and heard the risen Jesus, who came to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, The Son of God, are the last ones who come to believe in Jesus because he appeared to them physically. Everyone else after them, all generations of believers after them, would come to believe via a different path. They would come to believe based on “hearing or reading” the testimony and witness of these first believers, and by seeing the evidence of Jesus in their lives. They would come to believe based on the convincing and convicting that the written testimony in the Word of God brings. And they would come to believe based on God’s spirit drawing them to Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the “Word of Life”. **Rom 10:17**

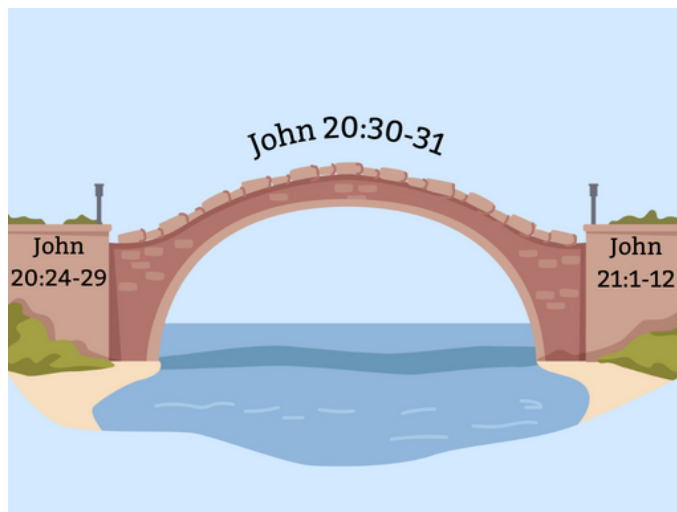
Those that come via that path, Jesus calls them “Blessed”.

The meaning of “Blessed” in the bible is different than our western understanding.



The Jewish understanding of “blessed” is about “flourishing, fruitfulness, and the multiplication of life that happens because God shares his life producing quality with his creation (Bible Project). The first uses of the word “blessed” in Genesis are about “flourishing, fruitfulness, and multiplication”. **Genesis 1:22, 28**

Thus those who come to believe “that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing in him, they will have life by the power of his name”, those who come to believe that without physically seeing Jesus are “blessed”. They flourish and multiply because they have God’s life in them, and God’s “life producing abilities” in them. They are “Blessed”. That’s you, in Christ you have God life producing qualities in you. Let’s see how Jesus shows them what “blessed” will look in the next account.



Next chapter.. **Ch 21:1** You know, at the Thurs afternoon bible study they pass out chocolate to help people stay focused...that's when I started deceiving myself thinking people stayed awake because I was interesting. It was all about the chocolate!

Alright, **Ch 21:1** Take a deep breath. "Later" doesn't tell us how long, but it's at least a couple days later because we know that's how long it takes to walk back to Galilee where this account takes place. The text says "Jesus appeared again". This is Jesus' "third" appearance to the group of disciples in the gospel of John.

And the location is significant. Galilee is where Jesus first met these disciples, and some of them he met here on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Full circle. With all they experienced in the past three years, then what they experienced in the past two weeks of their lives, can they even look at their old lives with the same eyes? This account sets up a contrast between who they were, and who they are now in Christ.

Verse two and three tell us who was present and what they did. **V2-3**. First comment, if you count the number of disciples, there were "seven" present. Patterns of "threes" and "sevens" occurs very regularly in John's gospel, and throughout the bible, especially the book of "Revelation".



This boat was discovered relatively near the location of our story today, preserved in mud during, an extremely low water season. It is dated to the first century. The 1st century mosaic found nearby in Magdala in the background informs us what this boat would have looked like. Historians state that this boat seats twelve plus a helmsman, and is made with twelve different types of wood. Does that all sound a bit too "fantastical"? You decide.

Also note in **v3** the other disciples were willing to join Peter, follow Peter, indicating they were probably all in the same place emotionally and spiritually ... "what do we do now"? When all ails fail, go fishing! Right?

Of significance, they fished all night, and caught "nothing". I've had a few boring trips of getting "skunked" fishing in my life and it is discouraging. But... "A bad day fishing is better than a good day....." yeah I'm not saying.

So they caught "nothing" all night. This is the point where the contrast between their old life and new life happens. Jesus appears on the scene and gives instructions. **V4-5** In the Greek Jesus asks them "Have you any meat?" Which the disciples understood the question to be about fish. The cultural historic accuracy is amazing here as the word Jesus used for "meat" is specific to meat you eat with bread, like fish at breakfast, which we see later in **v9**. Jesus of course new the answer to his question, it was Jesus after all, master over creation, who moved all the fish away from their nets throughout the night.

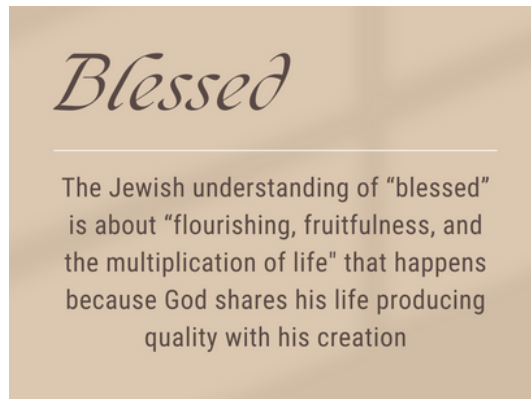
The context of this account in chapter 21 and them catching "nothing" is a link to a previous story in **Luke 5:4-11** where Jesus was making a similar point.

Hrm... “old life - new life”. So Jesus gives them instructions that are same as before in Luke 5, **v6**

That of course prompted a reaction by John who all the sudden “connected all the dots” that were spinning in his head”, and he said to Peter **v7**. John, just like in the empty tomb scene where he is “first to believe”, here John is “first to recognize Jesus”. Peter though, upon hearing John say “It is the Lord” is “first to action”. John is a little faster on the draw when it comes to believing. Peter is slower in the draw regarding belief, but faster when it comes to action. How many of you “Peters out there need a “John” in your life? And how many of you “Johns” out there need a Peter in your life? Pray for that! It’s a good model.

So “action Peter” kicks into gear. **v7-9** Some geographical context here. The see of galilee is 700 feet below sea level, Jerusalem is 2500 feet elevation. That’s a 3200 feet difference in elevation. So Peter being stripped down to work nets all night makes sense. The week before in Jerusalem Peter was warming himself by a fire at Caiaphas house.

It seems that the “fish and bread” that Jesus made for breakfast is a link to the story of the feeding of the five thousand where Jesus took five loaves and two fish (which adds to seven btw) and in that story there was a significant multiplication from seven to being able to feed 5000 (**John 6:10b**) Connect that “multiplication” from seven to feeding of the 5000 to the definition of “blessed”.



Hold on to that for a second.

Now with the seven disciples on the sea of Galilee enjoying “breakfast with Jesus” eating “bread and fish”, watch what happens next. **v10-11**

This is a likely testament to Peter’s size and strength as a fisherman. I also wonder though if this is not an “allusion” to or “foreshadowing” of what happens with Peter by the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2 and at the temple in Acts 4. You can look into that.

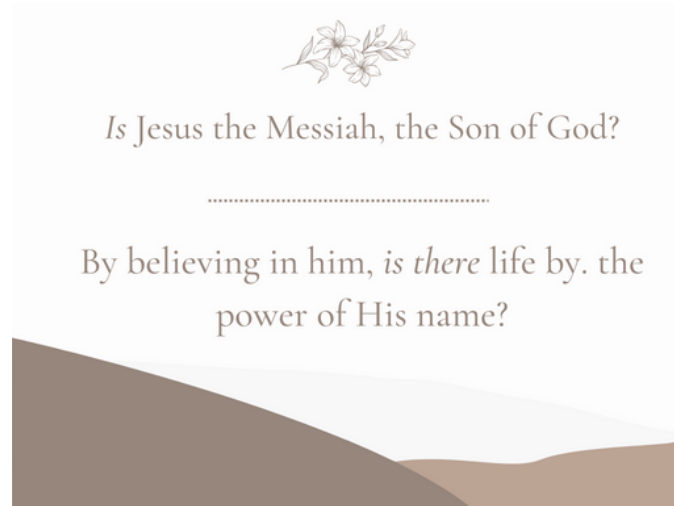
Back in our text **v12-14** Jesus “invites” the disciples to eat “bread and fish”. Another invitation, the previous passage “invitation” was for Thomas to believe. This invitation to the seven is to eat the bread and fish Jesus is offering, which symbolically is Jesus telling them that as they trust him they will “flourish, be fruitful and multiply”.

This is the origin of the “sacramental bread and fish” in some church traditions.

RE: the number “153” so many attempts to spiritualize that, I’ll include a link to some of those in the sermon notes. [John’s detail in his writing throughout the gospel is intentional, but regarding this detail, I think we haven’t learned what questions to ask yet. To venture a guess I would suggest, merely suggest, based on context, that it is somehow a linked to “Pentecost”.]

Now to finish our passage, Does being “blessed” meaning “flourish, become fruitful, and multiply” by trusting in Jesus happen? Look at **Acts 2:41**. The context is that Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, preaches to the crowd that gathered outside the upper room at Pentecost, and 3000 “believed and were baptized and added to the church”. That’s a pretty a pretty good day fishing. But then it gets better. **Acts 4:4** There’s the 5000. Same number, same way of counting, same Greek word, and same author as **Luke 9:14** Coincidence? You decide.

“Is Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God?”



And “By believing in him, is there life by the power of His name?” Jesus invites you to believe, and he invites you who do believe already to have the “Life” that he has equipped you to have by his Spirit. His Spirit within gives us spiritual life, eternal life, and it also can give us life that “flourishes, and is fruitful, and multiplies”. That’s a disciple of Jesus. Amen?

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

- **20:24 on “the Twelve”.** The designation “the twelve” is a real number of disciples that Jesus chose as Apostles. However, in written use “the twelve” may also refer to a “level of disciple” verses an actual number of disciples present. Jesus selected twelve to be the twelver apostles, from a much larger group of disciples, and many of this much larger group were there from the beginning (Acts 1:22-23). This verse informs us that when John uses the word “disciples” various times in his gospel it does not automatically mean “the twelve” were present, or that they were only “the twelve” disciples present. In 20:24 we know that “the twelve” is already one less, because of Judas’ death, and we know it is one less than that because Thomas was also not present. Thus it seems that in John 20:24 the “level of disciple” was intended here not the actual number of disciples by John.
- **20:26 What day is “eight days later”?** The phrase “eight days later” may be a cultural reference to the first day after the seven day Feast of Unleavened ended – hence the first day of travel home for pilgrims was the “eighth day.”
- **20:28 “My Lord and My God”.** What Thomas proclaimed echoes what John wrote in **John 1:1** and **John 1:14**
- **20:29 “Blessed”.** Run the above definition of “Blessed” thru the bible and see if that doesn’t hold true.. for example the “blessing” receives in Ruth 4:11, the “blessing” Mary receives from Elizabeth in Luke 1:42, the blessing Abraham receives in Gen 15:5, Jesus talking about “abundant life” in John 10:10... all seem to be about “flourishing, vitality, fruitfulness, multiplication”.
- **20:31 What is the ...“Power” of his name” in the NLT?** In the Greek it is actually “life in His name”. Jesus is both the High Priest and the sacrifice- his own life blood. Jesus as High Priest took the payment for our sins, his blood, into the Holy of Holies. God accepted that payment, as evidenced by the resurrection and elevated Jesus to the seat of honor and power at the right hand of the Father. Thus Jesus has the “highest name”. Jesus’ name is our entrance into the presence of God and it is our access to the highest power – Jesus himself.
- **21:1 Is Chapter 21 the prologue?** There is strong support from Dan Wallace, a leading NT scholar and textual critic, (Bible.org), that John’s Gospel was written in 65-66 BC and that Chapter 21 was, in ways, a tribute to Peter. This is well worth reading. <https://bible.org/seriespage/gospel-john-introduction-argument-outline> Specifically D.2. Occasion (and method of composition).
- **21:1 Sea of Galilee or Sea of Tiberias?** Our NLT says “Sea of Galilee”, the Greek says “Sea of Tiberias”. “Tiberias” is the large Roman city Herod built on the shores of Sea of Galilee, just south of Capernaum, named after Emperor Tiberias. John’s use of “Tiberias” suggests that John’s gospel first readers were most likely of Greco-Roman background, or primarily Hellenistic Jews who would have used the name “Tiberias” instead of “Galilee”.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

- **21:4-5** For some reason in my head I hear Jesus asking that with a British accent. “Fellows, have you caught any fish?”
- **21:9** “breakfast with Jesus” could be a song title.. ☺
- **21:11 What does “153” mean?** <https://netbible.org/bible/John+> Scroll down to 21:11 and click on the blue “27” - it will jump you to the footnote.