

The Gospel-Shaped Mission – John 21:1-14

Main Idea: Jesus entrusts His saving mission of advancing His Kingdom to sinful, doubtful, stubborn and at times disobedient people because there are no other kinds of people.

I. The Inability of Man | John 21:1-3

John chapter 21 recounts a last encounter with some of His disciples beside a familiar lake known as the Sea of Tiberias (v.1). **The last chapter in John’s Gospel opens the door to the future. It shows how faith in Christ should be translated into terms of daily activities.** The week of the Lord’s death and resurrection had been a trying and confusing period in the lives of the disciples. They went from having their feet washed by their master to seeing one among the group betray them all. In a matter of hours, the remaining eleven disciples went from dining with their savior to seeing Him arrested, tried, and tortured by the Romans. In two or three hours, they had been reduced from the position of disciples of an honored and popular teacher to that of the hunted partisans of a man charged with blasphemy. After Jesus’ death, the 120 remaining followers of Christ hid themselves in an upper room for fear of the Jews, and it wasn’t until the risen Lord revealed Himself to them that they began to go back to their homes. With these occurrences fresh in their memories, the disciples withdrew to Galilee. It is unsurprising that Peter and the other disciples returned to the lake where they (except for Thomas) had formerly worked and where Jesus had called them to follow Him (Luke 5:1-10). It was on a Galilean hill that Jesus had preached the Sermon on the Mount. It was in towns such as Capernaum, Cana, and Nain that Jesus performed His most notable miracles of healing, deliverance, and raising the dead. On one shore of the Sea of Tiberias (Sea of Galilee), Jesus delivered a man from a legion of demons, sending them into a herd of swine to perish in the waters. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus regathered His disciples in Galilee, reminding them of the Kingdom and Gospel they had learned from Him.

It is not hard to imagine how Peter and his friends ended up on boats in the Sea of Tiberias. When we return to our homes, we tend to walk down the memory lane of our prior activities. Moreover, the disciples probably needed to provide for their material needs. As the leader among the disciples, Simon took the initiative, saying, “I am going out fishing.” Following his lead, those who were with him said, “We will go with you” (v.3). The disciples’ night of fishing describes the inability of man to accomplish things on his own wisdom, skill, and power. We are used to accomplishing things with the same kind of attitude, diligence, and hard work that Peter and the others showed by fishing all night. But **in the realm of the spiritual work of Christ’s Kingdom, the rule is the one that Jesus gave the disciples on the night of His arrest: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).** This is true of service to Christ in general. How confident we often are in our plans to serve God and those around us without even seeking the wisdom that comes from Him. Just as Peter was certain that he knew how to catch fish on the Sea of Tiberias, so are we that we understand what it means to serve Christ and His church. Consequently, many often devote little time to prayer and fail to evaluate what they do in light of God’s Word. It is not surprising that for all the noise and earthly results people achieve, when it comes to actually being used by God in His kingdom, our programs, strategies, and expertise can seem as empty as Peter’s nets, “They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing” (v.3b). A follower of Christ without a clear mission is a lost person. **No one can do spiritual work for God’s Kingdom on their own. The mission of the Gospel begins with man’s understanding of their inability and need for God.** When people realize that Christ is all they have, they begin to understand He is all they need.

To Ponder:

1. What is the mission given to every disciple of Christ the moment they are saved by Him?
2. Are there any areas you are gifted to serve God but haven’t been doing so lately?? If yes, how can you go from not serving Him to actively using the gifts and talents He has given you for His glory?
3. How is Kingdom Work different from corporate work?

II. The Need for God | John 21:4-8

After a useless night of fishing, “Just as the day was breaking” (v.4), the disciples returned to shore, where Jesus stood waiting for them. Not knowing that the person talking to them was Jesus, the disciples still acknowledged that their attempt to catch fish had failed, “Jesus said to them, ‘Children, do you have any fish?’ They answered Him, ‘No’” (v.5). **The disciples’ failure through the night established their inability to give themselves successfully to any other enterprise than serving the Lord.** Not only had they been brought face-to-face with their own inability but also with the ultimate reality of their need for God’s sovereign intervention in their lives. The second lesson Jesus taught the disciples started with Him telling them to “Cast the net on the right side of the boat” (v.6). The disciples were no doubt exhausted and frustrated after their expedition, but there was something authoritative in the voice that allowed for no argument or hesitance, so they obeyed the Jesus’ command. To their astonishment, “they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish” (v.7) they caught. The lesson now is that the secret for the disciples’ success in ministry was to work at Jesus’ command and not based on their own opinions. **Great spiritual harvest can only happen under the directives of Christ Himself through the power of His Word revealed to man by the work of the Holy Spirit.** People can understand all they want about Christ and Scripture, but if they don’t act on it, the mission given to them will not have much impact in the Kingdom.

To Ponder:

1. What areas of your life do you hope God helps you grow spiritually as you serve Him?
2. What is your responsibility in your spiritual growth as a disciple of Christ?

III. The Provision of God | John 21:9-14

Analyzing the situation more carefully, we note that Jesus spoke with them three times. First, He queried them as to the success of their labor according to the flesh, “Do you have any fish?” (v.5). His purpose was not to berate them for failure but to have them admit, “No, we have no fish” (v.6). Second, Jesus then gave them a command: “Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some” (v.6). **The point was not *where* they were to fish but *how*: in accordance with His Word.** Third, once the disciples had brought the net to the shore, Jesus directed them to present their haul at His feet: “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught” (v.10). If all we do as Jesus’ disciples is to seek to serve Him by human inventions, we will have nothing to present to Him. Just as the net was brought to Jesus and the fish counted before Him, so will all the Gospel labor we perform at His command be laid out and accepted by our Lord with approval and delight (Matt.25:23).

The final lesson taught by Jesus in this passage is evidenced by His compassion and care for His own. As the disciples arrived, they saw that Jesus had anticipated their hunger and made provision for their needs, “When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread” (v.9). Ever thoughtful, ever compassionate for His own, the Savior showed His disciples that He cared for their physical as well as their souls. This is a great reminder that Jesus has a supernatural abundance of provision to meet the needs of all who trust in Him. As Paul reminds us in writing to the Philippians, “My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil.4:19). Not only has Jesus provided for them, but He also served them, “Jesus came and took bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish” (v.13). As their host, the risen Lord invited them to sit at His table and enjoy fellowship with Him (Rev.3:20; Luke 14:15-24). **Jesus continues to invite sinners into the blessing of His presence and provision today.** Consider the invitations that He sets before us in Scripture. **The Gospel invites people into a transforming relationship through God the Son.** Those who live in trusting fellowship with Him, serving at His command and by His power, at the end of the age will be with Him in eternal glory, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt.25:34). **God gives His best to people who deserve His worst, and He entrusts His saving mission of advancing His Kingdom to sinful, doubtful, stubborn and at times disobedient people because there are no other kinds of people.**

To Ponder:

1. What does John 21:1-14 teach you regarding God’s provision in your life?
2. What are we able to offer Jesus as His followers?