

Message #65

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John

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MEN WITH A PURPOSE

JOHN 21:1-14

INTRODUCTION

Today is Father's Day. There has probably never been another time in our society's history when there has been a greater need for the promotion and encouragement and honoring of good fathers. A group called the National Fatherhood Initiative says, **"There is a crisis in America. According to the U. S. Census Bureau, 24 million children in America--- one out of three--- live without their biological dad in the home. Consequently there is a 'father factor' in nearly all of the societal issues facing America today. We must realize there is a father absence crisis in America and begin to raise more involved, responsible, and committed fathers."**

It would seem that this "father absence crisis" should be met with the development of responsible and purposeful boys and men. Carl Olson, the editor of Catholic World Report, argues, **"Without an ultimate meaning and an understanding of fundamental values, men feed off their passions, turning to violence, pleasure, and cheap thrills--- at the expense of others and of their own communities. Men without roots turn into looters; men without purpose turn into predators. Men without a true commitment to others, without a lived and experienced knowledge of self-giving love, will struggle to build what is good, virtuous, and worthy. They will dive into the darkness of drugs, lust, power, violence, and even murder."** (Catholic World Report, 11/26/2014)

The men in our passage this morning are seemingly without purpose. They are good men who want to be responsible. But they have not yet taken up the commission that they have been given by their Master. Jesus is patient with them and works with them and communicates lessons to them that they need to grasp, and that we need to grasp today.

We saw last week in our study of #20 that the Apostle John reached a climax in his description of the story of Jesus. He told about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the conviction of the skeptic Thomas that Jesus really was risen from the dead. In vv. 30 & 31 John summarized the purpose of his

Gospel, **“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”**

Why did John just not end his biography there? Did he have extra papyrus on the scroll that he needed to fill up? Was he just another long-winded preacher who did not know when to quit? Some commentators have concluded that another writer added #21 at a later time. Some have suggested that John himself added it later on. There is no textual evidence to suggest this. I suspect that John felt that he needed to tie up a couple of loose ends. I suspect that he wanted to convey an important lesson about the proper execution of the Great Commission, that mandate that Jesus gave to His followers to spread the good news of the gospel.

I.

In vv. 1-3 of #21, which is on p. 907 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we find **MEN WITHOUT PURPOSE EXPERIENCE FRUSTRATION.** (PROJECTOR ON--- I. MEN WITHOUT PURPOSE...) According to v. 1, **“After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way.”**

We saw last week that the risen Christ revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene and several other women at the tomb just outside the walls of Jerusalem on that Easter Sunday morning. Later in the day He appeared to two disciples who were walking to Emmaus. On that Sunday evening Jesus appeared to a gathering of ten of the apostles and other additional disciples. Thomas was not present on that occasion. He had a hard time believing the story that Jesus had experienced a bodily resurrection. But one week later Thomas was present when Jesus appeared again, leading to the skeptic’s declaration that Jesus was Lord and God.

In Acts #1 v. 3 we are told that Jesus appeared to His disciples after the resurrection over the course of forty days. Jesus appeared to Thomas and the other disciples on day eight. They were told to meet Him again in Galilee. So this story happened sometime during that following 32 day period.

The place of gathering is the Sea of Galilee. John is the only Gospel writer who calls it the Sea of Tiberias. At the time of his writing that was probably the name that was most often used for this body of water. It was named after the city of that name which grew in the first century to become the largest city on the

lake. It is still the largest city on the Sea of Galilee. The city was named after the emperor Tiberius, who was the ruler of Rome in the first part of the first century.

We read in v. 2: **“Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together.”** The Apostle John was one of the two sons of Zebedee. We have seen in his Gospel that he avoids direct mention of his own name.

Seven of the eleven remaining apostles are mentioned here. The curiosity that we would have would be the location and status of the other four. Capernaum had become the home base for Jesus. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, all had fishing businesses based in Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. My guess is that the other four disciples were nearby. Perhaps all seven of the disciples identified here had fishing backgrounds. Maybe these seven were hanging around by the docks. Maybe the other four were hanging around with Matthew by his old tax office, which was also in Capernaum. We don't know. We can only speculate.

Verse 3: **“Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will go with you.’ They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.”** The other Gospel writers indicate that the apostles were instructed to go to Galilee after the resurrection. Matthew #28 v. 16 (MATTHEW 28:16) has this interesting note: **“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.”**

The disciples were instructed by angels after the resurrection to go to Galilee to meet with Jesus. In Matthew 26 v. 2, before the resurrection, Jesus told them that he would go before them to Galilee. Here in Matthew 28:16 we find that Jesus told them to go to a particular mountain. Our story seems to imply that they have not yet seen Jesus in Galilee after the resurrection. So why are they hanging around the lake and not the mountain?

We don't know the full story. But it certainly seems here that the apostles are just hanging around at this point with not a lot of purpose in their lives. They have received their commission from Jesus to spread the good news about Him. We don't sense that they have planned any meetings in Capernaum. We also don't sense that they have received empowerment from the Holy Spirit. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Peter takes the initiative in this situation. He goes back to what he knows--- fishing. These other guys may also have all been fishermen. So they willingly follow Peter's lead. Probably they all jump into Peter's boat, which he has used in previous years.

(GALILEE FISHING BOAT) Back in 1986 there was a drought in Galilee. The water level of the Sea of Galilee dropped to the lowest level it had been in many years. The remains of this boat were found in the mud. Archaeologists date it to the first century AD, about the time of Jesus. (GALILEE BOAT 2) It would have looked something like this when it was originally built. It was about 26 feet long and was probably the kind of boat that fishermen used in this era. It could well have seated seven fishermen who were using nets to catch fish.

(TABGHA) There is a long tradition that the best place to catch fish in this part of the Sea of Galilee is near the outlet of warm springs that empty into the sea, which is really a fresh water lake. It is known as Tabgha and it is just to the west of Capernaum. There is a church near the lake here, and it is a popular tourist stop.

(PROJECTOR OFF) John notes that it is at night when these disciples go fishing. He makes several references to key incidents that happen at night. John may be suggesting that these incidents are associated with spiritual darkness. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night with questions that suggest that he is in the dark spiritually. John notes that when Judas went off to betray Jesus, it was night. The arrest and trial of Jesus happened at night. Now it is night when these guys go fishing

John also points out that they catch nothing--- not even one fish. Fishing was the specialty of these guys. Most, if not all, of them had grown up on the lake. They knew the best fishing holes. They knew the best techniques, but they came up with nothing. This is perhaps an illustration of a principle that Jesus described a few days earlier in the Upper Room. In #15 v. 5 Jesus declared, **"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."**

Perhaps this fishing story is an indication that the disciples are not yet abiding in Jesus. They have received their commission. Whether Jesus expected them to begin preaching by now is not exactly clear. It seems that they had not yet received empowerment from the Holy Spirit. So at this point they are encountering frustration, even in what they know best--- fishing.

Such is the condition of so many men in our culture. We have all kinds of options for what we can do with our time and our energy and our money. We are made for a life of significance. Yet so many men fail to discover significance and purpose in life. The greatest purpose in life involves a relationship with the God who is really there. (AUGUSTINE QUOTATION) The early church leader Augustine declared in one of his written confessions to God, **“Our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”** (*Confessions*, #15) Without that discovery of a divine purpose, we men too often encounter frustration.

II.

In vv. 4-8 we find that MEN WITH A DIVINE PURPOSE LEARN DEPENDENCE UPON JESUS. (II. MEN WITH A DIVINE PURPOSE...) Verse 4 tells us, **“Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore, yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.”** It was still somewhat dark. We find out later that the boat was a little over 100 yards offshore. So it is understandable that the disciples did not immediately recognize Jesus. But there is this pattern in Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances that He is not always immediately recognizable.

Verse 5: **“Jesus said to them, ‘Children, do you have any fish?’ They answered him, ‘No.’”** The term for “children” here might more accurately be translated into our vernacular as “boys,” or “guys.” Jesus knows the answer to His own question. He is simply bringing attention to their plight. In the Gospels, these disciples never catch any fish without His help.

According to v. 6, **“He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.”** What sense would it make to toss the net on the other side of the boat? That would not involve much of a change in distance. And why would they listen to this unknown character on the beach?

Having been raised by a father who was an avid fisherman, I am aware of the susceptibility of fishermen to suggestions about how to do things a little differently when no one is catching fish--- try a new lure, use a different live bait, toss your line in a slightly different direction, drill another hole in the ice just a short distance away. After fishing all night, these guys were tired and frustrated. Maybe this guy on shore saw some ripples on the water suggesting that there might be fish on the other side of the boat. It was quickly apparent that this advice produced a great result.

Verse 7 tells us, **“That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw**

himself into the sea.” The other disciple here is John. We saw a similar pattern of the interaction between these two in #20. At the tomb John was the first to realize that Jesus was risen from the dead. Peter was the first one to rush into the tomb to find the linen cloths that had recently encased the body of Jesus. Here John is the first to realize that the man on shore is Jesus. Peter jumps into the water to go see Him. Why he puts on his outer garment before swimming is unclear.

Verse 8: **“The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.”** Were these guys bugged by the fact that Peter left them with the hard work while he went off to see Jesus? Hard to know. They may simply have been delighted to be bringing in such a big catch of fish.

The point of this big catch from the perspective of Jesus was to teach them about their need for dependence upon Jesus. It is John 15:5 (JOHN 15:5) again. **“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”** Even in their area of skill and expertise these fishermen and Jesus followers must learn about their need for dependence upon Him.

This experience also would have brought to their minds an earlier encounter with Jesus. Some of these same men were present. (LUKE 5:1-11, PAGE 860 IN BLACK ESV BIBLES) I would like for us to check out this account. Because it is a bit long, I did not put the words on the screen. So if you want to follow along, you will need to turn to Luke #5 vv. 1-11. The Gospel writer Luke says, **“On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret-- another name for the Sea of Galilee, 2 and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ 5 And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.’ 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.’ 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”**

This earlier miraculous provision of fish was intended by Jesus to picture the catch of men these disciples were eventually to harvest. Jesus wants them to catch men. But they will be dependent upon Jesus to do that. In John 21 the disciples may be in that same boat and maybe even at the same fishing hole. In #20 they were commissioned by Jesus to spread the gospel. This miraculous provision of fish is a reminder of that mission and their need for dependence upon Jesus. In Luke #5 Jesus was in the boat with them. Now He is on shore. Soon He will be heaven. The mission remains the same. Dependence upon Jesus is crucial. Power will be coming from the Holy Spirit. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The mission of the marines of the First Battalion Fifth Regiment in 2003 was to capture and gain control of the center of Baghdad. I explained last Sunday that the day when they did that was the most difficult day that most of these young men had ever experienced. I drew the comparison to the experience that the disciples had in trying to process on the first Easter Sunday morning what they had just experienced in seeing their Master be crucified. Navy chaplain Carey Cash helped one of the young men understand the gospel and come to a saving faith in Jesus. He was baptized the next day, Palm Sunday, in the palace of Saddam Hussein.

There were many good things happening spiritually in the lives of the men of this regiment. Several of them were already Christians. A number of them had been baptized before undertaking this mission. Several more were baptized after the mission was accomplished. There was an intense firefight on the day on which they attacked Baghdad. Amazingly only one of them was killed in this battle. When they compared notes after the mission was accomplished, there were amazing stories. There were stories about how rocket propelled grenades headed for their column suddenly veered off course. In one case an RPG entered one window of the vehicle and went out the other window without exploding. An Iraqi gunman pointing his rifle at a couple of the GIs suddenly dropped it and ran the other way.

Major Steve Armes reported that in the worst part of the fight, he looked up and saw an overpass lined end to end with armored vehicles. They formed a shield that protected the column from some of the incoming fire that was coming down from rooftops and balconies as they proceeded toward the center of the city. It struck him as odd at the time that he did not see the distinctive markings on these vehicles that marked them as part his battalion's unit. When things calmed down a few days later, he retraced their route to take a look at that overpass. He could find no overpass. There was no overpass. Yet he knew what his men saw and experienced. (Carey Cash, *A Table in the Presence*, p. 210) The Christians of that unit learned an important lesson about the need for dependence upon Jesus.

The primary mission in view in our passage is the spread of the gospel. That is the mission of all of us Christians as well. Along the way we have other missions. Today we men are reminded of the mission

with which we have been entrusted to be godly fathers. Even if we don't have kids of our own, we men are responsible to be role models and spiritual fathers to young people around us. That is a difficult job in the culture in which we live.

Children in our day are exposed to strange and evil messages. We have to be dependent upon Jesus to help them deal with the challenges they face. They are being told that they can pick their own gender. They have to figure out how to deal with cell phones and social media. They live in a world that says that sex outside of marriage is normal and acceptable. In our area they have to figure out how to respond to gambling and sports betting temptations. Then there are the age-old challenges of figuring out what it means to be a young man or a young woman. Men with a divine purpose learn dependence upon Jesus.

III.

In vv. 9-14 we find that MEN WITH A DIVINE PURPOSE EXPERIENCE FRUIT AND FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. MEN WITH A DIVINE PURPOSE...) In vv. 9 & 10 in our passage we are told, **“When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’”**

In John's Gospel the last time that Peter saw a charcoal fire he was warming himself with servants on the grounds of the home of the high priest Caiaphas as Jesus was being examined. When a servant girl accused him of being one of Jesus' disciples, he denied it. He said that he did not know the man.

It is perhaps also worth noting that the first of the seven signs recorded in John's Gospel happened upon the occasion of a wedding supper. Now his biography of Jesus is ending at a breakfast hosted by Jesus. Jesus provides the nourishment that is needed on both occasions. Here He is providing fish for fishermen. He is seeking to teach these guys that even with things that they are naturally good at, they need to trust Jesus for the fruit of their labors. The primary mission will be catching people.

Verse 11: **“So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them And although there were so many, the net was not torn.”** Peter was a strong guy. In the history of the church there have been many attempts to read some kind of spiritual meaning into this number 153. There is no indication in the text that we are expected to derive some kind of spiritual meaning from 153. It was just typical for fishermen to count up their catch. Normally they would have to divide it up among the fishermen who were part of the effort.

The author John is also stressing the point that the fruit of their catch is the result of the work of Jesus. In their mission to catch men, they will also need to depend upon Jesus to gain this kind of fruit for their labors.

Verse 12: **“Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ Now none of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’”** Still there seems to be something different about the appearance of Jesus in His resurrection body.

According to v. 13, **“Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish.”** Jesus is still serving. He is acting as the host of this meal.

Our passage concludes with v. 14: **“This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.”** John is counting Jesus’ appearances before the group of these disciples. In his Gospel, Jesus appeared to them on Easter Sunday evening. A week later He appeared again when Thomas was with them. Now he is appearing to them on the beach at the Sea of Galilee.

Meals in the Ancient Near East had rich symbolic meaning. They symbolized genuine fellowship and acceptance. The host was bound by custom to protect those who were gathered in his presence. Jesus is serving as host. He has promised that He will be with His followers, even when He is gone.

Men with a divine purpose will be confident that Jesus is with them. A couple of years later, John wrote the Book of Revelation. It was a description of a vision that he received from Jesus. In #1 he saw Jesus walking among the seven churches of the Roman province of Asia. He saw that Jesus was present with them.

In the message which Jesus had John send to the church at Laodicea, He said that the Christians there had become lukewarm. They needed a closer fellowship with Jesus. In v. 20 of #3 Jesus uttered words (REVELATION 3:20) that have application to us today as well as to those Christians of the first century. He said, **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”** Jesus desires our fellowship. He offers all of us an opportunity to experience it. In practical terms, fellowshiping with Him means things like reading the Bible, talking to Him in prayer, going to church, witnessing to others about Jesus, and hanging out with other Christians. Men with a divine purpose experience fellowship with Jesus. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Men with a divine purpose also experience spiritual fruit. Jesus was especially talking about the fruit of our witness for Jesus. But there are other kinds of fruit that living with a divine purpose will produce. There will be kids whose lives get straightened out. In a culture in decline, in a culture filled with broken families, godly fathers and godly men make a difference. We need good models of fatherhood and manhood.

Bradford Wilcox is the Director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia. He says that his research shows that **“evangelicals register the highest levels of [family support] of any major religious group in the United States...”** He also adds, **“Journalists such as Steve and Cokie Roberts and Christian feminists such as James and Phyllis Alsdurf have argued that patriarchal religion leads to domestic violence. My findings directly contradict their claims. Compared to the average American family man, evangelical Protestant men who are married with children and attend church regularly spend more time with their children and their spouses. They also are more affectionate with their children and their spouses. They also have the lowest rates of domestic violence of any group in the United States.”** (*Christianity Today*, August 2004)

In a declining culture men with a divine purpose will stand out. They will depend upon Jesus, and they will experience fruit and fellowship with Him.