

The Last Breakfast 4-8-07

John 21

We were planning to do a part of the Journey to Jerusalem again this year for this Easter service, but I had that uncomfortable feeling that said the Lord has something else in mind. Shortly after that, I heard a wonderful Easter message by Joseph Stowell. After hearing it I was fairly certain that was what the Lord really wanted, and then He confirmed it in other ways. So, this morning, I want to share a message from John 21, and give thanks to Joseph Stowell for some of the inspiration, but mostly to the Lord for His faithfulness to keep tapping on my shoulder until I get what He is saying.

If you ask a group of first graders how many of them are artists, you'll see every hand in the room wave vigorously in the air. Move up to second grade and ask the same question and you'll find only about half the children put their hand up. Jump up to a sixth grade class and ask again and you will find a hesitant hand or two raised cautiously to about the shoulder. What happened to all those enthusiastic artists? They just knew the ability was in them waiting to be directed and encouraged. As they grew older, they began to compare their work with others. After a few botched attempts and critical comments, they became convinced they could never develop the skill needed to be an artist. I wonder how many in the Christian realm have started out with the enthusiasm of those first graders and wound up discouraged and thoroughly convinced that they could never really be an instrument of God to any real effective capacity.

John 21 is one of my favorite passages (yes, I have many favorites) because of all the beautiful details that include our human tendencies and how Jesus deals with them. Jesus had told the disciples to wait for Him in Galilee. (Matthew 28:10) In verse 3, Peter told six of the disciples that he is going out for a night of fishing. ³ "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. John 21:3 (NIV) It is important for us to get a sense of what is at stake here. Jesus had given the mission of proclaiming the truth of what He taught and did to His disciples. (John 15:27) They just graduated from a three-year course in the life and teaching of Jesus, and now they are supposed to pass it on to the world. But is this what they really want to do?

Even after seeing the resurrected Lord, they still had the traditional mindset of the Messiah setting up an earthly kingdom. Jesus had explained to them how the Law and the Prophets were all about Him. (Luke 24:27) He had explained the need for the cross and what it meant for mankind, (Luke 17:25) but they just can't seem to get a physical kingdom out of their head. As Jesus was about to ascend, the disciples asked, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6 (NIV) You see, they couldn't help but think, "What's in it for me? Don't I get a position on the new cabinet?" It's a very Jewish thing.

Commented [notes1]: 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."
Matt 28:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.
John 15:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.
Luke 24:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.
Luke 17:25 (NIV)

Remember when they were leaving the captivity of Egypt, delivered miraculously by the powerful hand of God? It was only a few days into the journey when they said, "WE had it better in Egypt." (Exodus 16:3) Forget the miracles, Forget that giant column cloud that is leading us! I liked it better back there!" In other words, "I don't care what God wants of me! I liked Egypt better than this wilderness journey!" You know 'twas God that chose the Jew because they're so like me and you. And a hush fell over the congregation.

Commented [notes5]: 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Ex 16:3 (NIV)

If Peter drew half the disciples back into the fishing business, what would have happened to the message? Would you and I be saved today? Surely, God would have raised up others, as He did when He raised up Paul to take Judas' place (1Corinthians 15:8-9), but that wasn't on God's agenda. God had sovereignly chosen these men. (Mark 3:14) So Jesus had to show up again to get them back on track. The way He did it is truly thrilling to me, because it says so much to each of us when we are headed off mission.

Commented [notes6]: 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. 9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 1 Cor 15:8-9 (NIV)

I want you to notice that they fished all night and caught nothing. (1Corinthians 3:7) When you go off mission, don't expect it to be like you imagine. I'm sure Peter had fond memories of big catches and bringing them in to the market early in the morning and going home for a nap with a pocket full of coins. Even more likely, he may have been thinking that if they were going to go out as missionaries, they would have to raise the funds first, and he knew how to do that. How disappointing then to have cast those heavy nets all night only to drag up weeds. And when we go off mission, more than likely we will find the big catch we dreamed about ends up as a bunch of stringy weeds.

Commented [notes7]: 14 He appointed twelve--designating them apostles --that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach Mark 3:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 1 Cor 3:7 (NIV)

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. ⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. John 21:4-5 (NIV) Not an uncommon site on those shores. Sound carries across the water on a still morning. It would have been easy to not recognize someone and yet make out their words. The text says they were about 100 yards from shore. (John 21:8) They may have thought He was a fish merchant, hoping to buy and resell their catch. Sometimes the fish were salted and dried and taken to Jerusalem. But then they heard a familiar refrain.

Commented [notes9]: 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. John 21:8 (NIV)

^{6a} He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." John 21:6a (NIV) When we were in Israel, standing on the very spot where this story took place, we looked out and saw a boil of fish not far from the shore. It's what every fisherman hopes to see. It means the fish are in a feeding frenzy near the surface, churning up the water. That is when you are sure to catch some. I don't think Jesus saw a boil of fish. There were seven men in that boat watching desperately for that sight. When they looked to the other side and saw nothing, they had to recall the time that it had happened before.

Commented [notes10]: 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. Luke 5:4-6 (NIV)

Three years earlier, on what I believe was that very spot, Jesus had told them to let down their nets after a fruitless night of fishing. (Luke 5:4-6) Peter had complained and expressed his doubt, but when he obeyed, there were so many fish that they had to call another boat over. They kept filling the boats until they both were in

danger of taking on water. Peter dropped to his knees and asked Jesus to please leave him because Peter recognized himself to be a sinner in the presence of One who could command creation. (Luke 5:8) Jesus didn't condemn him, or even add His agreement with Peter's assessment of himself, but instead, graciously called Peter to come and follow him in catching men. (Luke 5:10)

Commented [notes11]: 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Luke 5:8 (NIV)

You'll notice throughout every Gospel account that Jesus is into people. He left no monuments, purchased no property, claimed no worldly titles, nor challenged the governments of man. He poured His life into people, these disciples, the woman at the well, tax collectors, and what the religious people referred to as "sinners". He said His mission was to serve, to seek and save the lost. (Luke 19:10) When Jesus calls us, He calls us to turn our focus from self to the needs of others.

Commented [notes12]: 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." Luke 5:10 (NIV)

Three years later, they must have flashed back to that day when Jesus first called them to turn away from self to follow Him and catch men. But as they lowered the net, the boat started to lean; their fingers suddenly reacted, grabbing the net with white knuckles. The shock of the catch must have distracted them for a moment from what was really happening, but John knew. ^{7a} Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" John 21:7a (NIV) He knew only one person that could do that, his Lord. Only the Lord could keep the fish out of the net all night and then call them into it.

Commented [notes13]: 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10 (NIV)

As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. John 21:7b (NIV) Impetuous Peter threw his cloak on and dove in to swim to shore. I think I may have done the same had I been there. He had already had a one on one with Jesus. (1Corinthians 15:5) We don't have a record of that conversation, but we do of this one.

Commented [notes14]: 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 1 Cor 15:5 (NIV)

The disciples followed Peter in, dragging the net filled with fish. You know they were fishermen because they counted the fish, all 153 of them. You know they were fishermen because John mentioned that they were LARGE fish. They also noticed that the nets didn't break. In the first big catch, they mentioned the nets were breaking. (Luke 5:6) When they got to shore, they saw a charcoal fire with bread and fish. You've heard of the Last Supper. This was the Last Breakfast. Where did Jesus get those fish on the coals? I imagine He called them right to the shore. Jesus was concerned about their hunger, but I think there is a bigger lesson here. When we are on mission, Jesus will provide our needs. We don't have to go off mission to provide for our selves. We can count on God. We may not have all we want, but we'll have all we need.

Commented [notes15]: 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. Luke 5:6 (NIV)

Charcoal (*anthrakia*) is only mentioned one other place in the gospels. It was when Peter stood by it in courtyard of Caiaphas to warm himself and denied Jesus three times. (John 18:18) The smell of the charcoal must have brought him back to that dreadful moment. After they had eaten, Jesus gave Peter a chance to affirm his love for Him three times.

Commented [notes16]: 18 And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. John 18:18 (KJV)

Jesus asked Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

I don't think Jesus was asking if Peter loved him more than the other disciples. Jesus had rebuked them for comparing themselves and wanting to be superior to the others. (Luke 9:46-48) He can't be starting a "who loves me most" competition. He had to be referring to the fish. Do you love me more than these fish, the security they bring, the thrill of the catch? And Peter said, "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Jesus asked, "Do you agape me more than the fish?" Agape is God's kind of love, a love that is a choice, a love that doesn't demand anything in return.

You see, Jesus wasn't fulfilling their idea of a Savior. They weren't getting what they wanted out of it. This had all turned out differently than they imagined. Is that what happened in your life too? Jesus is asking if Peter's love goes beyond selfish demands to an unconditional choice. Peter responded, "You know I *phileo* you." "You know I love you like a brother." It wasn't so much a choice as it was their time together had bound them like brothers, was the sense of Peter's reply. You are stuck with your brothers. Peter knew he couldn't just walk away and go back to his old life. And Jesus responded, "Feed my lambs."

Jesus had just fed them physically. He had shown He cared about their needs. But what about the spiritually starving ones that had just come to know Jesus and were wondering what the crucifixion meant? (Acts 18:24-26) There were thousands who had placed their faith in Jesus but did not understand the crucifixion. They were lambs wondering around spiritually hungrier than those fishermen after a night of hard work. You do realize that there are millions that have a respect for Jesus and His life but don't understand the crucifixion, don't you? They are lambs that need to be fed spiritually. They are waiting for someone to invite them to a spiritual breakfast. Do you see Jesus directing Peter and us away from focusing on our own desires and preferences to the needs of people? (Matthew 22:39)

The second time Jesus asked the same question and Peter responded in the same way. This time Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." Finally Jesus asked if Peter (*phileo*) loved Him like a brother. Peter answered, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." I don't think the focus is so much on the word used for love, though at whatever stage our love is, the question is still, do we love Jesus more than things? If we love Him, we will focus on people. We'll care for lambs and feed the sheep.

This was not a new teaching from Jesus. Before His death He told the disciples that if anyone loved Him, they would obey His teaching. (John 14:23) What did He teach? Love God with your all and love your neighbor as yourself. (Mark 12:30) What was His command? "A new command I give you, love each other as I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34) The "as I have" should catch our attention. He loved us to the point of laying down His life for us. Three denials from Peter were given three opportunities to confess his love, along with three reminders from Jesus that it is all about caring for people. Doesn't He do the same with us? (Ephesians 6:9) How many times have you denied Him in some way, and yet, He gives you the opportunity to confess your love and serve others.

Commented [notes17]: 46 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest.
47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him.
48 Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all--he is the greatest."
Luke 9:46-48 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.
25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.
26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.
Acts 18:24-26 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'
Matt 22:39 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."
John 14:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'
Mark 12:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."
John 13:34 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.
Eph 6:9 (NIV)

We get off mission every time we focus on what we want and what we are comfortable with, as we neglect the focus on people. We forget that there are so many that don't understand what the crucifixion is all about, lambs that need to be fed, sheep that need to be cared for. (1Peter 5:1-2) Like those first graders, we once knew that God had called us for something special. We knew we could be God's instrument to a needy world. The Bible calls it our first love. (Revelation 2:4) You remember. For most of us, it was when we first asked Jesus to forgive us and make us His. We were sure He wanted to use us to touch other lives. We knew He had a special plan for us. But little by little we drifted back to fishing. A discouraging remark here, a rejection there, someone failed to live up to the example you thought they were, and before long, the zeal with which you wanted to follow Jesus became a distant memory.

Commented [notes24]: To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 1 Peter 5:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Rev 2:4 (NIV)

Jesus has a way of coming back to us and giving us those de'ja vu moments. He tells us to let down our net on the other side of the boat and a memory is stirred. The smell of the charcoal and suddenly we are there again. For every time we denied Him, He gives us a chance to confess our love and reminds us the mission is about others.

At the end of the conversation, Jesus warned Peter that he would die as a martyr. Peter wouldn't settle for fishing. It wasn't going to be a self-satisfying life that lay ahead. Then He recalled Peter to his first love. "Follow me," Jesus said. There were those words again on the same beach where he heard them the first time. (Matthew 4:19) It was as if the past was gone and they were transported back to the first time Jesus said those same words. Peter switched the subject to John. I think he was just overloaded and wanted a break from the intensity of what was happening, but Jesus didn't let up. "You must follow me." Why is He so insistent? In our hearts, we know the answer. It is so easy to walk away and catch nothing.

Commented [notes26]: 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." Matt 4:19 (NIV)

Have you gone off mission? Have you lost the zeal of your first love, the thrill of believing God has a plan for your life? Has life become all about you and not people? It is so easy to get discouraged and distracted by the flashing lures that the world drags in front of us, but the problem isn't the lures. It is that we haven't let our hearts be satisfied with Jesus. Maybe it began with a lack of fellowship, or sometimes it is because those we fellowship with aren't the example they should be. But then, neither are we. Little by little we allow the old desires to return and settle for going fishing in one way or another. We justify it as part of the mission, but deep inside we know we are just fishing for satisfaction in something else.

I'd like to think that as Jesus comes to each one of us the door of our heart is flung wide open and we welcome the recall to active duty. (Revelation 3:20) We fling our hand into the air and say with the zeal of a first grader, "I am a servant of Jesus Christ." No wonder Jesus said you have to be like children to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:4) Or is the door of your heart closed this morning with a sign hung on it, "Gone fishing." He stands at the door and knocks. Will you invite Him in and hear Him say, "Follow me. You must follow me!"

Commented [notes27]: 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Rev 3:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matt 18:4 (NIV)