

Expository Thoughts On John - JOHN 21:1-14

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. Now this is how he did so. Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael (who was from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of his were together. Simon Peter told them, "I am going fishing." "We will go with you," they replied. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

When it was already very early morning, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, "Children, you don't have any fish, do you?" They replied, "No." He told them, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they threw the net, and were not able to pull it in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" So Simon Peter, when he heard that it was the Lord, tucked in his outer garment (for he had nothing on underneath it), and plunged into the sea. Meanwhile the other disciples came with the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from land, only about a hundred yards.

When they got out on the beach, they saw a charcoal fire ready with a fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you have just now caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three, but although there were so many, the net was not torn. "Come, have breakfast," Jesus said. But none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection, described in these verses, is a deeply interesting portion of the Gospel history. The circumstances attending it have always been regarded as highly allegorical and figurative, in every age of the Church. It may, however, be justly doubted whether commentators and interpreters have not gone too far in this direction. It is quite possible to spiritualize and filter away the narratives of the Gospels, until we completely lose sight of the plain meaning of words. In the present case we shall find it wise to confine ourselves to the great, simple lessons, which the passage undoubtedly contains.

We should observe, for one thing, in these verses, the poverty of the first disciples of Christ. We find them working with their own hands, in order to supply their temporal needs, and working at one of the humblest of callings--the calling of a fisherman. Silver and gold they had none, lands and revenues they had none,

and therefore they were not ashamed to return to the business to which they had, most of them, been trained. Striking is the fact, that some of the seven here named were fishing, when our Lord first called them to be Apostles, and again fishing, when He appeared to them almost the last time. We need not doubt that to the minds of Peter, James, and John, the coincidence would come home with peculiar power.

The poverty of the Apostles goes far to prove the divine origin of Christianity. These very men who toiled all night in a boat, dragging about a cold wet net, and taking nothing--these very men who found it necessary to work hard in order that they might eat--these very men were some of the first founders of the mighty Church of Christ, which has now overspread one-third of the globe. These were they who went forth from an obscure corner of the earth, and turned the world upside down. These were the unlearned and ignorant men, who boldly confronted the subtle systems of ancient philosophy, and silenced its advocates by the preaching of the cross. These were the men who at Ephesus, and Athens, and Rome, emptied the heathen temples of their worshipers, and turned away multitudes to a new and better faith. He that can explain these facts, except by admitting that Christianity came down from God, must be a strangely incredulous man. Reason and common sense lead us to only one conclusion in the matter. Nothing can account for the rise and progress of Christianity but the direct interposition of God.

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, the different characters of different disciples of Christ. Once more, on this deeply interesting occasion, we see Peter and John side by side in the same boat, and once more, as at the sepulcher, we see these two good men behaving in different ways. When Jesus stood on the shore, in the dim twilight of the morning, John was the first to perceive who it was, and to say, "It is the Lord;" but Peter was the first to spring into the water, and to struggle to get close to his Master. In a word, John was the first to see; but Peter was the first to act. John\

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