



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. John

Chapter 21

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Introduction

- As St. John concluded the previous chapter by stating his aim in writing his Gospel, some have assumed that this chapter had been added at a later time
- However, chapter 21 is quoted by many early Church Fathers and it is included in the commentary on the Gospel of John by the early-mid 3rd century Biblical scholar and theologian Origen without any question of its authenticity
- No copy of this Gospel has ever been found without the addition of chapter 21



Introduction

Chapter Outline

- The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14
- Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19
- His Words About John 21:20-23
- Concluding Words By St John 21:24-25

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- *1After these things*, He means all the events mentioned before; the resurrection of Christ from the dead, his appearance to Mary Magdalene, and twice to His disciples; once when Thomas was absent, and at another time when he was present, etc.
- *to the disciples*, Seven are only mentioned, as together, when He appeared to them
- *the Sea of Tiberias*, Called also the Sea of Galilee, being situated in Galilee
- Only John's Gospel mentions the lake called the Sea of Tiberias

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, built a new administrative capital on the southwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, about 7-8 years before Jesus began His ministry
- Herod Antipas dedicated his new city in honor of the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar calling the city Tiberias
- Herod Antipas not only named his new city for the emperor but also renamed the lake in the emperor's honor
- Since the lake was only renamed several years before Jesus' ministry began it is normal that the other Gospels refer to it by the older Aramaic and Hebrew names

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- This older designation, some scholars believe helps to identify the date when the Synoptic Gospels were written
- These scholars place the date of the Synoptic Gospels to within a decade of Jesus' resurrection
- In John's case, writing 30 years after Jesus' Ascension to a mostly Greek-Roman Christian church in Asia Minor, it is reasonable that he would use the Roman name for the lake
- The Lord made Himself visible to these seven disciples, among them was Nathaniel whom John had not mentioned after the Lord's meeting with him in chapter one

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- Some believe he is the same as Bartholomew, one of the twelve disciples
- As for the two disciples whose names are not given, these could be Philip from Bethesda and Andrew from Capernaum
- *I am going fishing*, Some scholars interpret this action by Peter and the others as an indication that these men were abandoning the path they had taken 3 years earlier and were returning to their old way of life, apparently unaware of what Jesus' commission meant when He spoke to them in the Upper Room in 20:21

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- Others think that perhaps they went fishing because they had been waiting a long time for Jesus
- Partly that Peter might not live an idle life, and partly to obtain a livelihood, which was now to be sought
- He suggests these resolutions to the rest of the disciples and they agreed with him
- The future was unclear, and they could not comprehend the nature of their new life after being physically separated from the Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- They had received the mission of preaching to the whole world, but they had not yet experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit that would guide them in their new task
- Or perhaps this episode is meant to show that they still had a choice: to take up their old way of life or to choose to follow Jesus
- They went out in the evening of the day, and fished all night, that being a proper time for such business, and the most likely to succeed in
- His Presence again causing success after failure might bring home to them the lesson that apart from Him they could do nothing, John 15:5

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- “Why did Peter return to do what he had left? We know he was a fisherman while Matthew was a tax collector. Peter resumed his work after he had become a believer, whereas Matthew never returned to be a tax collector. That is because obtaining a livelihood through fishing is one thing, while tax collecting is another. There are many jobs that cannot be partially or wholly done without committing sins or mistakes. It is forbidden to resume such jobs after becoming believers as they are associated with sin.” Pope Gregory the Great

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- *Jesus stood on the shore*, The words express the sudden appearance without any indication of His coming
- The disciples did not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ
- This could have been to the lack of light and visibility as it was too early in the morning, or because they were too far away, or because He had taken a different form as in Mark 16: 12 on the road to Emmaus
- St. John Chrysostom says that the Lord did not reveal Himself to them in order to engage them in conversation
- *any food*, It means anything eaten with bread, and was used as equivalent to the fish

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- It seems that, according to their experience as fisherman, they had to throw their nets to the left of their boat when they fished in that part of the lake
- However, without knowing who was the One giving them advice, they humbly obeyed and struggled patiently, without raising any objection or assertion of self confidence gained by their long practice in the fishing industry
- *the multitude of fish*, It suggests the surprising results that would accompany their labor when they should under the Lord's own command and inspiration, become true fishers of men

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- The characteristics of the two Apostles are again most carefully yet clearly given in verse 7
- St. John is the first to apprehend; St. Peter the first to act
- Some scholars point out that it is John who first sees Jesus because, being the more "spiritual" disciple, he is looking with the eyes of faith
- Another possibility is that the much younger man simply had better eyesight than his older companions, or he was at a place where he had a better view of the Savior standing on the shore

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- It was the custom to remove one's outer long garment and to wear only some under-garment when fishing
- Peter dressed before jumping into the water out of modesty and reverence for his Master
- He ties his outer garment so that he will have the freedom to swim
- His actions express someone who was overcome with joy over a reunion he had been awaiting with great anticipation

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- They were about 100 English yards
- The shortness of the distance explains how they were able to drag the net
- The net was not broken, though filled
- They did not further attempt to lift it; they pulled it to the shore
- It is significant that this time the net does not break!
- It is Jesus Christ who is in charge of the catch!
- The Fathers of the Church saw Peter's boat as symbolic of the universal Church

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- The Church may be tossed on stormy seas but it is Jesus' will that she should prevail and bring in an abundant harvest of souls
- Most scholars recognize that the fish are symbolic of the souls harvested by the Church for Christ
- Just as the great catch of fish was miraculous, so was the sudden provision of fish placed over the coals and the bread which had been prepared by the Lord Jesus Christ
- The scene had a sense of 'celebration' to it

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- “He prepared grilled fish on coals in order to be a tangible proof to the doubtful disciples, who did not dare to come close to Him as they thought they were seeing a spirit and not a body.” St. Jerome
- “Although the Lord asked them if they had any food, and as though He was hungry, yet He offered them food that did not require or depend on weak human efforts. The Lord has truly invited us to work for His account, but the pleasing fruit and heavenly food, which pleases the Father, are the work of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and the act of His Holy Spirit.” St. Gregory the Great

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- The new supply was added to the meal already provided
- The Lord permitted His disciples to join His meal, and to rejoice with Him at the success of their labor
- He made them feel that they shared in the effort, but it was all His work
- The circumstance is highly parabolic of the common joy which would fill His heart and theirs when the fullness of the Gentiles should be brought in, and all Israel be saved
- “The Lord commanded the disciples to bring of the fish that they had caught in order to clarify that the miracle before them was not a mere imagination.” St. Jerome

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- Various efforts have been made from early times to give some symbolic meaning to the number *one hundred and fifty-three*
- St. Cyril of Alexandria regards the 3 as representative of the Trinity, the 100 + 50 representing, in different proportions, the success of the apostolic ministry among Gentiles and Jews
- St. Augustine observes that 10 is the number of the Law, and 7 the number of the Spirit, $10 + 7 = 17$; and the numbers from $1 + 2 + 3 + 17 = 153$; so that the number represents all who are brought to God under every dispensation of grace

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- St. Gregory the Great reaches the value 17 in the same fashion as Augustine, but, he says, it is only by faith in the Trinity that either Jew or Gentile ever reaches the fullness of salvation; 17 is therefore multiplied by 3 = 3×17 , which produces 51, which is the number of true rest; multiplied again by 3, which completes the glory of the perfected, it is 153
- St. Jerome notes that Greek Zoologists had determined that there were 153 different kinds of fish in the Sea of Galilee, which he felt were symbolic of all the different tribes of the earth being brought back into God's Covenant family

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- *the net was not broken*, The differences between this and the earlier miracle, Luke 5:1-11 are too striking to be unintentional
- The first represents the visible Church, containing good and bad; the net is cast without special direction as to which side; the net was broken and many escaped
- But this one represents God's elect, foreknown by Him; all are good; the net is brought to shore, and none are lost
- The two Miracles represent the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant
- The one gathers together an untold multitude of both good and bad in the troubled waters of this world

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- Its net is torn with schisms
- The other gathers a definite number of elect taking them not on the stormy ocean but on the eternal shore of peace
- Jesus calls them to the meal
- He becomes once more their Host and their Minister
- They approach Him in reverent silence
- Knowing it is the Lord, they yet desire the assurance in His own words, and still they do not dare to ask, “Who are You?”
- The Greek word translated “ask” means to “prove” “inquire”

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- They are afraid to approach, so He comes to them
- He distributed both bread and fish to His disciples
- So, in a spiritual sense, He provides plentifully for His people; gives them to eat of the hidden manna, and tree of life, and leads to fountains of living waters; encourages them to eat and drink freely, what is of His own preparing, and at His own expense provided for them
- *the third time Jesus showed Himself*, St. John is giving his own witness

The Lord's Appearance by Lake Tiberias 21:1-14



- He passes over, therefore, the appearances to Mary Magdalene and others, and counting only those “to the disciples”; to the Ten on the first Resurrection day, and to the Eleven and gives this appearance as the third
- The Bible records:
 - 1- To Mary Magdalene, Mark 16:9; John 20:15-16
 - 2- To the women who went to the tomb, Matthew 28:9
 - 3- To two of the disciples on their way to Emmaus, Luke 24:13
 - 4- To Peter only, Luke 24:34
 - 5- To the ten disciples when Thomas was absent, John.20:19

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- 6- To the eleven disciples on the eighth day when Thomas believed, John 21:26
- 7- To seven disciples, John 21:2
- 8- To His disciples on a certain mountain in Galilee, Matthew 28:16
- 9- To more than 500 brothers at one time, 1 Corinthians 15:6
- 10- James saw Him, 1 Corinthians 15:7
- 11- To all His disciples on the day of His ascension into the heavens, Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:3-12; 1 Corinthians 15:7

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- *Simon Peter*, The contrast of the name by which the Evangelist denotes, and with that by which the Lord addresses Peter is significant because it comes in a context containing several significant verbal contrasts
- Our Lord's words would seem to address him as one who had fallen from the steadfastness of the Rock-man, and had been true rather to his natural than to his apostolic name
- *more than these*, Some explain the word "these" by saying that Jesus is pointing to the boat with the catch of fish and as if Jesus is asking Peter if he loves Him more than Peter's old way of life

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- Are you willing to give up all for Me?”
- However, the obvious reference is to Peter’s own comparison of himself with others in the confidence of love which he thought could never fail
- Some scholars believe that the Lord intended to ask if Peter still believed that his love for the Lord was greater than that of the others
- Peter had made this declaration when he had said that he would follow to Lord even if he had to die for Him and even if others would deny Him
- Peter is being asked by Jesus to declare his ultimate loyalty

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- The question was asked three times and has been generally understood to have special force in the restoration of him who had denied his Lord three times, and now declares his love for Him three times
- It may not be strange to trace significance, even in the external circumstances under which the question was asked
- By the side of the lake after casting his net into the sea had Peter first been called to be a fisher of men, Matthew 4:19
- The lake, the very spot on the shore, the nets, the boat, would bring back to his mind in all their fulness the thoughts of the day which had been the turning-point of his life

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- By the side of the “fire of coals” (John 18:18, the only other place where the word occurs) he had denied his Lord
- As the eye rests upon the “fire of coals” before him, and he is conscious of the presence of the Lord, who knows all things, burning thoughts of penitence and shame may have come to his mind, and these may have been the true preparation for the words which follow
- In order to regain Peter to the ministry of saving souls, the Lord Jesus Christ asked him, “*Do you love Me?*”
- This reveals that the Lord does not entrust a person with this ministry unless his heart is filled with love for Him

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- *Feed My lambs*, It is the true indication of loving God
- Someone who does not love the Lord cannot minister to souls and cannot be concerned for their salvation since he does not realize their value to Him
- The Lord has died for these souls and offered His precious Blood to redeem them
- The Lord used the word 'agape' to express sublime love and its honor, Peter, however, is embarrassed to use the same term and humbly used the word 'philo' which is used to speak about the love for friends

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- Some scholars interpret the lambs as the spiritually immature and the sheep as the spiritually mature members of the congregation
- The first time the Lord asked the question so that Peter would compare himself with his brothers, and find out if his love for the Master was greater than theirs
- Now that Simon Peter had learned to be humble, and did not answer with pride and confidence in his own power; the Lord no longer compared him with his brothers when He posed the question for a second and third time

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- On Peter's repeating his protestation in the same words, our Lord rises higher in the manifestation of His restoring grace
- *“Tend My sheep.”*, It has been observed that the word here is thoughtfully changed, from one signifying simply to feed, to one signifying to tend as a shepherd
- (Peter’s faith had been shaken due to the suffering of the Lord, and now he shed bitter tears as he heard the Lord’s tender words, *“Tend My sheep”*.) St. Jerome

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- St. Peter was saddened as the third question reminded him of his denial for three times
- But to him who had uttered a threefold denial, opportunity is given of a threefold confession, although St. Peter at first resented the repeated question
- He was grieved because doubt was indicated, and he knew he had given cause for doubt
- He may have thought that Jesus seems to distrust the reality of his personal love
- His reply is therefore more earnest than before

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- He appeals with great warmth and earnestness to Him, as the omniscient God, and the searcher of all hearts, who knows all persons and things, and the secret thoughts, dispositions, and affections of men's minds
- *Feed My sheep*, There are some that take upon them this work, and pretend to do it, who do not love Christ
- But then they are such who feed themselves, and not the flock; and who feed the world's goats, and not Christ's lambs and sheep, and in time of danger leave the flock

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- Only the true lovers of Christ faithfully perform this service, and abide in it by preaching the pure Gospel of Christ and by directing all souls to Christ
- *Most assuredly, I say to you,* A way of speaking often used by Christ to raise the attention to and affirm what is spoken
- Literarily these words of verse 18 refer to the crucifixion of Peter
- Tradition states that he was crucified
- Tertullian says, “Then is Peter girded by another when he is bound to the cross”

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- “For since Peter had continually said, "I will lay down my life for You", and, "Though I should die with You, yet will I not deny You" Matthew 26:35: He has given him back his desire.” St. John Chrysostom
- In his youth, he was free to gird himself whenever he wanted, and to go wherever he wished
- Because of this freedom, he submitted himself into the hands of his Savior so that He would gird him and carry him according to His divine will

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- “This is where he ended: by dying with complete love for the sake of the One to whom he had boldly promised he would die for Him. He did so when he was strengthened by the Lord’s resurrection...the object of his promise which he vowed when he was still immature. The ultimate order of things was that the Lord should die first, and then Peter would die as a result of preaching the Lord Jesus Christ.” St. Augustine
- *signifying by what death he would glorify God*, These are the words of the evangelist, explaining the meaning of what Christ just said

Jesus Restores Peter 21:15-19



- The first time Jesus called Peter to *"follow Me"* was after the huge catch of fish on the Sea of Galilee three years earlier
- Now He uses the same words again but this time there is a double meaning to the command *"Follow Me"*
- Peter will indeed "follow" Jesus and spread the Gospel message across the known world, but he will also follow Jesus, not only in imitation of His life but also His death



His Words About John 21:20-23

- We must suppose that St. Peter had left with our Lord, and that St. John seeing this had followed at a distance
- *But Lord, what about this man*, Some scholars suppose it to be dictated by a certain jealousy or curiosity, a consciousness of contrast between his own impulsiveness and the beloved disciple's quietness and self-assurance
- John had practically leaned and put his head on the Lord's chest, and he had not proclaimed never to deny the Lord
- Moreover, John had followed the Lord to the Cross, and the relationship between him and the Lord had not been hurt in the way it had with Peter



His Words About John 21:20-23

- Clearly the inquiry was not altogether pleasing to the Lord, and led Him once more to reiterate the original command, *If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me*”
- *You follow Me*, and cease to inquire after another's duty
- These two disciples, Peter and John, have been compared and contrasted in chapters 20 and 21
- However, they have formed a bond through this experience that will link them throughout Acts 3:1,3,11, 4:13, 8:14, as they preached the Good News



His Words About John 21:20-23

- In this passage Jesus had decreed the fate of both men: one to suffer and die and the other to suffer and live
- The information that the "beloved disciple" lived a long time also helps to identify John as the "beloved disciple"
- All John's brother disciples were martyred for their Savior
- Only John died a natural death
- St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, a disciple of John's disciple Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna, reports that John lived into the reign of the Emperor Domitian who died in 96 AD



Concluding Words By St John

21:24-25

- The disciple of Jesus who wrote this fourth Gospel testifies that he is an eyewitness to the events he has recorded
- He is pledging his honor that what he has recorded is true
- No book could record, no words could tell, what that life was, or what things Jesus did
- The disciples saw and believed, and wrote these things that we may believe, and in believing may have life in His name
- The whole redeeming life, word, and work of the Word made flesh had a quality of infinity about it
- The entire evangelic narrative has only touched the fringe of this vast manifestation, a few hours or days of the incomparable life



Discussion

- Who was with Peter?
- Why did they go fishing?
- Jesus engineered this conversation with Peter. What does it tell us about Jesus?
- Why is it critical that we confess the truth about ourselves? How does doing so, or not doing so, impact our relationship with Jesus and with other people?



Discussion

- Who did the lambs/sheep stand for?
- Why does Jesus ask Peter three times “Do you love me?” Is there any other way Peter could truly have been restored?
- What does a pattern of comparing our circumstances against others say about our affections? Why is comparison a sure fire way to get off track in our relationship with God?