



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 21: 1-14

Fall 2023

"Breakfast With Jesus"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are coming to the end of our studies in the Fourth Gospel and we are in chapter 21. We're going to look at the first fourteen verses,

21 After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested *Himself* in this way. ² Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

⁴ But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ So Jesus said to them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered Him, "No." ⁶ And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find *a catch*." So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. ⁷ Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped *for work*), and threw himself into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net *full* of fish.

⁹ So when they got out on the land, they saw a charcoal fire *already* laid and fish placed on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have now caught." ¹¹ Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

¹² Jesus said to them, "Come *and* have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are You?" knowing that it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave *it* to them, and the fish likewise. ¹⁴ This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

John 21: 1-14

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, it's good to be with Your people. It's good to be here on a Sunday morning, and it's good to be in a place where those who come want to hear the Bible taught, the Word of God preached. This is what we need. This is what nourishes our souls. And so we thank You, LORD, for this opportunity to do that this morning, in this great chapter as we come to the end of the Gospel of John, this text which teaches us many things. It verifies the great theme of this book: That Your Son is the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, and He is the source of all the great blessings that we have. He provides for us. We can lean on Him, we can trust Him, we can follow Him confidently—that He leads us well and He will provide for all our needs.

He gave them breakfast; He fed them. He gave them fellowship; that's what they needed. LORD, that's what we need, and so teach us the lessons of this passage, build us up in the faith, strengthen our commitment to You, our understanding of You. Give us the confidence to draw close to the throne of grace and seek Your help in time of need. We have the great mediator between You and us, and it's Your Son—and He's

accomplished everything for us. So LORD, bless us with an understanding of the things we've read and what we will consider; build us up in the faith.

Bless us also, LORD, in the material things of life. And we pray for our health, that You'd bless us in that. We live in a world that's full of invisible dangers, and they're things we can't anticipate and are things that are there—and You know, and we don't. And so we look to You to bless us, bless our health and our safety.

LORD, bless us in all the various ways we need blessing. You know our needs, and they're different with each and every one of us. You know the health issues. You know the struggles we have, for we all have struggles with one kind of sin or another. Strengthen us and bless us—and that's what we need in this hour. Build us up in the faith, that we might serve You faithfully and bring glory to Christ; glory to the Father, glory to the Son, and glory to the Spirit. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Hebrews 11 is known as 'the faith chapter', in which the lives of Old Testament saints are recounted for their faith, from Able to Moses, and others until the author runs out of time to list them all. He describes them as, "so great a cloud of witnesses," (Heb 12:1), men and women, "of whom the world was not worthy", (Heb 11:38), but who inspire us to be faithful, inspire us to persevere in the faith. But that cloud didn't evaporate there; it continued through the New Testament, and really, across the ages of church history.

Two saints of more modern times, who are notable for their faith, are George Müller and Hudson Taylor. Müller had a ministry with orphans in England, and Taylor started the China Inland Mission. They had something in common: Both of them had a faith ministry. They didn't ask people for money. They didn't have pledge drives or beg people to give. They looked to the LORD. They prayed, and the LORD faithfully provided. Both men have been witnesses to many and an encouragement.

But if we did not have them, we still have an abundance of Scripture teaching and demonstrating that the Lord is faithful to His people, and provides for their needs.

John 21 begins with that lesson, when Jesus provided breakfast for His disciples on the shore of Galilee. The chapter 21 is a kind of epilogue, or postscript to the book.

Chapter 20 gave a suitable conclusion to the Fourth Gospel with the Lord's resurrection appearance to His disciples, (vs19); the confession of Thomas, "My Lord and my God!", (vs28); and then the purpose of the book stated: That, 'these things were written that you may believe that Christ is the Son of God, and in Him have life in His name.' (vs31).

But chapter 21 makes a contribution to the book by tying up some loose ends: such as with the restoration and recommission of Peter. Peter had denied the Lord three times and John recounts for us how that was resolved when, in the presence of the Lord and His friends, Peter confirmed three times his love for Christ.

Then following his restoration, the Lord prophesied Peter's death, which served as a reminder to them, and to all of us, the cost of discipleship. So it is a chapter in which some important matters are resolved and important matters are set forth.

The incident that begins the chapter, the miraculous catch of 153 fish and the breakfast the Lord served His disciples, shows the personal interest that He takes in the church in providing for us. Not a few commentators have seen in this a picture of the present dispensation, this present age: 'The disciples out on the sea represent us in this world, and Christ on the shore represent Him in heaven. As He directed the disciples from the land, so too He directs us from heaven as we travel through the troubled waters of this world.'

It's an incident to reassure them, and us, that the Lord will provide for us in all areas of life. In ways unknown to us, in ways that are unexpected to us, He will provide. We simply need to trust Him and obey. Life's not complicated. It may be difficult—but it's not complicated. Trust the Lord. He's reliable, and obey Him.

Now the disciples had been in Galilee for some time after the Lord's resurrection. He had told them to go there and wait for Him. (Mat 28:10). There were seven of them

together, there at the sea. John names them in verse 2; "Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus,..." (which means *the twin*), "...and Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, and the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples..."

Now, this is the first time Nathaniel is mentioned since chapter 1—and it's also the first place in this Gospel that the expression, "*sons of Zebedee*" appears, (it's very common in the other Gospels, the *synoptic Gospels*); they were James and John, John being "the beloved disciple", as he's called throughout this Fourth Gospel. They were all there together in obedience to the Lord's instruction. But some time has passed; and Jesus had not appeared. So Peter said, "I am going fishing", (vs3), and the others joined him.

A lot has been said about that. Some have suggested Peter and the others had lost their focus on the ministry and they were reverting back to their old occupation. Maybe—that's possible. Or it might be something more ordinary, something economic. They were fishermen by trade and they may have thought, 'Well, while waiting for the Lord, they could use their time better than being idle.' And so they went on the sea.

But their fishing expedition was not profitable. They fished all night. Then, early in the morning, a lone figure stood on the shore. They didn't recognize Him. But He called out to them, "Children," He said, "you do not have any fish, do you?" And they answered, "No." (vs5). He knew that of course, (the Stranger knows all things), but He asked the question in order to fix their attention on their failure and to prepare them for what came next.

Verse 6, "And He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right hand side of the boat, and you will find a *catch*.' So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish." When that happened, John recognized the Lord. [He was the first to grasp the resurrection when he saw the empty tomb. That same insight happened when the net filled with fish.] When it did he, "...said to Peter, "It is the Lord." (vs7). And Peter responded by throwing himself into the sea and swimming ashore to meet Him.

John was the first to perceive, Peter was the first to act, which was true of his character. We sometimes think of Peter as a kind of impetuous person—impulsive. And that may be true here, but it may not be altogether impulsive. Peter had stripped down for work, possibly to his loincloth. And before going into the sea, he put his outer garment on, (which normally we would expect just the opposite, that a person would take off the garment in order to swim back to shore), but Peter put it on, deliberately put it on, probably out of forethought, probably out of respect for the Lord. 'He wasn't completely impulsive in this', is what I'm saying; he gave some thought to his appearance before Christ.

But mainly what he showed here is his eagerness to see Him. He wanted to be with the Lord—and he was so eager that he left the others behind in the boat. They were more reserved, more cautious; they took care of this great catch of fish.

John wrote in verse 8 that they were, "about 100 yards away", and they dragged this, "net *full* of fish" to the shore. So they come to the shore with the fish but they don't bring them onto the shore; that will happen later.

But when they reached the land they found that Jesus had already prepared breakfast for them: "...they saw a charcoal fire *already* laid and fish placed on it, and bread." (vs9). F. F. Bruce wrote that, "The risen Lord had breakfast ready for His tired disciples." And it would have reminded them, probably, of the meal that He had prepared earlier on the other side of the sea of Galilee when He fed the multitude with loaves and fishes. The same word for *fish* that's used in chapter 6 where that miracle occurred, is used here. So perhaps the idea is that He miraculously produced the fish and bread that was on the fire just as He had done that for the multitude earlier.

Well, He certainly miraculously provided them with the fish that they brought ashore. Verse 11 gives the number that they caught; "Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn."

One hundred and fifty-three is an odd number; and I guess the fact that it's an odd number, intrigued interpreters, particularly ancient interpreters—the early interpreters who tried to find some 'secret meaning' in the number itself.

Well, there's nothing mystical about this number, nothing hidden about the number. The meaning is in the event itself. And that meaning is very clear, I think. It's that they caught a lot of fish. Why 153?—because that's the number they caught. The fish were large. But it happened at the Lord's command—and that's what's significant. The disciples had fished all night without success. But when the Lord appeared and spoke, and told them to cast their net on the starboard side, then they had great success. When they obeyed...that's what happened. And that's the lesson. (Or that's one of the lessons; I think there are at least three lessons here that we can glean.)

But this is the lesson that the Lord gave His disciples, and the lesson that is here for us as His modern day disciples. —What's true for them is true for us. And the first is the obvious lesson: That Jesus is, who John said that He is, at the end of chapter 20, (vs31), and throughout this Gospel: "...that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. ..."; and we must look to Him for success. He rules the sea as well as the land. Wherever the disciples were called to go, the Lord would be with them in His infinite wisdom and power to guide them, to protect them, and to provide for them. —And that's true of us as well.

The fishing expedition of Peter and the others illustrates our ministry in this world, which Scripture often describes as, 'a restless sea'. You see that, for example, in Isaiah 57, verse 20, that 'The nations are like the sea with the waves churning up the muck and the mire. Well, we're on that sea, as it were, and on that sea we are to be fishers of men.

We see that in a similar incident, a kind of parallel passage, recorded in Luke chapter 5. It was the beginning of the Lord's ministry and He was with the disciples. He was with Peter in his boat and He told Peter to, 'put out to deep waters.' (vs4). Peter protested; he said, "Master, we worked hard all night *and* caught nothing, but I will do as

You say and let down the nets." (vs5). Well, when he did, Luke wrote that they caught such a great "quantity of fish", that, "their nets *began* to break." (vs6). They filled up their boats with fish, so many that the boats "began to sink." (vs7). Peter realized it was a miracle, and he worshipped the Lord. "Depart from me, Lord..." he said, "...for I am a sinful man!" (vs8). Jesus told him, "...from now on you will be catching men." (vs10).

That was the reason for, and the lesson of, the whole event: They had fished all night without Christ. But at His command, and with Him present they caught a super abundance of fish, all to show that He would make them 'fishers of men'.

That is again illustrated here at the end of the Fourth Gospel with an incident that gives both a picture of our mission and the source of our success. We are 'fishers of men'. But we can only do that and have success in our mission as Christ directs and as Christ blesses. That is true of every aspect of the Christian life.

And that is a teaching found all through the Fourth Gospel. Jesus stated it clearly in the upper room, in chapter 15, with the analogy of the vine and the branches. He made the point positively and then negatively. In John 15, verse 5 He stated, "...he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit...". Just as a branch receives life from the vine that it is in and bears fruit, so too we, as we abide in Christ, have fellowship with Him, live in obedience to Him, will bear much spiritual fruit.

Then He added negatively, "...for apart from Me, you can do nothing." (vs5b). Apart from Him all our activities in the flesh are fruitless—our efforts are in vain. We are like those men on the sea, fishing all night, and catching nothing. It's as we look to Christ, the Son of God, seek His guidance, follow His leading that we receive His blessing and are made to be a blessing to others as we walk in His light. And specifically here, that is true of winning souls, of effectiveness in giving the Gospel. It does not depend upon us; it depends wholly and completely on the LORD.

Back in chapter 6, after Jesus fed the multitude He said in verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me...". Every one of them that has been given by the Father

to the Son will come to Him. And then in verse 44 He adds, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Coming to Christ, believing in Him is first of all a matter of being drawn by God. And so we must look to Him for the catch. He told His disciples to cast the net on the right hand side of the boat. They obeyed, and their catch was great, because Jesus drew a big school of fish into their net. He is master of the sea, and all the fish that are in it. And He is Lord of this world, and we are to cast the net. We give the Gospel to the world, to those who we come in contact with, and He draws His elect into that '*net*', into the Gospel, to faith in it.

He is master of the sea and all the fish in it—and all of those who occupy planet earth. It does not depend on our eloquence, it does not depend on our energy, (though both of those are good). And I think it's good to work on eloquence if you're a preacher and seek to be very precise and clear. And it's good to have energy and to take care of one's health, and all of that. That's important, but our success in the ministry, ultimately, does not depend on us; it depends on Him. We depend on God's sovereign will, and He makes that known to us *as we obey Him*.

The disciples did, and their net miraculously filled with fish—and He makes the point of saying, 'it did not break.' Earlier, in Luke chapter 5, the, "nets began to break", (vs6), in order to signify how great the amount of fish that the disciples caught. But here the "net did not tear", in order to signify that, 'Just as the net was sufficient for the catch, the Gospel is sufficient for a multitude of people, and sufficient for all eternity.' The grace of God that gathers a multitude in salvation will keep them all—none will be lost.

How many times have we seen that in this Gospel? In chapter 6, the Lord said, "...the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." (vs37b). Emphatically, "I will not cast out." In chapter 10, the Lord spoke of His disciples being in His hand. And His hand is in the Father's hand. And He said, 'No one can snatch them out'. (vs29). There's a double security there. In the hand of Christ, and Christ in the hand of the Father, we are

absolutely secure; John chapter 10, verses 28 and 29. And that's signified here: The net did not tear or break—not one of the 153 fish was lost.

Now that is the first lesson of this event in the third appearance of the Lord's resurrected appearance to His disciples. It pictures the mission of the church, and the source of our success. Our mission is to 'Go out on the waters' of this world, and 'Fish for men', to proclaim the gospel of grace. And the Lord will give success as we look to Him and obey Him. He provides. He provides success in the ministry of the church.

And He provides for our needs, as we go out, as we live in this world, and look to Him. That's the second lesson. When the disciples came ashore, tired and hungry, the Lord was waiting for them with breakfast prepared. He was ahead of them, providing for their needs and serving them—after the resurrection as He had done before the resurrection. He's always ahead of us, to sufficiently meet our material needs as well as our spiritual needs. But here, first of all, this second lesson, our material needs.

Don Carson wrote, "That is a lesson the church must learn again and again: That He is sufficient for every need that you have; your material needs as well as your spiritual." I think that's true. We have to learn that lesson over and over again, because it's a hard test to endure—and to 'pass', as it were. Very often a test of our faith is in the area of those material needs: Will we trust Him to supply them?; Will we trust Him to provide?; Do we really believe that He's sovereign over everything, and that He is faithful to do what He's promised to do?

Early in his Christian life and ministry, George Müller recognized our need to learn that great truth. And that was a major motivation for the kind of ministry that He adopted in establishing orphanages. The plight of orphans was a problem in England. Charles Dickens brought it to the attention of the public with his novel, *Oliver Twist*, in which he described orphans as, "despised by all and pitied by none."

George Müller pitied them. In fact, he saw the problem and sought to help those orphans before Dickens wrote his novel. But he not only pitied the orphan, he pitied the

weak Christian who was common in the church—people who profess faith but didn't seek God's kingdom and trust Him to meet their material needs.

He wrote of various Christian friends who lived more by their wits than by faith and the Spirit. They didn't trust the LORD. They tried to figure things out and accomplish things in their own strength. And so he wanted a ministry that would demonstrate to them, and the world, the reality of the things of God. He wanted something that he could point a brother to as a visible proof that God is living and God is faithful.

That became the inspiration for establishing the orphan house; "Simply by prayer and faith," he wrote in his autobiography, "without asking any individual for the means or the funds." He wrote in a letter, "The primary object of the work of my hands is to lead those who are weak in faith to see that there is reality in dealing with God alone."

And so by prayer alone, he, and those associated with him, petitioned God for the needs of the orphans and the orphanage. And God never failed to provide. And He often provided in amazing ways, amazing answers to prayer—miraculous answers to prayer.

George Müller understood what Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 4, in verse 19, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." 'My God will supply all your needs.' He provided orphans with breakfast every day for decades. He provided for all of their needs, as He did the disciples when He prepared breakfast for them, there on the shore of Galilee.

Now having prepared a meal for them, He then invited them to, 'Come and have breakfast', to dine with Him. It was an invitation to eat and satisfy their physical hunger. But more than that, it was an invitation to sit with Him and have fellowship. That's the third lesson here.

In the orient, fellowship often occurred around a table at a meal. The fellowship that they had in the upper room was the Passover meal. In Revelation chapter 3, in verse 20, Christ is knocking at the door of the church of Laodicea, knocking at the heart

of the believer, as it were, and promising the one who opens that door to allow Him in, that He, "will come in...and dine with him", have fellowship with Him.

That's what the Lord desires of us—and I would say, it is what He *fundamentally* desires of us. There are things we need to do, and things we're called to do—but first and foremost what He wants is your fellowship, and to cultivate that relationship. And there's nothing more important for us than doing that—nothing more important for us than fellowshiping with the Lord. That's what we were made for. That is the essence of eternal life. That's John 17, verse 3, 'Knowing God, knowing Christ, knowing the Triune God.'

And it's illustrated here in the meal that the Lord prepared. He is concerned to feed our stomachs, and He will. But more than that, he desires to feed our souls through fellowship. And that should be our greatest desire. As I said, it's what we were made for, but it is also spiritually practical. It is the way to gaining confidence in Him, strengthening our faith, preparing us to serve Him.

Again, George Müller is an example. In his autobiography he wrote that the LORD taught him something in 1841 that changed his life. He wrote, "The point is this. I saw more clearly than ever that the first, great, and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the LORD. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the LORD, how I might glorify the LORD, but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished. Otherwise," he wrote, "his work would be done in the wrong spirit."

That's what the Lord desires of us, that we would come daily to Him, to find food for our souls by reading His Word, studying it, praying and spending time alone with Him. He is the living Savior. And also by spending time with His people through fellowship with the saints in the meeting of the church, and in other ways. The disciples were on the shore together, having breakfast with Christ. We learn through our association with others. We're a community; we are a body. We're not an atomized

group, just scattered out. We are joined together, and we need each other; 'Iron sharpens iron, so one man another.' (Pro 27:17). This is the way to get joy and satisfaction in the Christian life, through fellowship with the Lord and His people. Napoleon said, "An army marches on its stomach." It has to be well fed to fight well. And we need to be well nourished by our Lord to serve Him well, to serve with joy and from gratitude.

We live in an age of distractions when people fill their time with entertainments and activity—which isn't bad activity; but it's so often less than the best. We all struggle with that. I do. I admit it.

Christ says to us, 'Come and have breakfast.' He invites us to spend time with Him. The Creator of the universe and Savior of the world, God the Son, He invites us to have fellowship with Him. What a privilege!—And what a necessity. He prepared everything for the disciples and invited them. They knew who He was. But as we read on, it seems they were hesitant to accept His invitation. There was a sense of wonderment there, perhaps. And evidently it was hard for the disciples to begin eating.

So John wrote, "Jesus came and took the bread and gave *it* to them, and the fish likewise." (vs13). He served them, just as in the days before the cross, before the resurrection and glory. It was an act of condescension. The resurrected Christ still serves His disciples as when He washed their feet, which reassured them that He would continue to guide them and provide for them as He had before.

He cares for our bodies as well as for our souls. He is the living Savior, with wisdom and power, who fixes things. And we're to trust Him, trust Him for everything, trust Him at every moment. And we'll find amazing answers occur, things we may not have anticipated, things we thought were contrary to the circumstances, as we trust Him.

John rounds out the passage by saying, "This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead." (vs14). Three times is a way of confirming that He is alive. What greater encouragement is there than that? As we serve Him here below, sometimes toiling—know this, He's watching us, always

watching us, and always providing for us. And always inviting us to draw near to Him; to come and dine, to come and have fellowship.

That's the Lord's invitation to the saints who believe in Him. The saint is one who does believe in Him; and that's the invitation that He gives to us, 'Come and dine.'

But to the unconverted, those without faith, those who have not trusted in Him, the invitation is found back in chapter 1, verse 46, "Come and see." That's what Phillip said to Nathaniel when he told him about Jesus. Nathaniel came. And after meeting the Lord he confessed, "You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." (vs49).

He came, he saw, he believed. If you're here without Christ, come and see. Look to Him. Examine His words, examine His deeds, His life. And by God's grace, you will see that He is the Savior, and you need Him. Only He can save. He's the Son of God who died in the place of sinners. He took our death so that we might have His life. And we receive that life and that forgiveness through faith alone in Him. So believe and live.

(Closing prayer) Father, what a blessing and what praise we can give and should give and will give for all eternity, that Your love is unfailing. And out of Your love you purchased our salvation, and cleansed us of all of our sins. We stand before You guiltless and righteous in the righteousness of Christ—fully, completely, and forever accepted by You. Through no work of our own, through Your work altogether, through Your Son, and through the Holy Spirit who brought us to a saving knowledge of Yourself.

We thank You, we praise You. May we live lives of obedient service, not out of a sense of duty, but out of the great love we have for You, motivated by that, and that alone. So LORD, cultivate that relationship within us, give us the gifts of the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, and joy, and peace, and six other great virtues. Bless us, LORD, that we would serve You faithfully. We thank You for Your grace and Your goodness to us.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

(End of Audio)