

John 21 v 1 - 14

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[0 : 00] Chapter 21. Last week we looked at John 20 and of course the week before that was Easter. So we're really thinking about the risen Lord Jesus Christ and about these post-Easter or after Easter appearances of Jesus.

So we're going to pick up from verse 1 of chapter 21. Verse 1 of chapter 21 reading through to verse 14.

Afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. That's the Sea of Galilee. It's one and the same thing. It happened this way. Simon Peter, Thomas Cordydimus, Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, two other disciples were together.

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.

Early in the morning Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them. Friends, haven't you any fish?

[1 : 17] No, they answered. He said, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, it is the Lord. 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.

The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from the shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it and some bread.

Jesus said to them, bring some of the fish you have just caught. Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three.

Even with so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, come and have breakfast. None of the disciples dared ask him, who are you? They knew it was the Lord.

[2 : 23] Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

May the Lord bless and help us to understand and apply his word to our lives this morning. Please open your Bibles to John and chapter 21. John and chapter 21.

And just to remind you that we're in this passage this morning. Now, some years ago, a few years ago, Paul Mallard, who's a pastor of a church in Birmingham, came to speak at a conference I was at.

And during his preaching, he made mention of a Bible, the Bible he was actually reading from and using. And he told us that this Bible smelt of chocolate.

And he explained that it wasn't because it was a novelty Bible for Christian chocoholics, to help them soothe their withdrawal symptoms. But actually, it was because it was his father's Bible.

[3 : 31] And his father was a man who'd only become a Christian when he was well into his 50s. But as soon as he became a Christian, he had this insatiable hunger to read the Bible. He wanted to read the Bible whenever he could and whenever he had opportunity.

And so he took it with him wherever he went. And, of course, he took it with him to work. And he worked in the Bourneville Chocolate Factory in Birmingham. And most of his work was night shift, which really was just basically just being there.

So he had all this time to read. And so he read his Bible over and over and over again through the long hours of the night. And in those hours, of course, because of the pervading atmosphere of chocolate that was there, the pages of his Bible absorbed the very smell of the chocolate.

That chocolate-smelling Bible illustrates a very important truth for us this morning. It's this. You cannot separate God from his world or this world from its gods.

They go together. They are bound together. There is no division between what we might call secular and spiritual. And that's an idea, though, that's very prevalent today, even amongst Christians, but particularly in the world around about us, that there is this spiritual aspect, as it were, of life, which is separate from the secular, the everyday aspects of life.

[4 : 55] There's a strong determination, it seems, in our society to remove what we might call as religion from day-to-day living. It's a view that's put forward very much that a person's faith is something personal to them.

And that personal faith is something that is to be kept within the boundaries of religion. That personal faith should be kept within the home or kept within the church. It has nothing to contribute to society, really, apart from when the church does a few sort of good things, like a soup kitchen or a food bank or that sort of thing.

But apart from that, the church and Christianity and religion has no real place in the workplace, in life in general, in day-to-day affairs. It's interesting to see the response that people have made to the words of David Cameron, who has again spoken of the United Kingdom as a Christian country, a Christian nation.

Letters have been written, a letter signed by over 50 people who are well-known, important people in society, writers and authors and so on, saying how wrong he was to say that and how that was dangerous and problematic.

I don't think he's right anyway in saying it because our country is no way a Christian country. It's a country that's had a huge, hugely influenced and shaped by Christianity over hundreds of years and has a great debt to us, to the Lord God and to Christianity.

[6 : 23] But in our present day and generation, it's only paid a very token lip service from time to time. We're not a Christian country. But the reality is, is that God is in this world.

And the reality is that there is no separation between daily life and Christian life, the spiritual and the secular. And I think especially chapter 21 of John's Gospel proves that point.

It shows the very real presence of the Lord Jesus in everything that's going on in the world today. Now we need to ask a question because this, of course, is the very last chapter of the Gospel of John.

And it's his summing up, it's his bringing together all that he's been teaching, all that he's been telling us about the life of Jesus. Just in those verses earlier, at the end of chapter 20, you'll see he tells us that Jesus did many other miracles in the presence of the disciples, which he's not included in the book.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. So John has been selective, as all the Gospel writers were.

[7 : 35] They were selective, they were very careful in how they accumulated the material, the eyewitness accounts that they put together for us. And John chooses not to include, at the end of his Gospel, what the others include.

The others all include what we might call as the Great Commission, go and preach the Gospel, go and make disciples. And Mark and Luke also include the events concerning the ascension of the Lord Jesus as he bodily returned to heaven after 40 days.

John includes things in his Gospel that we don't find in the other Gospels. That's why it's so good, we've got the four. People sometimes say, why have you got four? And they contradict, they don't contradict one another.

They're four eyewitness accounts. And so they see different things, the same thing. It's a bit like if you were to witness a road crash and the police would come and one person was on the corner of there, one person was in a window there, and so on.

Each person would say something different or add something to the story, but they were still witnessing the same thing. So it is with the Gospels. We've got these four points of view, so we get a fully rounded picture of the life of Christ, one that is faithful and true and trustworthy.

[8 : 47] But John includes things that the others didn't see. He includes Jesus at the well with a Samaritan woman. He includes the wedding at Cana when Jesus turns the water into wine.

He includes this great section of the upper room teaching and discourse that Jesus has on the night before his death with his disciples. He has the inclusion of Thomas, which we looked at last week

and this chapter as well and many other things.

And we're told just at the end of the passage we read, verse 14, that this was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. We've seen that those first two occasions.

One was in verses 19 and following when Thomas wasn't there, the disciples were there. The second one we looked at last week when Thomas was there and Jesus met with them.

So this is the third of his appearance to the disciples as a group together. Here there were seven of them in Galilee by the lake. But if we include Mary's meeting with Jesus at the earlier part of John 20, we really have a picture of how Jesus is with us in every part of life.

[10:00] We have three different situations and into each situation Christ makes himself known. So we have Mary in a very traumatic situation. She's weeping. Woman, why are you crying?

She's heartbroken because Jesus' body is gone and she doesn't know what's happened to him.

And she's had all the emotion of seeing him dying on the cross. She's at a very low ebb.

Jesus is there to minister to her. And so we see again that Jesus is the one who binds the brokenhearted. He's the one who is with us even in the trials and the sorrows of life. That he never forsakes us.

When everybody else may do and we feel alone, he's with us. In those two meetings with the disciples previously, we saw again, especially at the meeting with Thomas, that he has a concern for the individual.

Remember we pointed out that Thomas is really the only person that Jesus is interested in when he comes at second occasion. Thomas is doubts and he deals with them. And he deals with them in such a way that they are resolved.

[11:00] And so that Thomas is able to say, my Lord and my God. He has this great revelation, light bulb moment where he sees and realizes that this Jesus, this man before him is the actual God who created the world, the Lord, who speaks throughout the whole of the Bible.

And he's there in the person before him. And we also saw as well, again, how Jesus is fulfilling a promise he made to his disciples at the end of Matthew 28.

Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. The ever abiding promise of Jesus. That promise in Matthew 18 in verse 20 where two or three of you gather together.

There I am with you in the midst. That's why we come together as we do as Christians. We thought about that a little bit last week. How important it is that we meet together because there Christ has promised to be with us in a special way.

And how Thomas had missed out on the blessing on the first week because he wasn't with God's people. That's why the Bible encourages us, urges us. Hebrews 10. Don't give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.

[12:09] It's blessing to be had when we meet together. It's not for numbers. It's not for the offering. It's not for any of those things that we meet together as we do. It's because Christ commands a blessing upon his people when they meet together.

And so then we come to this third or rather fourth, we might say. Appearance of Jesus in the Gospel of John. And we're now in Galilee at Lake.

It's called the Sea of Tiberias. It had different names like several things in the land at the time. They were named one thing by some people and the locals, a bit like Whitby.

Some people call where we live the railway and some people call it something else. I forgot. You know it. Don't need to shout it out. So people have their different names. So Galilee, Tiberias, it's one and the same thing.

And they're there. And Jesus makes himself known to them. So what's the setting? In what setting does Jesus appear? Is it a religious meeting?

[13:10] Is it a prayer meeting? Are they all gathered together in the upper room as they were? Is it a time of great strain and difficulty and stress or emotion? Are they being persecuted? Well, no.

Really, in one sense, if it wasn't for the fact that Jesus was there, it would be really just an everyday scene of life. Here's some fishermen going fishing. There's nothing special in that, is there?

There's nothing religious in that or spiritual in that. It's just some men going about their business, doing what they always used to do. At least three of these men we know were career fishermen.

And they're just getting on with fishing. That's what they're doing. Getting on with something ordinary. They're getting on with their job. And it's there that Christ meets with them. Now, I hope for

some of you, there will be a little bit, something going on in the back of your heads as you read through that, thinking, this reminds me of another part of the life of Jesus.

This sounds very familiar, this part. Well, it does. It reminds us of Jesus' very first meeting with his disciples, which Luke tells us about in Luke and chapter 5.

[14 : 15] I just want to turn there. Keep your finger in John 21 if you can. But Luke 5, we have Jesus' first meeting with his disciples and the first calling of the disciples. And they are very, very similar.

So then in one sense, we have these sort of bookends of Jesus' first meeting with the disciples and calling them. And in John's account, anyway, the last time that he meets with them. Though, of course, we know that Acts tells us he meets with them again and tells them about his return and so on.

But there's so many similarities. First of all, let's just read from Luke 5 and from verse 3. This is Jesus. He's at the lake.

He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I'll let down the nets. When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

[15 : 21] So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so they were full. So full they began to sink, rather. And Simon Peter saw this.

He fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord. I'm a sinful man. For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. Do you see those similarities? Jesus approaches the disciples. They've been fishing all night and caught nothing, just as they did in John chapter 21. Jesus gives both instructions to cast their nets once more.

And then they catch this huge amount of fish. John tells us the number. They counted them. Again, evidence. This is an eyewitness account. It's not a made-up story. We have so many clear points that point to the fact that people were there and they saw this.

They counted the fish, 153. And then it says they caught all these fish that their eyes are open to see who this Jesus is. Peter, go away from me, Lord.

[16 : 20] He recognizes something about Jesus, that he is somehow holy, somehow good. And he recognizes that there's something special about him. And, of course, there in John 21, when they pulled in the fish, the disciple whom Jesus loved, John, that is, remember, that's his shorthand name for himself, says it's the Lord.

So you've got these wonderful similarities, these wonderful overarching patterns that are going on. One opens the story, one closes the story.

So what are we learning? What do we see here? What are we meant to take hold of here? What is this appearing of Jesus here to his disciples in reminding them what happened before meant to tell them and us today?

Well, as I've already indicated, it tells us very clearly more than anything else that the risen Lord Jesus Christ is present in the daily routine of life.

That being a Christian is somebody who knows the very nearness and presence of Jesus Christ in every part of our day and night. That there is never a time in which he is not there.

[17 : 32] So whether it's at work, whether it's at home, whether it's in school, whether it's in the supermarket, wherever we are, we are in the presence of Jesus. And he is with us as the risen Lord.

Now that's something more than what theologians call the omnipresence of God. The omnipresence of God. And omnipresence means that God is everywhere. In the whole of the universe, you cannot escape God.

In the whole of the world, you cannot escape God. God is there. The psalmist says that in Psalm 139. If I go to the depths of the sea, you're there.

If I go to the ends of the earth, you're there. If I go to the heavens, you're there. I can get away from you. You can't run away from God. You can't get away from God. Jonah tried that, didn't he? Failed dismally as he went out to sea and ran away from God.

You can't get away from God. Don't run from God, dear friends. Even if you are doing so at the moment in your own hearts and lives. Don't keep running away. You can't get away. But there's something more than that here.

[18 : 34] There's something more than just that sense, that theological sense and that reality that God is everywhere. But there is this sense in which he is especially with us as his people. Even in the very mundane, even in the daily aspects of our lives.

In the grind of life. As I said before from Matthew 28, surely I am with you always. That was his encouragement to the disciples as he was ascending and going to the Father.

They had this sense of being bereft. Where is he going? We can't cope without Jesus. We need him. He said, I'm not leaving you as orphans. John 16, I'm not going without. I'm going to be with you always.

And so Peter and the others, here they are at Galilee. They're there because Jesus had told them to go there.

Back in Matthew's account, Jesus tells Mary, tell my disciples, go to Galilee, that I might meet them there. So they'd gone. They'd been obedient and they'd gone to Galilee.

[19 : 35] But when they got there, of course, well, for them, they thought, well, Jesus isn't here. He's not arrived yet, if I can put it that way. So Peter, being pretty much an impatient sort of a guy, thought, well, I'm not going to stand around here all day and twiddling my thumbs.

I'm going to do something useful. Let's go and do some fishing. You know, we might as well, while we're here, get back into the boat again. It's been three years. We're a little bit rusty. But, you know, that was something he obviously loved doing.

So they all said, well, let's go do that. And then they don't realize it. But Jesus approaches them, doesn't he? Early in the morning, verse 4, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn't realize it was Jesus.

How true that is of us as Christians. Jesus is there. We just don't realize it. We just don't see him. We just don't consider him.

We just don't, well, even believe that he's there. But he is. Wherever we are, whatever we're doing, we are always, dear friends, living in the presence of the risen Christ.

[20 : 45] We are always near to him, and he is always near to us. And that is so vital for us to take hold of. We've got to get rid of this notion, which even as Christians we've absorbed, that somehow Jesus is here when we meet in church more than he is with us when we're at home or more than he is with us when we're at work.

Now, I've said, and rightly, because the Bible teaches us there's a special blessing to be had in meeting together. It's one of those things, one of those blessings we might call means of grace.

One of the gifts that God gives us that we might be blessed is meeting together, but it's not exclusively where Jesus is. So when you leave this building, dear friends, as a Christian, when you go to work tomorrow morning, and whatever you're doing, Christ is with you.

And we've got to get that out of, we've got to get that into our heads. We've got to get out of our heads this sense that there's the secular and the spiritual.

We've got to get into our heads the recognition that Jesus is present with us. And that has two effects. First of all, it means, of course, that Jesus sees everything that you and I do. There is a sense of that, just as it is with God, being wherever we are.

[21 : 58] You can't escape. You can't hide from God. You can't sin, as it were, secretly. That's what some of the people in the Psalms sort of said. Well, God doesn't see what we're about. He doesn't see what we're doing.

And God sort of says, well, look, I made the eye and I made the ear. Don't you think I can see and hear everything that's going on? And as Christians, that can be a very helpful restraint for us when there's a temptation to be in a situation we know we shouldn't be in or to enter into a sinful action or word.

Hold on. Christ is with me. He's present. He sees what I really do. I really want him to see me acting in that way. But more than that, and this is where I would stress in a much better way than that, we see that because Christ is with us, he is with us to help us, to enable us, to equip us in the daily routines of life.

And because Christ is with us in his power, we have the assurance, the confidence to believe that in all that we do in life, we can know the help of the Lord.

And it is only with the Lord's very real help that we can do what we need to do. Here are these fishermen. That's their job.

[23 : 12] That's what they spend all their lives doing up until the time they met Jesus. And they're out there and they're fishing all night long. And they catch nada. Nothing.

Not a bite. Not even a slight, you know, tug on the nets. Nothing at all. They failed in one sense. They were doing their daily routine, but they failed.

They weren't going to put any fish on the table, were they? It didn't matter when the board came in. They weren't going to have any fish on the table. Sorry, that was a joke then. Do you remember the song? Who will have the fishy on the little dishy?

Who will have the haddock when the board comes in? I used to watch that. That's how old I am. You should all know about that. So there was no fishy on the little dishy when the board came in, was there?

There was no fish there for them. And they'd been working and toiling and been very hard at work. And it was only when Jesus came to them and instructed them, throw the net on the other side, that they land this huge catch just that they'd done years before.

[24 : 19] You see, and I'm sure that you know exactly what this is like. We can work and we can labor and we can toil in so many different areas and things. And we can feel as if we've accomplished nothing.

We can feel as if we've got empty nets. We work hard. We study. We do our chores. We put real effort and input into the things that we do.

And there are times when we're doing those things and we come away and think, what have I achieved? What actually have I achieved by all this effort? What have I done? What good has come out of all this?

Has it really been worth it? I'm sure for many of you that can be something of the experience, perhaps a teacher in the classroom all these years. What have I achieved by teaching these children?

Have they really grasped? Can be a parent with their children. It can be just in the workplace. What have I, this job that I'm doing, yes, I'm taking on wages. What is it actually doing?

[25 : 17] What is it actually accomplishing? We see here, dear friends, that here, with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the actions and the labors of these disciples was not pointless or empty because the Lord Jesus gave them the fruit of their labors in his time.

I'll put it that way. At his command, as he saw fit. It was only as he gave them the catch that they actually saw that he was with them. And sometimes it can be like that for us.

We fail to recognize Christ is with us until things go right or until something happens. And then we say, oh, Lord, you've been doing that. You've been helping me. But actually he's been doing that all the time and we didn't see it.

We'd lost sight of that. And we've lost sight of our dependence and our need for him to help us in those things. It's not just me who needs the Lord's help in my job.

You do too. And he is there present to give you that help, to strengthen and to sustain you, and to make your work fruitful, useful, not only in the sense that you do your job well, if I can put it that way, and that's important, but also so that there is a sense of accomplishment in your life and purpose in what you're doing, that somehow God is working in it to accomplish his purposes and will.

[26 : 45] But when we go to work, when we go about the jobs and the chores of the day, and we go with that sense of absence of Christ, or we feel that somehow this is nothing to do with us being a Christian, then we will feel ourselves to be, well, what is the point?

We'll feel discouraged and we'll feel downcast. And to go to our job again with a sense, I've got to do this in my strength, I've got to do this with my ability, will again rob us of receiving from the Lord the help, the grace, the strength that he gives.

See, for these disciples, of course, the Lord was teaching them something very important. They were called to be fishers of men. That's what their job was as apostles.

You're going to be fishers of men. They were to take the gospel out to see men and women brought into the kingdom of God, brought into a relationship with God. And if they were to go out and do it in such a way, thinking it's all up to me and it's all up to my strength, and we go with our own power, then they would utterly have failed.

Jesus was teaching them, as they go out to be fishers of men, it's as they go out under his command, and as they go out in the help he gives them, and as they go out with a sense of his presence, that they shall indeed be fruitful.

[28 : 04] It's a lovely line at the very end of Mark's gospel, chapter 16, it says, Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

It's the same at the start of Luke's account of the record of Acts. Luke tells us that I've already written about what Jesus began to do. Acts is about what Jesus continued to do.

It's not the Acts of the apostles in that sense, it's the Acts of Christ at work in his apostles and in his church. The Acts of Jesus. And so they are friends, and as we conclude, as we think about these things, how do I approach the work which Christ has called me to?

How do I approach Monday morning? Not just the church part, not just the things that we do when we're together, perhaps we're involved in children's work, or moms and toddlers, or some other aspect of Christian work, as we may call it, but as I approach work tomorrow morning, as I go into the office, the hospital, the school, the building site, as I go back to the home.

How do I, how do I go? What's my attitude? Is there a sense in which I recognize, firstly, that Christ is with me in his risen power? Do I go there and it says, Jesus, you're here with me this morning?

[29 : 23] That's, that's one of the reasons for myself, personally, why I find it helpful to have my prayer time in the morning. It's, to say, I mean, I know we're different, and sometimes it's not possible, but, but to begin the day with prayer, to begin the day in the presence of the Lord Jesus, is a help to remind us that we're going through the whole of the day with the Lord Jesus.

And so are we praying? Are we consciously looking upon him and relying upon him for the help that we need? For the grace that we need to do this work? Do we go about our work in such a way that we are doing it as unto the Lord?

Lord, Lord, I want this work that I do, even though it seems to be mundane and monotonous and maybe just a little bit boring, I want that I do to do it in such a way that it shows that you are with me. You are with me, at work in me. It's part of our witness, dear friends, as Christians, not just when we speak to people about Christ, and that's important that we do, and are vocal in that sense when we can about the Lord Jesus, but, dear friends, the way that you live and the way that you act speaks powerfully, more powerfully than your words can ever speak, about Christ's risen power in your life. That's what we want, isn't it? Isn't it one of the things, sadly, that people can often accuse Christians of is hypocrisy? You say one thing and you do another. You say you love Christ and you're a Christian, but you're a nasty piece of work.

[30 : 52] You're critical and you moan, and you're complaining, and you're difficult to get on with. How can that bear up together? Christ with us affects how we live.

So finally then, read these verses from 1 Peter. Just listen to these verses, 1 Peter chapter 4. Amen. Each one of you should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering or sharing out God's grace in its various forms.

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things, God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. Well, let's sing together, dear friends, as we bring our time this morning to a close.

Number 617. I serve a risen Savior. He's in the world today. 617.

[31 : 57] We'll stand as we sing. We'll stand as we sing.

We'll stand as we sing.

We'll stand as we sing. We'll stand as we sing.

He has talks with me along this narrow way. He is, he is, salvation to him God.

And ask me how I know he is. He is, tell him my heart.

[33 : 27] And now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout every generation, now and forever and ever. Amen.