Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

This truly is an amazing miracle! Some experienced fishermen, who had caught nothing, despite fishing the whole night, caught 153 fish because someone on the shore told them to try the other side of the boat! And of course, the person on the shore was the risen Lord Jesus.

Well, if you have been here for this sermon series, you will know that I have repeatedly said that John’s Gospel is a record of **seven** **great** **miracle** **signs** that demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And we looked at those seven miracles in ch’s 2-11. So, what about this fishing miracle; this eighth miracle in John’s Gospel? Should I go back and edit all of the sermons that mention seven great miracle signs to say eight?

Well, there is no doubt that this is a miracle, and that it was performed by the Lord Jesus, but this miracle has **an entirely different purpose** than the first seven. The first seven miracles, as the last verse of ch. 20 explains, were recorded to show that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And if the first seven miracles have not convinced the reader to believe in Jesus yet then this eighth one will not either.

No, this miracle is not about convincing unbelievers but about teaching the church. And this is evident from the **audience** for this miracle – the disciples. They now knew that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And when we looked at **20:19-23**, we saw that the disciples were the beginnings of the NT church.

And what Jesus told them then was that He was sending them, as the Father had sent Him, and then He gave them the Holy Spirit. And things got off to a good start as they told Thomas and brought him to church the next Sunday.

But as we come to ch. 21, we are going to see that the church still has a lot to learn about what being the church means. And in many ways, not a lot has changed. The church today also still has a lot to learn about what being the church means.

So this miracle is a teaching miracle *for* the church that is *about* the church.

So our overall theme for this chapter is that **Catching Fish and Feeding Sheep is the Church’s Task**. And it would be *are* the church’s task if these two things were separate activities, but we are going to see that they are really two parts of one activity, which is why I have it as catching fish and feeding sheep *is* the church’s task.

And what we will do is to work our way through the four parts of this chapter today and next Sunday. The four parts are the fishing miracle, the breakfast on the shore, the restoration of Peter, and what Jesus said about how Peter would die and Peter’s follow-up question. But our focus today is the fishing miracle and the breakfast on the shore, and **catching fish as part one of the church’s task**.

1. So let’s begin with the fishing miracle that is described in vv1-8.
   1. **The Sea of Tiberias** is just another name for the Sea of Galilee. It was up in the North of Israel. And you might remember that when Jesus first called Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and the two sons of Zebedee, to follow Him as His disciples, they were also casting nets for fish on the Sea of Galilee. So we are right back where it all started with Jesus and these fishermen. And we will return to that point a bit later on.
   2. But we read in v3 that they spent the night on the boat, fishing, but that as morning approached they had caught nothing. And remember that these were experienced fishermen. I am not a fisherman myself but the serious fishermen that I know know the best spots and the best techniques. But none of their expertise had helped that night and they were fish-less.
   3. And it was just then that someone on shore, who they did not recognize at first, called out to them, “*Children, do you have any fish?*” And they answered, “*No*,” and “*He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some*.’” And they did and they did!
      1. Now, if you are pretty good at something, what is your gut reaction when someone gives you advice about how to do it better? If you are like me, you don’t like to be told how to do it better because you don’t think that it can be done better. Mumble mumble… And I have to say that my impression of fishermen is that they are not typically quick to accept advice about how to fish better. But there doesn’t seem to be that sort of reaction here, does there; the disciples just did as they were told.
      2. And this is probably because of how Jesus expressed Himself. The NIV does not have “*children*”; it has “*friends*.” But that is probably a stretch on the Greek word used here. A better English equivalent is “**lads**.” And ‘lads’ would have suggested an older man or a fellow fishermen. And also, the way that the question was phrased in Greek is also important; it is more of a rhetorical question. So we end up with: “Lads, you don’t have any fish, do you?!”
      3. And when they replied with “Nah!” He told them to try the other side of the boat and they would catch some for sure. And perhaps this gave the disciples the impression that this was a man who knew what He was talking about; who could see something from the close by shore that they could not see from the boat.
      4. So they obeyed His instruction and threw out the net. And sure enough, the next thing they knew was that they had a net that was so bulging with fish that they could not haul it into the boat!
   4. And it was right then that the disciple whom Jesus loved, who we have consistently identified as John, the author of this Gospel, said, “*Peter! It is the Lord*.” And not surprisingly, given Peter’s track record of acting quickly without really thinking things through, he jumped in to the water and swam to the shore. And the way vv8-9 read, Peter and the boat arrived at the shore around the same time! There is no suggestion that Peter got there first and had special alone time with Jesus. So all that he achieved was that he was wetter and more puffed than the others ☺.
2. Now, to fully understand the significance of this fishing miracle, we have to consider the **breakfast on the shore** that is described in vv9-14. For that is where what this miracle means became apparent.
   1. So we read about the fish and bread breakfast that was cooking on the shore. And then Jesus told them to bring some of the fish they had caught, which Peter did, and they counted the fish and there were 153 of them! But even though there were so many, the net had not torn. So Jesus told them to “*come and have breakfast*,” and it was perfectly clear to everyone by then that Jesus was Jesus! And He took the bread and the fish and He gave it to them. And then John notes that this was the third time that Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples after the resurrection.
   2. Now, to understand what was going on we have to begin with a little bit of background:
      1. **The disciples were in Galilee because Jesus had told them to go there**, to a particular mountain, in fact, where He would meet them. We read this in Matthew 28. But as we noted earlier, the region of Galilee was their home. It was where they had worked as fishermen before Jesus called them to be His disciples. And do you remember how Jesus called them back then? It is actually very relevant for what happens here. His words to them were, “*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*.” And then we are told, “*Immediately they left their nets and followed Him*.” But here in John 21, it seems that they had not fully left their nets, for they were back at it.
      2. And as we noted earlier, when Jesus had His first meeting with the disciples after He had risen, He told them He was **sending them**, and He gave them the Holy Spirit. But it seems that their preaching and evangelism program had begun and ended with Thomas. And here they were back to fishing *for fish*!
      3. So it was clearly going to take another large prod from Jesus for them to become the Apostles, or sent ones, that He had called them to be.
      4. And that prod would be spelled out in plain language when Jesus met them on that mountain, soon after this. We read about that also in **Matthew 28**. It is when Jesus said, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*.” Do you boys and girls know what we call that passage? The Great Commission. They were not to stay at home and fish; they were to go into all the world and proclaim Christ in order to make disciples.
      5. But while that is the Great Commission laid out in plain language, this fishing miracle is the Great Commission *illustrated*. And you know how this works from sermons, don’t you, boys and girls? Ministers will explain what a Bible verse means and often they will use a story or a word picture to illustrate the explanation. And Jesus illustrated the Great commission with this fishing miracle.
   3. Let’s see how Jesus illustrated the Great Commission with the fishing miracle:
      1. Recall, first of all, what we said about how Jesus spoke to the disciples from the shore about how they would surely catch fish if they tried the right side of the boat. We said that His words gave the impression that He was a man who knew what He was talking about; who could see something that they could not; that if they just did what He said there would be success. And there you have the Great Commission, in a nutshell, don’t you! Jesus says, I have my people in every nation and in every age of history, so go! ‘Fish’ as I have instructed you and you will catch them!
         1. And this has been a repeated theme of Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel: **John 6:37**  *All that the Father gives me will come to me*, **John 10:14**  *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me … The sheep hear His voice, and He calls His own sheep by name and [they] follow Him, for they know His voice*. And in **John 17** Jesus repeatedly spoke about those given to Him by the Father. Jesus knows there are lots of fish!
      2. And notice also that when the disciples arrived at the shore, Jesus had some fish laid out already. They are a symbol of the disciples and the other believers that made up the small church of that time. But Jesus said to the disciples, “*Bring some of the fish that you have just caught*,” which Peter did. So the fish that the disciples caught were added to the fish that Jesus already had, as a picture of how the kingdom of God multiplies. And this too is something that Jesus spoke about in John’s Gospel:
         1. In **John 10:16**, in reference to the Gentile believers who would be added to Jewish believers in the church, Jesus said, “*And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd*.” And in **John 17:20**, Jesus said, Father, guard and sanctify the people you have given me. “*I do not ask for these only (meaning the disciples), but also for those who will believe in me through their word*.” So Jesus spoke there about those who would become disciples through the preaching of the disciples.
      3. And what we are told about the fish that the disciples caught is that they were large fish and that there were **153 of them**. And there are all sorts of theories about whether or not that number has a symbolic significance.
         1. What is beyond dispute is that it was **a large catch of large fish**; a massive haul. So even if we cannot be sure about any other symbolic significance, up until Jesus returns to earth, many will become disciples of Jesus!
         2. But because the specific number is recorded it may be that the number is significant also. One of the early church fathers was a man named **Jerome**. It’s impossible to conclusively prove his theory but he wrote that in his time it was believed that there were 153 species of fish. So this number would be symbolic of all of the nations of the world.
         3. And in that vein, listen to this prophecy of **Ezekiel** from **47:9-10**: “*And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to En-egalaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea.*”
         4. Now, I could go on from here and share some incredible number theories that come up with some amazing 153 results, but the fact of the matter is that we do not need a calculator in hand for us to be able to understand God’s Word. We simply cannot be sure if John had Ezekiel in view or if the ancient world counted 153 species of fish. What is clear and plain from this fishing miracle is that there will be many disciples of Jesus.
      4. And one other important and noteworthy symbolism arises out of what is said in v11, about **the net not being torn** by the large number of large fish. And it simply is that despite there being male and female, rich and poor, old and young, Reformed and Baptist and Anglican, and African and Fijian and Russian and Maori, etc, in the church of Christ, it is the one, united church of Jesus Christ.
   4. So, putting it all together, what Jesus illustrated with the fishing miracle and the breakfast on the shore is that the first part of the task of the church is to go and ‘fish’ for disciples, in every nation. And we are to do this believing that many will respond in repentance and faith in Christ and become a part of the one church of Christ.
      1. Are you doing this? Are you going and making disciples? When a work colleague talks about Covid-19 do you tell them that even if we survive the virus we will die one day and beyond that there is something far worse than Covid-19 to fear – the Day of Judgment? But Jesus came that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. That’s it! That’s the gospel that the Spirit delights to use to bring ‘fish’ into the net of salvation in Christ!

Well, there is more we can see and learn about the task of the church as we continue with this chapter next Lord’s Day morning. But may we be wonderfully used by the Spirit of God to bring many ‘fish’ into the net of salvation in Christ. Amen.