

# Gone Fishing

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you, Ruth, for reading, and please do keep the Bible open at John chapter 21 as we look at that together. As always, if you find it helpful, there's an outline inside the notice sheet so you can see where we're going as we look at that together.

Let's pray and ask for God's help that he would meet with us. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight.

O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. One of the trends in our culture is that we love to watch people being tested on the TV.

Often that's what reality TV is all about, not just getting into someone's life, but seeing how they respond to a serious test. So you have the apprentice and obviously the ruthless Alan Sugar, hard to please.

Can people persuade him that they're worth hiring? And then on Dragon's Den, it's similar. As people walk into that room, really intimidating room with the dragons there and they're trying to persuade these wealthy people to part with their money.

[ 1 : 03 ] And time for a confession for me. Last year, after years of resistance and basically mockery, I actually caught an episode of the Great British Bake Off myself.

And it turns out it's really good. It's really, really good. And if you've not seen it, you've just got to see it. It is brilliant. Now, the judges on Bake Off, Mary Berry and Paul Hollywood, they're a lot nicer than Alan Sugar.

They're more positive than the people on Dragon's Den. But it's still a cutthroat show. You know, you could have had several weeks where you've been star baker. And then all it takes is that your meringue doesn't set right.

Or your frangipan's too sweet. And you're off the show. That's it. You're out. And sometimes it can feel like our lives are a bit like that. We have to strive to prove ourselves.

Perhaps especially in the workplace, maybe we feel that people remember our mistakes for a lot longer than they'll remember the things that we do right. Maybe we feel like that with our parents or with a partner, our friends.

[ 2 : 03 ] Now, as Christians, we're followers of Jesus Christ. And if anybody is entitled to high standards, it's him. His life was matchless.

His conduct completely flawless. It had to be so that he could be our substitute and die for us on the cross. What would he require to follow him?

Well, this Easter, we've turned to John's account of Jesus' life to look at Resurrection Day. We started looking at that a fortnight ago. And Jesus appeared to his disciples alive again with the marks where the spear had pierced his side and where the nails had pierced his hands and feet. And John could have ended his gospel there. Jesus is seen alive again. Believe in him. But in chapter 21, John adds this wonderful epilogue that teaches us a bit more about what it's like to know Jesus for ourselves and to follow him and work for him personally.

We've got a miracle breakfast. A transforming question. And then a costly commission. So let's start with the miracle breakfast. It all happens back up north.

[ 3 : 14 ] The north is, of course, as we know where all great things happen. And here we find seven of the disciples together again by the Sea of Galilee. And in verse 3, Peter gets restless.

I'm going out to fish. Peter always the leader. So the others say, we'll go with you. Now just think about that for a moment. Fishing isn't a bad thing.

But this is hardly getting out there in the power of the Spirit with the news for the world that Jesus is alive again, is it? Peter has gone back to his old job.

They're drifting. And I think John here presumes that we know that this happened before. In Luke chapter 5, there was a miraculous catch of fish.

Jesus did that for them. They were still fishermen. And he said to them in Luke 5, from now on, you will catch people. He was giving them a new commission.

[ 4 : 11 ] I think John wants us to be aware of that. The disciples left their nets decisively to follow Jesus. And yet here we are in the same place at the same time of day.

But it's not the same Peter anymore. Peter, by now, is a spiritual failure. Peter, by now, is a spiritual failure.

He's broken. And now he's gone fishing again at night. Well, dawn breaks and there's a man on the shore.

Have a look with me at verse 4. 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?

Slightly annoying for them. No, they answered. He said, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you'll find some. And they do. We don't know why they do that.

[ 5 : 39 ] Maybe John, maybe the others, maybe they're getting an inkling. Hang on. This kind of thing happened before. So they cast their net on the other side of the boat. And verse 6.

When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. And it's John who realizes first what that means. Just imagine being John, hauling that net in.

And it dawns on him who it must be. On the lakeside. And he turns to Peter. Verse 7. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It is the Lord.

Imagine it. You're on the boat. And the man on the shore is the man you left everything for. The man who cleansed the leper. Who healed people. Who died for you.

And who has risen again. And Peter is overwhelmed. As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, It is the Lord. He wrapped his outer garment around him. Before he'd taken it off. And jumped into the water.

[ 6 : 36 ] You see, Peter must have been stripped for work. So he puts his garment back on. And he dives in. Now the action stays with the boat. Because John's on the boat. And this is John's account of what happened that day.

But soon the boat catches up. In verse 9. 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. 153. But even with so many, the net was not torn.

Jesus said to them, Come and have breakfast. It's the first ever men's breakfast. They don't dare ask who Jesus is. Because they know that it's the Lord.

See the authority of Jesus? The authority of Lord of the universe. Then Jesus, their master, serves them. Verse 13. Jesus came, took the bread, And gave it to them.

[ 7 : 38 ] 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. John here is reassuring us with more evidence.

They saw him again. Jesus is alive. And that's really important for us because we're being called to live for him, to put him first, and to share him.

And we're surrounded by people today who think we're completely mad for doing that. I don't know whether you saw this lady Victoria Wasteney in the news this week because she lost her appeal. She's an NHS worker. She was suspended from work. And the court of appeal said that she was wrong on several grounds at work. She was wrong to invite her Muslim friend to events at her church.

And she was wrong to offer her Muslim friend an evangelistic book explaining the Christian faith. Now, I don't know the full circumstances there. It seems a very odd case to me because my experience of secular work and lots of people I know find that as long as you're gracious and respectful, it's still fairly easy to share your faith at work.

[ 8 : 48 ] I don't know what in particular happened there. But it's interesting, isn't it? Why do people think that's wrong of Nicola, sorry, of Victoria, to share her faith with this Muslim colleague?

I guess people would give plenty of reasons, wouldn't they? People would say, well, religion's a private matter. We don't mind what you believe, but you keep it to yourself. Don't share it at work. People would say, well, you've got to respect diversity.

And as Christians, we believe that we want to at least respect that there is a diversity of belief, even though we feel that we have the truth. But the thing is that fundamentally, the reason why in our society today it's controversial to share your faith is because people don't think it's true.

Of course. If people thought across our society that Jesus rose from the dead, they wouldn't have a problem with you telling people. People don't think that it's true.

And John says, it is true. They saw Jesus alive again. Of course, we have to be respectful and gracious, but you're not mad to go out on a limb and tell a colleague that you're a Christian and tell him about Jesus.

[ 9 : 57 ] You're not mad to devote all of your time and energy and money to Jesus and the advance of his name instead of to yourself. Because John 21 really happened. On a real morning by the Sea of Galilee, a man who'd been crucified served breakfast to his followers.

The disciples needed to see that again because they've been drifting. And so it's worth asking this morning, are you drifting? Have you been drifting?

Can you look back at other times in your Christian life when you were more passionate about it? Have you gone back to the aims and goals that you had before you were a Christian?

If you think about your priorities for life today, let me ask, are you drifting away from Jesus and dreaming of the perfect marriage or the right home in the right location with the right renovations or the best holidays and weekends away?

Because you think, those are the things that would sort my life out. Are you drifting from Jesus because you're so committed to success at work because deep down you think that respect from other people is what you really need?

[ 11 : 10 ] People to think more highly of you. Well, if you think that maybe you are drifting a bit, then look back at that glorious scene, that glorious morning by the lake and let me ask, don't you want to be with Jesus?

You know, when John said to Peter, it's the Lord, Peter didn't say, oh yeah, you're right, it is Jesus, but look at all these fish, we're rich.

No, forget success, Peter jumped straight into the sea because he couldn't even wait for the boat to get to the shore. He just wanted to be with Jesus again.

And no wonder, Jesus is amazing. You know, you'd be astonished by how much has been written about why there were 153 fish recorded by John in the catch.

For example, did you know that 153 is the triangular number of 17, apparently. I don't know what you do with that, but it is. But I'm going with this theory for why John tells us there were 153 fish.

[ 12 : 15 ] It's because it's a lot of fish. And you can imagine in their excitement that one of them said, I've never seen anything like this. All night we catch nothing.

Jesus arrives again. He says, put your net in the other side and we could barely haul the net in. I'm going to count them. There were so many. It's abundant. That's the point. Because being with Jesus is wonderful.

He's in charge of everything and yet he meets you. He meets these seven drifting men. He changes their fortunes. He provides what they need and he's waiting for them on the shore to serve them and look after them.

So will you meet him again today? Perhaps like them, you need to jump in again in the Christian life. Recommit yourself to the Lord Jesus. Well that's the miracle breakfast.

Next we get the transforming question. They're sitting on the shore by the lake. Let's pick things up at verse 15 by the crackling fire. When they finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?

[ 13 : 27 ] Yes, Lord, he said. You know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my lambs. Jesus probably means to Peter, do you love me more than these other disciples love me?

Because he's reminding Peter of his boasting, even if everyone else denies you. I never will. But now for Peter, the boasting has gone. He doesn't make any more wild, audacious claims.

He just says, you know. Lord, you know that I love you. Verse 16. Again Jesus said, Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?

He answered, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, take care of my sheep. The third time he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.

[14:32] Jesus said, feed my sheep. Can you see this is wonderful grace here. It's astonishing grace. Peter abandoned Jesus. He's a spiritual failure.

And yet Jesus forgives him and he restores him. And this is so important for us to hear this morning because we're all spiritual failures. Before you become a Christian, you're a spiritual failure.

You've turned your back on God. But when you become a Christian, we're all spiritual failures still. We go on sinning. I'm a complete spiritual failure.

But with Jesus, the one who died for sins and rose to rule, there is complete forgiveness on offer. Jesus invites Peter back and he gives us the same invitation today.

Plunge your failure into the grace of Jesus. And if you do that, there are no limits to what Jesus can do with you. But notice also that the grace that Jesus offers isn't easy, is it?

[15:36] It's challenging and it's transforming. Imagine that you're Peter that day, so thrilled to see Jesus again. How would you have felt when Jesus asks you that second time and then the third time and you realize that it's once for each time that you denied him that night and left him to die alone.

It hurts, doesn't it? And the same is true for us, that God's grace may wound you at the same time as it restores you. As Jesus repeats the question, he's twisting the knife, isn't he?

He's twisting the knife, but it's the knife of a surgeon, not the knife of a thief. Jesus confronts Peter with his sin so that he can transform him by his grace.

And the same is true for us. The more Jesus confronts you with your own spiritual failings, the more painful it will be. But the more you will realize how much he has forgiven you and the more that grace will change you.

Jesus says to each one of us this morning, face up to what you're really like, that you're a spiritual failure. Then plunge your failure into my grace and I will build you up and transform you.

[16:54] And what's the qualification that you need to follow Jesus? Does he give you a hard exam? Do you have to pitch? Does he look at your past failures? Well, no.

All that Jesus wants is for you to love him. If you love him, you can serve him. Jesus performs this heart surgery on Peter.

He wants Peter to realize how much he's been forgiven so that he loves Jesus more and is more useful to serve him. And all of this is connected with the work that Jesus now calls us to do as his people.

He wants you, whoever you are, whatever gifts that he's given you, to do whatever you can to be part of his mission in the world to fish and to shepherd.

He wants us to fish. He wants us to go out with his message and tell others so that they'll believe in him and have life in his name. I wonder if, because you love Jesus, you might have the courage this week to say to a friend, can I just ask what you think about Jesus?

[18:01] You know, I follow him. I worship him. I think it's really important. Could we talk about that? Would you come with me to church? To the God particle play that's going on at church?

To an evening of Christianity explored? Could we talk about Jesus? Jesus wants us to fish.

Secondly, Jesus wants us to feed his sheep. Three times, he says to Peter, feed my sheep.

In other words, look after my people by serving them with God's word. And we're called to do that here at St. Silas. We'll have different roles in that.

But we can shepherd each other by bringing God's word to bear on each other's lives, to encourage each other and challenge each other. We can shepherd our children and young people. We love Jesus by loving the lost, by fishing.

And we love him by loving his people, by shepherding. And if we don't really want to do that, then we need to meet with Jesus again to have another transforming encounter where we admit our spiritual failings and we grasp the depths of his love for us so that that love spills over from us to others.

[19:10] Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Well, Peter realizes and he's a different man now. You know, in Luke chapter 5, when he first saw Jesus' power with a miraculous catch of fish, he said, depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.

That's our natural reaction to Jesus. I wonder if it's your reaction this morning. I wonder if you're keeping a distance from him because you don't want the pain of having to change as he exposes the ways we're not living for him.

Well, Jesus says, meet with me. Admit your faults. Let me wipe the slate clean and as you grasp what I've done for you, it will transform you. Then you'll love me more.

Then you can serve me. So do you love Jesus? That's his question. Do you really love him? We've seen the miracle breakfast. We've heard that transforming question. Finally and more briefly, let's look at the costly commission. See, we sometimes think of love today in a very sentimental way.

[ 20 : 19 ] The sentimentalism about the word love has even spoiled the word today in our culture. But love in the Bible is a strong word. And Jesus had said to his followers in John 15, you show your love and its greatness by being willing to die for your friends.

Then Jesus says to Peter, feed my sheep. But he taught his disciples that the good shepherd is the one who lays down his life for the sheep. And it becomes crystal clear for Peter in verse 18.

Have a look with me. Jesus says, I tell you the truth. When you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.

Well, that phrase, stretch out your hands, was an everyday term for crucifixion. And John confirms that in verse 19. Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Jesus is warning Peter he's going to be crucified. And then he says in verse 19, then Jesus said to him, follow me.

[ 21 : 33 ] And it's the same command that Jesus gave his first followers in chapter 1 of John's gospel. Follow me. But back then, it was so exciting. Jesus was about to embark on a breathtaking mission and any red-blooded man seeing this miracle man and great preacher would have wanted to follow him.

But now the risen Jesus walks along with Peter by the lake and he's got marks in his hands where the nails were and a mark down his side where he was pierced with a spear.

Follow me sounds very different now, doesn't it? For Jesus, knowing him is about following him and following him is very costly. I remember a church pastor describing a guy in the church to me, another Christian, and he said, yeah, he's really serious about being a Christian.

And that's a good thing. It's good to be really serious about being a Christian. Don't just follow Jesus because it's exciting. It is exciting to be a Christian. But follow Jesus because he's alive and he's done more for you than you could ever do in return.

But the more you grasp what Jesus has done for you, the more you see that there is nothing that he cannot now ask of you because he's Lord and he died for you.

[ 22 : 56 ] But Peter has one more lesson to learn. He looks over his shoulder. You see that, verse 20? Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following him.

Verse 21. When Peter saw him, he asked, Lord, what about him? Jesus answered, if I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?

You must follow me. Jesus had a different plan for John than he had for Peter. But what Peter does there is so typical of us, isn't it?

We're always looking over our shoulders. In fact, we tend to judge what Jesus requires of us, not by what he says in his word, but by what we see other Christians doing around us.

We want to make the rules for other people and make sure they're giving up things before we give things up. If I'm going to have to give more money for being a Christian, then they shouldn't be going on that holiday.

[ 23 : 52 ] They shouldn't be driving that car. If I'm going to give my time to serving Jesus, why is that person still a member of the golf club and going on a spa day? What about them, Jesus?

But Jesus says, don't worry about him. Don't worry about her. This is about me and you. This is about what I want you to do for me. It's a costly commission.

But John finishes by reminding us of why we take that up. It's that Jesus is amazing. He was the word. He was with God in the beginning. Everything was made through him.

He took flesh. He lived. He died. He rose again. Verse 25, John says, Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

Well, that's the same Jesus who is at work today in the world. Do you love him? Well, then plunge your failures into his grace and let's serve him together in costly ways in this great city of Glasgow by fishing for people and shepherding his flock.

[ 25 : 03 ] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we marvel at the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for the ways that he reinstated Peter, the one who had denied him so clearly and that you used Peter in such astonishing ways.

Father, we recognize that our lives are not our own anymore, that Jesus paid the price for them and so we pledge as in the hymn the things of earth we leave behind to live in worship of our king. His is the right to rule our lives. Ours is the joy to live for him. Amen.