

FISHING ON THE RIGHT SIDE

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John 21:3-7

Fishing is a study of the unpredictable! Those of you who may have fished in your life came to realize that fishing is a lot like branding cattle. You have to “strike while the iron is hot.” It’s also sometimes a lot like throwing darts while you’re blindfolded. Sometimes you can fish all day and never a bite while on other days everything seems to be just right and fish will bite about anything you throw in the water. I know that if you have fished you are also aware of what I will call the “hot spot paradox.” By that I am talking about a fishing situation where you can be fishing in a spot and not getting a single bite...it may be in the bow of a boat or at a spot on the bank of a lake or river. Wherever it is, some of you have probably had someone come up beside you, throw their line in 6 or 8 feet away and start dragging in fish. If they are a friend or family, you might get them to let you fish there too after you have watched awhile with frustrated envy. But no sooner do you throw your line in that spot than all activity ceases and that’s the end of the fish-catching!

Now if you were an ichthyologist (fish expert), wildlife biologist, or an experienced fisherman you could probably tell people a thing or two about why some days are good days and some spots 6 or 8 feet away from where you are fishing are hot spots. There are reasonable explanations for it from a biological and ecological perspective. But that doesn’t lessen the mystery of those fishing incidents.

We see in our text one of those apparent mysteries about fish and fishing. But this incident is more than a mystery. We find in this account the fact of a miracle undoubtedly wrought by Christ. We also find some truths about why our efforts sometimes seem to go awry. I say “seem to go awry” because things are not always what they appear to be. I hope we can see some truth about that before we end this message.

What we see in this historical incident can help us to understand some things about the focus of our labors, whether spiritual or temporal. And what the Lord Jesus has to teach us by it should drive away some mysteries from our life of service to the Lord and should clear up some unanswered questions about the direction and productivity (or **seeming** lack of it) in our lives.

Let’s walk through this account and see what the Lord will teach us. Notice:

I. **Verse 3.** Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

- ❖ This was a joint endeavor “they” (the same outcomes and experiences often holds true for both joint efforts and single efforts);
 - **partnering does not necessarily guarantee success;**
 - The tower of Babel was a huge partnership effort;
 - There was a huge crowd of self-righteous Jews who tried to seize Christ in Nazareth and throw him off a cliff (**Luke 4:28:30**), but they failed.

- All the apostles tried to cast that demon out of the young boy mentioned in Mat. 17, but they were unable to get it done.
- We should always enlist help when it is a task which requires it, and is worth the endeavor
- But it will pay us to consider the endeavor we are about to launch, to assess whether it has a likelihood of success.
- ❖ They did not quit after a few hours
 - **persistence does not ensure success;**
 - neither does it necessarily mean we are doing the right thing;
 - persistence which continues to meet with failure needs to be considered a weather vane to measure the direction we are going in)
 - This wasn't even a case of meager returns; it was a case of no returns ("caught nothing")
 - Sometimes our most persistent labors bring no fruit.
 - In **Galatians 4** the persistent missionary Paul is concerned because the Galatian Christians seem to be caught up in a bunch of observances of calendar events and apparent holy days. He says in **v. 11**: "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain."

II. **Verse 4.** But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

- ❖ They were still at it when Jesus showed up (say something about Christ's continual presence with His people and the fact that this scene cannot represent a situation where Christ has somehow separated Himself from His people, and has now come back...but it can represent something else about Christ coming to His people, and that is when He comes upon His people with power to unfold a big spiritual event.
 - God's children don't always know when Christ has come on the scene in a special way
 - Remember in **John 20** when Jesus shows himself to Mary...she does not recognize it is Him; then in **Luke 24**, he joins up with two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus & they don't recognize Him).
 - Preoccupation with our own way of doing things sometimes makes us not very observant about the movements of the Lord.
 - To use a metaphor, we are sometimes so busy fishing with our own fishing tackle that we can step on and break a golden rod and reel lying at our feet!
 - This week, I was looking for a piece of hose I had taken off the inducer motor pressure switch when I was repairing the furnace. I was standing next to the furnace trying to think where I had left it and couldn't, so I went looking for it in the dojo and the house at points where I thought I had left it. I looked everywhere, and finally went back out to the furnace thinking I would have to close it up until I got a piece of hose. As I stepped back exactly where I had been before I went looking for the hose, and there right in front of me at chest height, among the other parts of the furnace and the tools I was using lay the piece of hose. Too busy fishing in my own pond to see the fish lying before me!
 - Tiredness from our own fitful and inept efforts sometimes makes us thick headed about spiritual things.
 - In **Luke 9** we read that the apostles had just returned from their strenuous work of spreading the gospel across Judea and we note then that in **Luke 9:10** the bible tells us that the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And **he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place** belonging to the city called

Bethsaida.

- Have you ever wondered what that was all about? He was taking them on a sabbatical so that they could have some rest and start afresh.
- Spiritual work is hard and often so is secular work. We need a break from our work because if we fish all night and catch nothing, we will be weary in the morning and may cause us to be really dense about seeing and understanding the movements of the Lord in our lives.

III. **Verse 5.** Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.

❖ The arrival of Christ as an actor in unfolding events guarantees a change in things (**II Cor. 3:17** “...where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.”).

- The Lord comes upon the scene at Mt. Horeb and natural laws are suspended while a bush burns but does not turn to ashes (Exodus 3);
 - At the Red Sea the waters part to reveal a dry bottom (**Exodus 14**);
 - In the wilderness manna falls in the night for food in the morning (Exodus 16);
 - At an altar in Israel, Elijah has an offering laid and soaked with water until barrels of water run off the altar and into the trenches...the Lord visits the scene and the offering burns as does the very water in the trenches...(1**Kings 18**);
 - A little 12-year-old girl has died at the home of a ruler of a synagogue ... Jesus comes to where the child is, speaks a word to her and she rises to life (**Mark 5**);
 - Christ spits on clay and rubs it on a blind man’s eyes and he gains his sight although he had been blind from birth (**John 9**)
- ❖ Christ is sure to bring us to reality when He intervenes “Have ye any meat?”
- It is sobering, but a blessing to be brought to realize that intensive labors have gotten no apparent results
- ❖ Before children of God can be ready for real and Christ-provided blessings they often must be brought to an awareness of their own failures and incapacities. (The Lord would always have us to remember His words [**John 15:5**] “...without me ye can do nothing.”)

IV. **Verse 6.** And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

❖ The Lord’s directions may run counter to all previous endeavors and counter to what we call logical thinking

- In **Acts 27:30-31** Paul was on the way to Rome on an Egyptian ship. When the ship began to founder the sailors were getting ready to abandon ship...this has always been the way to survive a sinking ship...get into a lifeboat...but this time Paul informs the captain of the soldiers that if they were to be saved everybody had to stay in the ship...counter to all good shipwreck rules
 - Does everybody know what a riptide is (explain)? Now, almost every swimmer thinks that the way to escape from a riptide is to resist it and swim for the shore...but that’s not the solution. Doing that may well kill you. Instead, you have to relax and let the riptide take you away from the shore until its force slacks off. Then you swim parallel to the shore for 50-100 yards and you will almost always be out of the range of the riptide at which time you then swim to shore.
- ❖ The change the Lord sometimes points us to may not be far away from where we already are (he didn’t say, “row to the other side of the lake and then start fishing over there.”)
- Notice that the change the Lord directs did not demand that they change fishing gear, nor

that they change boats, nor that they change which lake they were fishing in. Some folks imagine that everything has to be changed in order to improve our productivity, but this event teaches us that we simply have to handle what the Lord has given us in the RIGHT way.

- ❖ The account in our text actually seems to be pointedly obvious about the **difference between one side of the ship and the other**. Lesson: There are endeavors that seem to be focused on the proper target, but the Lord can discern the error and can give directions for how to remedy it.
 - Shooting a bow is tricky business. Do you know why? Because the further away your target is, the higher you have aim above the target! Sometimes we may think we are centered on the target, but we may need to be aiming higher!
 - Problems with staying focused presents a challenge for us in our attempts to serve the Lord: Are we focused on the right target? Are we just fishing?...or are we fishing on the right side of the ship?
- ❖ Guidance from the Lord is of no value if we do not act on it (“They cast therefore”)
 - The one thing I want us to notice about this point is that those apostles acted on what the Lord told them to do. That is the key to doing things right, regardless of the number of fish caught or not caught!
 - I believe a lot of sincere and well-meaning Christians have launched off into self-concocted techniques and changes in regard to the way they were trying to serve the Lord, and because of that have gotten into trouble with the Lord.
- ❖ Heeding the Lord can bring the most pleasant and productive consequences
 - This boatload of fish needs to symbolize blessings from the Lord

V. Some Closing Thoughts About This Event

- ❖ Jesus did not rebuke the apostles for fishing – I believe there is a reason for this and it is not because He was being kind. I believe He understood and knew that no rebuke was in order. And here is why:
 - ❖ There are some tasks we are **appointed to** in our lives that will not generate any outward results
 - ❖ But looking at how this all ended, we need to realize that the Lord meant for them to put forth a lot of time and labor without visible results because I believe there were inward lessons they were in need of that came from this seemingly empty effort. What might some of those lessons been?
 - They had all night to **think about their crucified and risen Savior** (remember that is **v.14** of this chapter we are reminded that this is the third time the Lord has appeared to the apostles since His resurrection).
 - They had the darkness of the night, quiet of the lake, the lapping of the waves, the caress of the wind to think about the creative miracles of God
 - They had all night to reflect on how poorly they had behaved when their Master was arrested
 - This whole scene also gives us this very important message: Without Christ, earthly pursuits and earthly effort are fruitless. But, with Christ, earthly actions can become things that glorify Him.

(If you need more material, go back to **John 21:7-9** and take points from what happened after they caught the fish.)