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Jesus and the Miraculous Catch of Fish
John 21: 1-14

Jesus and the miraculous catch of fish DIG: Where are these seven apostles in this scene? Why did Peter return to the profession of fishing? Compare this story with Luke 5:1-11. Why do you think Christ might repeat this type of miracle now? What effect would it have on Kefa? Where did Messiah get the fish in verse 9? Why didn't Jesus just use some of the fish caught by the apostles and brought ashore? How did the Lord's preparing them breakfast relate to what He did for them in John 13:1-17?

REFLECT: Where do you go to get away from it all? How does ADONAI meet you there? When He meets you, how do you feel? Condemned or accepted? What does God use to get your attention and get through to you when He needs to reestablish contact? To what lengths do you go to, to reach Christ?

After reassuring **Thomas** that **He** had truly risen from the dead, **the Master appeared again to His apostles by the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberius**, or **the Lake of Gennesaret. This was the seventh appearance of Jesus after His resurrection.** We have no way of knowing how long after the resurrection this took place, but it was not likely more than a month **(Acts 1:3)**. **It happened this way:** Seven **talmidim, Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other talmidim were together (Yochanan 21:1-2).** Five of **the Eleven** are named, while another two **apostles** are left anonymous.

It is clear that **the talmidim** still did not fully understand the nature of **their** future ministry. For three-and-a-half years **they** had followed **their Great Rabbi**, learning from **Him** and fully expecting **Him** to reign as **King Messiah**. But suddenly, in a matter of hours, everything changed. **He** was arrested, tried, judged, crucified and laid in a tomb. When **Jesus** was buried so were **their** expectations. And when **He** emerged it seemed like **their** dreams were left behind like **His** grave clothes. **They** were in a state of limbo. **The Lord** had died, but **He** was no longer **dead**. **The**

Master had **breathed the Ruach Ha'Kodesh on them (John 20:21-22).** But as David indicated, **the Spirit** would come and go **(Psalm 51:11)** before Shavu'ot **(Acts 2)**. Therefore, **they** could comprehend **the Lord's** teaching in the next forty days before **Jesus** ascended up to heaven **(Acts 1:9)**; however, **they** were without daily leadership. The messianic Kingdom, it seemed, was not going to be what **they** had hoped for, so **their** future was uncertain. Nothing remained as it had been before.[1683]

Human nature cannot abide in limbo for long. Consequently, when we can't go forward, we cannot help but return to the familiar. **Simon Peter** said to **the others,"I'm going** (Greek: *hupago*) **out to fish (John 21:3a). Here the Greek word is used to denote the final departure of one who ceases to be another's companion. Thus, this was Simon's formal announcement after the informal meeting that the talmidim had, presumably in his home, to the effect that he was abandoning his preaching commission received from the Lord Jesus, breaking his relationship with Him so far as future ministry was concerned.**

And the ten other apostles said: **We'll go with you" (John 21:3b).** This was a crisis. Here is one of **the** chief **apostles**, not only deserting **his** preaching commission to go back to the fishing business, but leading six other **talmidim** with **him** to do the same thing! It is reasonable to assume that **the others** would follow **him**. These **men** had been training to preach the gospel and carry on the work of saving souls after **Messiah** had ascended to heaven. Should **they** desert **their** great commission, **God's** work on earth would be stopped.

This was a masterstroke of the Adversary. He could not tempt **Savior** in the wilderness. He could not keep **Jesus** from going to the cross. He could not coax **Him** to come down from the cross to save **Himself**. He could not keep **His** body in the tomb and therefore the blood of **Christ** had already purchased salvation. Now, if there was to be no preaching of the Good News of salvation, the great dragon reasoned, the plan of redemption for lost sinners would fail. How would **Yeshua** meet this new challenge?[1684]

The first step in bringing His renegade apostles back to their preaching ministry was to make their business a failure. So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing (John 21:3c).

"What was I thinking?" **Peter** mumbled to **himself**. Why did **I** run? But **Simon** had

run. **He** had turned **his** back on **his** best friend and ran. We don't know where. **Kefa** may not have known where. **He** found a hole, a hut, or a vacant shed. **He** found a place to hide and **he** hid.

So **Simon** was in the boat, on **the Sea of Galilee**. Once again **he's fished** all **night and caught nothing. His** thoughts are interrupted by a shout from **the shore**.

This was not an accident and actually was a very teachable moment by **Jesus**. **Early in the morning, the Lord stood on the shore. But** like Mary Magdalene and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, **Peter** and **John did not** recognize **Him** at first because of **He** appeared in **His** glorified body**.**

He called out to them: Children (Greek: *paidia*)**, haven't you any fish? The Lord's** question, translated in Greek, anticipates a negative response. It was if **He** said, "So, you haven't caught anything, right?" Moreover, **He** called **them children**. *Paidia* is the plural form of the word for *small child* and can be used as an affectionate address. **Simon** and **Yochanan** looked up. Probably someone from the village.**"No," they answered (Jn 21:4-5).**

The talmidim had been in this situation before. These **men** had spent a wasted night on the sea when **Yeshua** instructed **them** to recast **their** nets. When **their** obedience netted them a record catch, **He** promised **them** similar success in ministry (**to see link click Cj – Come, Follow Me, And I Will Show You How to Fish for People**). Now, after so much had happened, **their** resurrected **Lord** had once again instructed **them** to recast **their net**. Surely one of **them** would figure out who **the man on the shore** was.

The voice yells back: **Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.** What a miracle! **The Lord** was **about hundred yards** away from **them (Yochanan 21:8)**. In American football this would be from goal line to goal line, yet **they** heard **Him** plainly. Normally, throwing your fishing **net** to one **side of the boat** or the other would not make any difference. But **John** looks at **Kefa**. What's the harm? So out flew **the net**. **Simon** wraps the rope around **his** wrist to wait. But there is no wait. The rope pulls taut and **the net** catches. **Peter** sets **his** weight against **the side of the boat** and begins to bring in **the net**, reaching down . . . pulling up . . . reaching down . . . pulling up. **When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish (John 21:6).**

The second step in bringing His maverick apostles back in line was to direct a large school of fish into the net that was thrown into the right side of the boat. The Lord did not merely see a large school of **fish** from a hundred yards out. **He** is **the Creator**! And **His** creation obeys **Him**. Just as the animals obeyed and came two by two into Noah's ark, **He** *caused* these **fish** to swim into **the apostles' net**.

Kefa kept on working but **he** was so intense with the task **he** missed **the Messenger**. **John** didn't. **Then John said to Peter, "It is the Lord" (Yochanan 21:7a)!** The moment is *déjà vu*. This had happened before. The long **night**. The empty **net**. The call to **let down the nets for a catch (Luke 5:4)**. **Fish** flopping on the floor of **the boat**. Wait a minute. **Yochanan** lifts **his** eyes to **the man** on the shore. "It's **Him**," **he** whispers.

Then louder. "It's **Yeshua**."

Then shouting. “It’s **the Lord**, **Simon**. It’s **the Lord**!”

Peter turned and looked. **The Meshiach** has come. Not **Jesus** the teacher, but **Yeshua** the **Supreme Commander of Life and Death**. **Christ** the victor over darkness. **The Son of God** was on **the shore** . . .

If **Yochanan** was the first to recognize **Messiah**, **Kefa** was the first to act. **As soon as Simon Peter heard John say, “It is the Lord,” he put on his outer robe that he had removed** so that **he** could work more efficiently (and girded **his** *chiton*, or undergarment between **his** legs and around **his** waist) **and plunged into the water. Simon’s** action helps us to recall that night on the stormy **Lake of Gennesaret** when **the Savior walked on the waves** toward **the boat** that carried the weary **apostles** (see **Fp – Jesus Walks on the Water**). It was **Peter** who said: **Lord, if it’s You, tell me to come to You on the water. Kefa** was just as desperate to get to **the Lord** then as **he** was now.

Meanwhile, **the other talmidim** rowed to shore in a small row **boat** that was attached to the large fishing **boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards (Yochanan 21:7b-8).**

Simon plunges into **the Gennesaret**, swims to **the shore**, staggers out wet and shivering and stands in front of the friend **he** betrayed. **When they landed,** it suddenly because clear to **them** that the **fish they** caught were not needed because **Jesus** already had **fish** for **them**. **They saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread (Yochanan 21:9).** Both are aware of the last time **Kefa** had stood near **a fire** (see **Lk – Peter Denies Jesus Three Times**). **Peter** had failed **God**, but now **God** had come to **him**.

For one of the few times in **his** life, **Peter** is silent. **He** stepped onto the shore as quietly as if **he** were entering the Most Holy Place in the Temple. Words were useless. In fact, the moment was too holy for words. **God** is offering breakfast to

the friend who betrayed **Him**. And **the rugged fisherman** is once again finding grace at the cross.

What do you *say* at a moment like this? What do *you* say at a moment such as this?

It's just you and **God**. You and **God** both know what you did, and neither of you is proud of it. What do you do? What can you possibly do?

You might consider doing what **Simon Peter** did. Stand in **God's** presence. Stand in **His** sight. Stand still and wait. Sometimes that's all a soul can do. Too repentant to speak, but too hopeful to leave . . . we just stand.

Stand amazed. **He** has come back. **He** invites you to try again. This time, with **Him**.[1685]

Now Jesus takes the third step in His endeavor to bring these runaway apostles back to their responsibility of carrying on the preaching of the gospel after He should leave the earth for heaven. He knew that **He** had a tired, cold, discouraged, guilty, group of **men** with whom to deal. Great issues were at stake. Instead of broaching the subject of **their** desertion, and calling **them** to repentance and a return to **their** preaching mission at once, **He** first saw to it that **their** physical needs were supplied. People are easier to reach if their physical needs are cared for, and their minds and hearts are at rest.[1686]

Jesus said to them: Bring some of the fish you have just caught.
Christ's invitation for **them** to add **His fish** to **the fire** is significant. While **the Lord** can do all things without the help of anyone, **He** invited **Peter** to contribute the fruit of **His** efforts. **Yeshua** wants to enjoy the victory we accomplish together, not because **He** *needs* us but because **He** *wants* us! **So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and** with **his** comrades **dragged the net ashore** and witnessed the remarkable results of divine help to human effort **(John 21:10).**[1687]

It was full of large fish (**153** to be exact), **but even with so many the net was not torn (Yochanan 21:11).** With a group of men fishing, the catch was presumably shared with them all. So it was necessary to count **the fish** before assigning the shares. There is no symbolic or allegorical significance to the number. It merely means *a very large number of fish*. Sometimes **John** records such things. In describing how **Messiah** turned **water** into wine (see **Bq – Jesus Changes Water Into Wine**), **he** recorded: **Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind**

used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons or **from** 75 to 115 liters of **water (John 2:6).** In simply meant *a lot of water*.

Jesus said to them: Come and have breakfast. None of the apostles dared ask Him, "Who are you?" even though **they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish (John 21:12-13).** This image of **Christ** distributing **the bread** and **the fish** is no accident. It was a clear allusion to the abundance **He** created in the wilderness (see **Fn – Jesus Feeds the 5,000**). **The One** who had provided for **them** during their time with **Him** before the Crucifixion had promised in the Upper Room that **He** would continue to provide for **them**; and the fact of this meal substantiated **Messiah's** promise that **He** would meet **their** every need. **The talmidim** had thought the death of **Christ** would end **His** care for **them**; now **they** had a demonstration of **His** continuing care. Those who feared that **His** death would terminate **their** fellowship with **Him** now enjoyed sweet fellowship as **they** ate what **He** had provided.[1688] **This was now the third time Jesus appeared to His talmidim after He was raised from the dead (Yochanan 21:14;** see **John 20:19** and **26** for the other two appearances**).**

In the congregations of **God**, we tend to think of full-time vocational messianic rabbis and pastors as "called" by **ADONAI** (and rightfully so). They are not, however, the only people called by **YHVH** to fulfill a divine purpose. *All* believers have been called to bring glory to **Elohim** in whatever they do. So, in reality, it is appropriate to extend the range of a "calling" to include any vocation a believer chooses to pursue. We become the message. Therefore . . .

We must come to terms with our limitations. While we should do our best and always pursue excellence, never forget that, ultimately, success is not up to us. **Peter** and his business partners ran a lucrative fishing business and were experts in their vocation. **They** had years of experience and all the right equipment, yet **their net** came up empty. Only with **the Lord's** help did **they** find success. The miracle haul of **fish** illustrates that without the help of our **Great Rabbi's** help, all our expertise and diligence will come to nothing.

We must come to terms with our priorities. All believers have been called as disciples and all are commissioned to **make disciples** (see **Mo – The Great Commission**), regardless of each person's life's work. Not only that, we have all been called to bring glory to **ADONAI** in whatever we do **(First Corinthians**

10:31). So, students, tradesmen and women, homemakers, professionals, ministers, laborers . . . **Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters (Colossians 3:23).**

What is your attitude toward your life's work? If you start the day thinking, "Ugh! Back to the ole' grind!" It's time for a change. If a new job isn't possible (it may require other significant sacrifices, but this is usually possible), then the change might have to be internal. Begin by committing every aspect of your job to **the Lord** for **His** purposes and **His** glory. "**Lord**, I'm **Yours** today. This is **Your** desk. This is **Your** office. These are **Your** tools. This is **Your** computer. Now help me become the very best worker I can possibly be. And in the process of time, let's catch some **fish**. Let's **make** some **disciples**."

We must come to terms with our imperfection. Peter laid aside **his** calling to **fish for people** because of **his** failure and took up a vocation which **he** thought wouldn't cause as much damage to the Kingdom. While **he** wanted to put it in the rear view mirror and make the best of a lesser future – **Jesus** met **him** head on. **Christ** didn't deny, minimize, rationalize, or ignore **Simon's** failure. Instead, **He** emphasized it no less than three times, each time calling the dejected apostle to: **Feed my sheep**. It was if **the Lord** was saying, "Yes, **Peter**, you blew it. And you'll blow it again. Nevertheless, I want you to fulfill your calling."

Failure is inevitable. And **Messiah** is never surprised when we fail. It's not as though **He** called us to follow **Him** without knowing failure! With the penalty for our sins already **paid in full** on the cross **(John 19:30a)**, failure for the believer is merely a reminder to depend on **Him** rather than on ourselves . . . to replace self-confidence with **Christ**-confidence.[1689]