

The Stranger on the Shore

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[0 : 0 0] John 21 and tonight we're looking at verses 1 to 8. This next incident in the experiences of Simon Peter, whose life we've been following for a good number of weeks now in the Gospels.

Where we find Jesus revealing himself, this is of course after his resurrection from the dead, coming to reveal himself to the disciples. We can read at verse 4, just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore. Yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, Children, do you have any fish? They answered him, No. He said to them, Cast a net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. So they cast it and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish. And so on. Now last time we left Peter in Luke chapter 22 and verse 62, we left Peter weeping bitterly. You recall that after he had denied the Lord three times, Peter. And when the cock crowed, Peter remembered the word of the Lord and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And he went out and wept bitterly. And then he really disappears from the Gospel accounts until we find him with John on the morning of the resurrection, as you find recorded here in John chapter 20. Now we looked at that passage in advance really of it in the series on Peter. We looked at that at Easter time and still looked at it as an incident involving Peter, but because it was focused on the resurrection, we looked at that passage then. But that's when Peter next appears in the Gospels after the reference to him going out and weeping bitterly. And I'm sure we said at the time that it's significant that he appears with John. We don't know exactly how it is that they came to be revealed here together at the resurrection. On the morning of the resurrection, did Peter go and seek out John, having gone out and wept bitterly? Did he go out then knowing what he had done and deeply regretting what he had done? Did he seek out John? Did he seek his company? Or was it the other way about?

Did John actually go to seek out Peter, knowing what he had done and realizing how Peter would have felt about it and realized in the grief of his heart? Was it John who sought out Peter to take him with him and to look after him? We don't know. But we know that they appeared together on the morning of the resurrection. And we can certainly say from that that because they appeared together there, John did not have a problem accepting Peter despite what he had done. John did not have a problem with Peter actually being personally with him and again beside him as they came to experience the tomb now empty of the body of Christ. And that's surely a reminder to us too, as we said at the time, that we ourselves are responsible for caring for those who may have lapsed, who may have even in a public way denied the Lord in whatever way that's been done. We must be like John and have a care for all who have perhaps slipped away or for those who have gone astray and for those who've no longer followed the Lord as closely as they used to or have gone away from following the Lord altogether or come back from the profession they made. Whatever it is, however we find that, we are responsible as the people of the church of God to show the compassion and the care and the love that John obviously had for his brother

Peter, his brother disciple, to actually look after him and to be a support to him even though he had done what he had done in denying the Lord. And now here's another step in the understanding and the experience of Peter as he comes to experience the risen Jesus dealing with him at this time and again working this miracle which as we'll see is very likely miracle that we saw in the earlier experiences of Peter. We read it again tonight in Luke chapter 5 and we'll refer to that later on in our study. But this is another step in his understanding and it's significant that the first verse of the chapter there says, after this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the sea of Tiberias and he revealed himself in this way. John is emphasizing for us that the initiative here is with Jesus. He didn't just come and then the experience was that the disciples themselves sought him out and actually made an effort to find out who this was. This is all about Jesus revealing himself again to the disciples. This is all about Jesus adding to what they already know about him, adding a further dimension to their knowledge because this is him now risen from the dead, actually speaking with them and dealing with them and adding to all that they had experienced before he actually died as Peter himself here will learn as well.

And what they're going to learn here as we'll see is that the same Jesus who was with them in the little boat as they experienced that miracle that you find in Luke chapter 5 is actually still with them to work as miracles, but he's no longer in the boat with them. He's now standing at a distance from them, but it's the same person with the same effects, with the same power, with the same insight as they previously knew him to be. And we'll see why that's important. But first of all, John tells us about this unsuccessful fishing trip that Peter and his disciples, his fellow disciples took at this occasion. Peter said to them, I'm going fishing.

[6 : 44] They said, we will go with you. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Now that seems a bit odd to begin with because they knew that Jesus was risen from the dead. They had come to that knowledge. They knew the tomb had been empty of his body. He had come actually to reveal himself to them before this. And yet, why is it here that Peter says, I'm going fishing? Well, some commentators say that Peter was really just at this point so despondent, having done what he had done, and here without Jesus being present, that he was just turning away from the exercise, the responsibilities of his discipleship, as if he was just saying, well, that's it, I'm giving up. I'm just going back. I'm going back to my fishing. I don't want this discipleship, this following of Jesus, and this being a disciple in the way that he's called me to be. Now, it's surely not that.

Jesus had said to them to come and to wait for him, that he would meet with them, and that he would actually meet with them here in Galilee. So they knew that Jesus would be true to his promise. But there's an element particularly here of something that you might say is frustration. Jesus is not here. They've been waiting for him. He's not appeared. Where's he gone? They don't know where he is. They previously experienced him with them. They were walking with them. He was walking with them. They were able to actually see him physically. They knew his voice. They were experienced of his, they knew his teaching.

They were used to his teaching of them. All of that took place while he was physically present with them and near them, and they formed a group around them. But that's gone. That's no longer the case. And the same as there's something there of an element of frustration with Peter that he's not here. So he might as well at least meantime go and do something he knows how to do very well.

So he says, I'm going fishing. Of course, well, they had to eat anyway. They had to get some food, and maybe that's just a simple answer to it. But nevertheless, there seems an element of frustration there. So maybe it's just filling in time. And we can say that there's something in that for ourselves as well. Because sometimes we feel that God at times delays in revealing himself to us.

We've been praying for something in particular. God has laid it on our hearts. Maybe it's someone in particular we're praying for tonight, and nothing's happened. And maybe we've been praying for a long time for this, and still nothing's happened. We don't see anything really happening, nothing different in their lives. We may be praying for their conversion. We may be praying for their healing. We may be praying for some of the other specific things with regard to certain people. And the Lord seems to delay an answer. He seems as if he's still far away. He's not present. He's not revealing himself. And that's when frustration can kick in. We're all human, even as Christians, at the end of the day. And it's a real challenge to us, isn't it? Sometimes they are a real test to our faith, these incidents, where we have to wait for a time before God reveals himself.

[10:14] It's really testing us, as he did with the people of Israel, as he tells us in the Old Testament many times that he reminded the people of Israel that his delays, if you like to call it that, were actually there to test them. And they were tested as to whether they would still remain obedient to him. Would they be true to his directions, to his commands? Or would they just find the time so long that they would just go aside and start doing other things? Maybe tonight God is testing you like that. Maybe you're experiencing something of that kind of delay, and God revealing himself to you. Maybe you've been praying for yourself. You want to be a Christian. You want to be a Christian more fully, more assuredly in your heart, and you're not getting this assurance that you're looking for. Maybe you want to do something more for the Lord, and you're waiting for the Lord to reveal himself to you as to what that might be. And so far it's not happened. Well, these times of testing are so that we will continue really to wait believingly upon him, and still place all our trust in his word, because that will not fail. We're not going to fall back on our own perception of things, and how we ourselves ideally would have things to work out. We still have to wait upon the Lord, and keep praying, and keep coming to worship him, and keep up our relationship personally with Christ.

But then they caught nothing. We will go with you, they said. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Now, this wouldn't be due to a lack of skill or a lack of knowledge on their part. Peter and his companions, who were so used to fishing, that was their trade before Jesus called them into following him as disciples. They had the skills, they had the knowledge, they knew the whereabouts of fish. They could actually use their expertise and their skills in that way.

But they had no success that night. They caught nothing. And you have to put that along with what follows, and see it in the light of what follows. Because what Jesus is really drawing their minds to, and Peter's mind is going to be very much in the leadership of the church after Pentecost, as you see in the book of Acts, he's really preparing them for that. He's preparing them for mission. And to be prepared for mission, they have to absolutely be convinced that nothing of their own skills, nothing of their own expertise, nothing of their own knowledge is going to be sufficient to really make a success of gospel ministry. It has to be the power of Jesus. It has to be Christ himself that changes people's lives, or else they will not be changed in the proper way.

As I look over this congregation tonight, I see many gifts, and many gifts, and many skills, and many qualities.

And as has been seen over the last year, I know it goes back further than that, but since I've come amongst you, I've seen that at work. I've seen these gifts put to work. They're still being put to work.

[13 : 34] These skills are actually being developed by so many of you for the gospel. And so many people are doing so many good things for the gospel in the name of Christ. Now we want to add to that. We want to those who are not yet fully involved in all of that to use your skills for the gospel, to use them in the service of Jesus, to ask yourself, as I must ask myself, what more can I do to add to the work of the kingdom of Christ in Stornway Free Church? But the one thing I must never do as a preacher of the gospel as your minister, the same that you must never do, is depend upon whatever skills God has given us as he has gifted you abundantly. Gospel success uses our gifts, but does not depend on these gifts for success. That comes from the power of Christ. And there's the second challenge, if you like. As we use our gifts for the Lord, let's always accompany that with earnest prayer that Jesus would reveal himself through them, that Jesus would come and use the power that he used here in the experience of these disciples, and take whatever contribution we have to the cause of Christ, and make that effective, whether it's with young people, with children, with infants, with older people, whether it's in Cabber Faith, or in women's meetings, or in parent and toddler, whatever aspects of the work we're involved in, and think about even if we're not involved with, pray that God, through his Holy Spirit, will bless and use these skills of people that he's given to people.

Because that is what we want to see. There are so many challenges to us out there tonight. Challenges from secularism, challenges from other forms of belief, challenges from people who don't really acknowledge to have any kind of belief at all. They're not even secularists or humanists, they're just simply nothing at all. But they don't like the gospel, and they don't want the gospel, though they need the gospel. There are so many challenges that come to confront us as we seek to serve the Lord. And as we face those challenges, be sure of this, only the power of Christ can intervene to actually make our witness to be a success, spiritually a success, success in the eyes of God.

We're not talking just now about filling up all these empty pews, and thankfully there aren't that many of them, though there are some. Of course we want to see that. But we want to see that filled by the power of Christ, not by human philosophy or human gimmicks. We want to see these filled with people who have been touched by the Holy Spirit, who have been visited by God, to whom Jesus has revealed himself, at least to this extent, that he's laid upon their hearts that they need to be saved, that they are sinners who are lost without Jesus. That might sound old-fashioned gospel stuff, but that's what the gospel is. We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe in conversions. We believe in people being born again. But everything we do must itself be tailored in a way that really is convinced that that's where the power must come from, that Jesus alone can change lives. I know we all believe this, but let's avoid the danger or give in to the kind of thing that you see elsewhere, where things other than the gospel itself and the preaching of the gospel and witness to the gospel and the part of God's people, where these are substituted, because that too, you see, can come from frustration. They're waiting here for Jesus to appear, and he's been a long time.

They feel that he hasn't revealed himself to them. Where is he? We long for the days when more power, spiritual power will be present in our congregation here and other congregations as well. And while we're waiting, the tendency or the temptation rather is that we would just divert our attention to try other things.

Things which would not necessarily fit very easily with the gospel and with the teaching of God's word and the principles of how we do our service for Christ. There's only one thing going to change people's lives, and that's Christ.

[18 : 33] That's the Holy Spirit. And that's above everything else what we have to pray for. That the Holy Spirit would bless his word. That Christ would be present through that spirit to everyone who comes in that door.

And every other church where the gospel is maintained, and even where it isn't. That night they caught nothing. Jesus is preparing them for a gospel ministry that can only be successful by the power of the gospel ministry that can only be successful.

That's what you and I have to depend upon as well. So from the unsuccessful fishing, we come to the way to success.

See here, as the day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore. Yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. And the way that John speaks here, just as the day was breaking, it really fits in with the whole idea of Jesus revealing himself to them.

There's a sense in which as the day was breaking, as the dawn came, as the light became clearer, then they were able to see more clearly who this person was. But that's not really what convinced them that it was Jesus.

[19 : 57] It was only after they performed this miracle that they knew it was indeed Jesus. In other words, John is really alluding here in the use of this imagery as the day was breaking, to Jesus revealing himself.

And what I mean by that is that the more clearly you and I perceive and see Jesus, the more light, if you like, we get on our relationship to Christ and on Christ himself, on his suitability, on his beauty, on everything about him as our Savior, the more we're in a position then to really apply all of that to our relationship to Christ and to one another.

We need to know more of this Jesus. We need to pray that he will reveal himself to us bit by bit, more and more, that our understanding will increase. That's what a gospel congregation really is committed to, a gospel congregation like you undoubtedly are.

Committed to Jesus revealing himself more and more to us. And that's how it is in our personal life too, isn't it? Because our personal lives as Christians, they're all about Jesus being central to that life, our relationship to him being central to that life.

But when we come to know him for the first time savingly, you don't want to leave it at that. You want more light on this relationship. You want to know himself better.

[21 : 26] So you come to the means that he has given you to do that. You go to pray to him. You read the Bible. You study the Bible. You read books that explain the Bible. You attend gospel services. You come to the prayer meeting.

You ask others. You engage in Christian fellow. All of the things that are advantages to us. What's it all about? It's about the day breaking more and more in our experience.

It's about Jesus revealing himself to us increasingly as we go on in life. So that's surely one of your own concerns tonight, isn't it?

To know him better. To know him more fully. For him to reveal more in your own soul of who he is, what you mean to him and what he means to you.

And how you will serve him and how you will engage more in that service than presently perhaps you're able to do. And then it's Jesus on the shore.

[22 : 29] We've called our study the stranger on the shore. And that's really what he is at this point. They don't know that it's Jesus. He calls out to them and asks them, have they caught anything?

But, you know, we have to compare this with the first miracle of a similar kind in Luke chapter 5. Now this is very like that incident, but it's not the same incident.

That was before he had died. This is after he has risen from the dead. It's the same Jesus, yet it's different.

He's not now in the boat with them. He's now on the shoreline at a distance. And what that's really conveying to them and conveying to us tonight as well is the same Jesus who occupied that little boat with them and actually taught them there and then taught them his miraculous power by catching this huge catch of fish in Luke chapter 5.

That's the same Jesus. One of the great doctrines of the faith is that the person of Jesus has not changed even though he has died and risen from the dead.

[23 : 46] It's the same person with the same qualities. And he's left nothing behind when he died and rose again from the dead of his qualities.

Indeed, what he's now showing the disciples is that he's not going to be with them physically anymore. They have to learn to get on without his physical presence.

But he's going to be the same Savior and Lord with the same power and the same ability on their side and for their help that they knew before he actually died.

And if you go back to chapter 16 of John, you can see actually how he himself said that this would in fact be better for them. Just follow me through to John 16 and in verses 7 to 11, you'll see what Jesus is saying there.

He's been talking to them about him going and they're asking various questions. But he says in verse 5 there, none of you is asking me where I'm going, but because I've said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

[24 : 58] They're really sad that he has said to them that he's leaving them, he's going. They don't yet understand this. Then he says, nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away.

For if I do not go away, the helper or the comforter, you could translate that, will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

Concerning sin because they do not believe in me. Concerning righteousness because I go to the Father and you will see me no longer. Concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged.

That's the impact of the gospel. That's what Jesus is talking about. But he's talking about that in relation to the Holy Spirit who will come and convict the world of these things.

He is Christ's replacement. Although Christ is working through the Holy Spirit and the mystery of the Godhead where you find the three persons.

[26 : 02] But what he's saying is, it's actually better for you that I go away. You know, tonight you might be saying to yourself, If only Jesus walked in here physically and sat down here at the front and turned around and spoke to me and I could see him, How much better that would be than what it is now when I cannot see him physically.

Well, Jesus is saying, you're mistaken. I've given you something better even than my physical presence. That is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The power of God through the Holy Spirit. Christ's own presence through the Holy Spirit. That's our great advantage tonight. That we have the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised. Do we really believe that?

Are we really convinced of that? That God has endowed his church with the Holy Spirit for our sanctification.

For our comfort, for our help, for our guidance, for our empowerment in whatever we do and seek to do for him. And then when you go to the next fishing expedition that Peter was involved in, If you turn briefly over to Acts and chapter 2 and at verse 14.

[27 : 31] This is, of course, just immediately after the Holy Spirit of God has come and descended upon the gathered church there with a sound like a mighty rushing wind and spoken in all these tongues to the people who were present from all these different parts and they were hearing in their own language.

This is a really definitive, once-for-all act of God bestowing the Holy Spirit on his church in the New Testament age. And then Peter, verse 14, Standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them.

And then you have a summary, at least, of his sermon. In other words, he's casting the gospel net.

Just as Jesus said, Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men. Remember, he learned, he experienced these miracles in Luke 5 and John 21.

And here he is, now that Christ is gone and the Holy Spirit has come. He's coming to preach this incredible sermon. And then if you look at verse 41, you'll see the intake.

[28 : 44] So those who received his word were baptized. And there were added that day about 3,000 souls. That's gospel success.

3,000 souls added on that one occasion to the believing church of God. Who's at the forefront of that gospel ministry?

Who's cast the net? It's Peter. What has the net taken in? An abundant catch of 3,000 souls. How has it come about? Through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But, of course, in the course of his sermon, he actually tells the people that this Jesus, in verse 32, God raised up.

And of all that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from God the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he, Jesus, has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

[29 : 50] Now you see how that ties in with our study this evening. The power of Christ as it works through the Holy Spirit is the power that converts souls. That's the great intake. That's the power that brings the spiritual fish into the net as the gospel net is spread in the preaching of the gospel, in the witness of God's people.

And that's the success that was anticipated in the miracle on the lake here, as all these fish were taken in, where previously, moments before, there had been none.

And so you find, as it goes on, that Jesus asks the question, Children, do you have any fish? Well, the word children perhaps isn't the best translation.

Literally, it would mean something like, Lads, have you caught any fish? The answer to that is no. He told them to cast on the right side of the ship, of the boat, and you'll find some.

So they did so. And now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of fish. And what we're really interested in is many points that we could pick up by the time it's gone, but we're really going to focus just on Peter's reaction.

[31 : 03] The Lord, sorry, the beloved disciple, we take that to be John, he said to Peter, It is the Lord. And you can just imagine this excitement as they realized, as he realized who had brought this about.

And I'm sure memories of the previous incident in Luke 5, that would have come flooding to his mind. And this, again, reminded him of all of that miracle.

And here is Jesus having brought this about. It is the Lord. You just imagine, he probably shouted that out. It's the Lord! To Peter.

And Peter, when he heard it, the moment he heard it, he threw himself into the sea. Aye, yes, that's Peter.

He ran to the tomb to see indeed if Jesus' body was still there or not. And as soon as he hears and realizes this is the Lord, what does he do?

[32 : 04] Well, he's been stripped for work for his fishing, but now that he hears this is the Lord and knows this is the Lord, he puts on his outer garment again. He throws himself into the sea, and he really is saying to himself, Now that I know that it's you, Lord, I just can't wait to get to you.

He is that excited and that eager to just get from where he is to where the Lord is on that shore. If only I had come to church tonight with that level of excitement at meeting Jesus.

Because it's the same situation in this sense, the same Jesus who stood on the shore and spoke to them and brought about this miracle. He's present here tonight.

He's present here in the Holy Spirit. He's present here in the Gospel message. He's offering himself in the Gospel. He's here so that you and I can have the privilege of meeting with him. Did we run to church spiritually?

Did I come with an anticipation of meeting Christ in a way that excited my very soul? I hope you did more than I did because I would have loved to have had more of that in my own soul.

[33 : 29] to come and realize that I was going to really go to a place where Jesus met with his people. And that's surely how we would like to come to church and even come to our private devotions.

To really capture, first of all, the words of John, it is the Lord. That's why we're here. It's the Lord. It's the Lord's place where he's worshipped. It's the Lord's presence where we know his presence.

And because it is the Lord and because we're convinced it is the Lord and that the Lord is here, oh, how my heart and your heart should be pounding as we anticipate what it means to meet with King Jesus.

because it's no ordinary meeting. And perhaps my problem, as it may be your problem, is that we're too familiar with it.

It's become too matter-of-fact for us. It's become too ordinary. And we've lost that sense to an extent of excitement.

[34 : 38] Well, maybe you haven't. I hope you haven't. But if we have, let's try and recapture it and seek from the Lord himself that he will reveal himself more to us so that we come to that point like Peter where we just throw ourselves towards meeting him.

And where nothing, nothing is of greater importance to us than actually getting to where Jesus is and having him again come to reveal himself to me.

And of course they caught that huge catch of fish, 153. We read later on in verse 11. Why is it mentioned? 153.

Why is John being so precise? A lot of people have really tried to make all sorts of reasons as to why that's mentioned and built doctrines even out of it.

Well, it seems really that it's just very simply an account of how many fish there were so that we can appreciate something of how astounded they were not only at the extent of the catch but that the net was not torn.

[35 : 51] And we don't want to push things too far spiritually but you know that's also true in a spiritual way. Are we somewhat afraid tonight of catching large numbers of fish for God?

Are we afraid of a large catch spiritually? Are we afraid some or do we shy away from fullness of blessing? Do we think that somehow it's not for a free church congregation to experience such fullness of blessing as would really touch our hearts so that we would more than we do be filled with a sense of excitement and joy and show it?

Or even on the other hand a sense of our own sinfulness and show it like Peter on another occasion depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord. We would weep over our sin and come to Christ for forgiveness.

Well the point is God's blessing even if it's full will never be too much for the nets that He's given us.

We have to be confident that what God has given us in terms of what we are as a congregation and what we do for Him is never going to be inadequate.

[37 : 12] to actually hold the catch of fish that we hope He will bring in. Let's not be afraid of a fullness of blessing of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit of God coming to reveal Himself more and more in this place and in your life.

Don't be put off by suggestions that somehow that would just be too much for you to handle too much for you to cope with and that you wouldn't really want it anyway.

It's just excessive. It's just fundamentalism. It's just not politically correct. Well the gospel is never politically correct.

God's blessing is never politically correct because God is God. what we want to see is God's power cutting across political correctness and all the other issues that we have in our society and bringing in such an abundance of souls into His kingdom that would transform our society locally and nationally into something that it isn't but could be and would be by Christ's miraculous power.

Don't take your eyes off that stranger on the shore but I hope for all of us here tonight that He's not a stranger that we're familiar with Him that He's my Savior and yours too.

[38 : 50] Let's pray. Gracious Lord we acknowledge how much Your Word contains for our instruction our guidance our comfort our assurance how much Your Word contains to to bring our pride into the dust how much Your Word contains to elevate us in humility and independence upon You.

Bless Your own Word we pray in our midst once again. Continue to bless it and to bless us through it. Grant that we may continue increasingly Lord to flourish for You in our own individual lives and in our life as a congregation.

We long Lord for the day when You will come to manifest even more of Your great power and quicken us and give us more of that power in ourselves and to see others coming also to speak of the great things God has done for them.

Hear us now we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, going to conclude our service this evening in Psalm 68. Psalm 68 notice the correction that's from your bulletin sheet.

It's Psalm 68 on page 303 and singing verses 18 to 20. Thou hast, O Lord, most glorious, ascended up on high, and in triumph victorious, led captivity.

[40 : 31] All the way through to verse 20. He of salvation is the God who is our God most strong and unto God the Lord from death the issues do belong.

verses 18 through to 20 of Psalm 68. Psalm 68 53 24 ■■■ ■■■ud■ ascended upon night, ■ triunt, victorious and Captain, captivity Thou hast received In gifts for men Hearts such as did we now Gave for them That called the Lord

In gifts of men Might dwell Blessed be the Lord Who is to us Of our salvation gone Who did he with His benefits As precious God The Lord The all salvation Is the God Who is our God Most strong And unto God The Lord From death The issues Do belong

I'll go to the main door This evening After the benediction Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and evermore Amen God God Father God God God God God God God