

CHURCH.

LESSON 46

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray and commit your group and this course on building Christ's Church to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] REVELATION 12 - 14
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Revelation 12 - 14).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [KEY VERSES IN JOHN] (19) JOHN 17:15
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Review two by two.

(19) John 17:15. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

4	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) [THE GOSPEL OF JOHN] JOHN 21:1-25
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Introduce. In John chapter 21 Jesus appears to seven of his disciples at the Sea of Galilee and reinstates Peter as apostle. Then the writer concludes the Gospel with a united testimony of a group of people with respect to the reliability of the things recorded in the Gospel of John.

STEP 1. READ.	GOD'S WORD
<i>Read.</i> LET US READ John 21:1-25 together. Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
<i>Consider.</i> WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART? <i>Record.</i> Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook. <i>Share.</i> (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)	

Discovery 1. The significance of the miracle of multiplying the fish.

In John 16:32 Jesus Christ had said, "A time is coming that you will be scattered, each to his own home" (and business.". After Jesus Christ had been crucified and resurrected, the disciples had given up their activities in the kingdom of God and had returned to their former occupations in order to gain a livelihood. Some of them had been fishermen and went fishing again. And so history repeated itself. Just like in Luke 5, these disciples battled all through the night to catch fish and they caught nothing! It is possible that their night-long failure was a revelation of God's displeasure with them for having neglected their work in the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, God still loved them and did not abandon them!

(1) The purpose of the miracle of multiplying fishes.

Early in the morning, Jesus Christ stood on the shore of the lake of Galilee, but due to the dawn or early morning mist, they could not recognise him. He called to them saying, "Fellows, you haven't anything to eat, have you?" Jesus knew that they had caught nothing, but still he asked this question in order to rivet their attention on the fact that their return to their former occupation (fishing) has been a complete failure. The disciples had failed to reckon sufficiently with God's plan for their lives. It was as if Jesus was saying to his disciples, "You have caught nothing at all, isn't it? Without me you can do nothing! (John 15:5)" Jesus Christ wanted his disciples to learn this lesson once for all: Without the Lord Jesus Christ, they could do nothing (that has everlasting significance), but with Jesus, his extraordinary plan for their lives would be fulfilled!

The disciples simply answered "No". Then Jesus said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find fish." The response of the disciples was very unusual. Experienced fishermen usually do not permit a perfect stranger to

give them directions and especially not about a trade they had practised all their lives! But because the tone of the stranger's voice was so compelling, they obeyed immediately. They caught so many fish that they continually struggled without success (imperfect tense) to haul the catch into the boat. They had to tow the net to the shore. Later they counted 153 large fish and yet the net did not tear. This passage describes a first miracle of a miraculous catch of fish!

The purpose of this miracle of multiplication of fish was twofold.

- The first purpose of the miracle was to open the eyes of the disciples so that they would see that by themselves they could accomplish nothing (John 15:5).
- The second purpose of the miracle was to strengthen the faith of the disciples in Jesus Christ and in his continued power and love for them!

What impresses me is that Jesus again and again enters into the specific circumstances of my life and gives me again and again a new chance, a new task and a new hope for my life! When he closes one door, he always opens another door (Revelation 3:7-8). When he finished writing the first chapter in my life, he begins to write the second chapter. "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of ministry, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living Good, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:2-3).

(2) The possible symbolic meaning of this miracle.

The Bible does not ascribe any meaning to the number "153" fish. If there were any symbolic meaning attached to this number, it must bear some relation to the subject matter in the context. It probably pointed to the fact that the disciples would make a great catch of new believers in Jesus Christ through their preaching and teaching (Matthew 4:19; 24:14).

If there were any symbolic meaning attached to the fact that the net did not tear, it must mean that "the net of the gospel" would never tear, no matter how many converts it catches! There is no limit to the number of converts the gospel will bring into God's kingdom (Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9)!

If there were any symbolic meaning attached to the fact that the disciples could not haul the great catch of fish into Peter's boat, it simply means that no sheepfold is large enough to accommodate all the sheep in the Good Shepherd's flock (John 10:3-16). No congregation or church denomination is large enough to accommodate all the Christians in the kingdom of God in the world! All churches in the world need one another in order to accomplish the great commission!

Discovery 2. The significance of the miracle of multiplying one fish and one bread.

(1) The purpose of the miracle of multiplying one fish and one bread.

The disciple John usually understood something quicker than Peter and the disciple Peter usually acted quicker than John (cf. John 20:3-6). So when John realised that it was Jesus standing on the shore, he told Peter and Peter jumped into the lake to swim ashore, because he wanted to be the first to reach Jesus. The other disciples followed in the boat and towed the net full of fishes to the shore. When they landed they saw a fire of burning coals with fish (singular) lying on it as well as bread (singular).¹

If the words "fish" and "bread" in verse 9 and verse 13 have collective significance (pieces of fish and loaves of bread), then this passage does not describe a miracle, but an ordinary breakfast. Then Jesus asked the disciples to bring some of the fish they had just caught. But if these words have a singular significance, as they definitely have in verse 13 (one fish and one bread)², then what Jesus gave to them did not come from the fish which the disciples had caught! Then this passage describes a second miracle of multiplying one fish and one bread!

In John 6, Jesus Christ performed a miracle and fed five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish (John 6:11). In John 21 Jesus Christ invited seven hungry men to come and have breakfast with him from one flatbread and one fish, which he himself had provided before they had landed and which did not come from what the disciples had caught. He took of the flatbread and gave it to his disciples and he did the same with the fish. This is exactly what happened when Jesus fed the five thousand. Once more Jesus performed a miracle by sharing one fish and one bread among the hungry people present!

The purpose of this miracle of the multiplication of one loaf of bread and one fish was also twofold.

- The first purpose of the miracle was to remind the disciples that they had a calling and mission to fulfil, namely, not to be occupied with their former occupation (to be fishers of fish), but to proclaim the gospel and to make disciples in all the nations (to be fishers of men).
- The second purpose of the miracle was to remind them that it is always the Lord Jesus Christ who multiplies the number of converts and who gives spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 3:6)!

(2) The miracles are signs.

Both these miracles of multiplication have the features of "a sign", that is, a miracle with a message about who Jesus Christ is! The readers are given the impression that there is more than meets the eye, and the inner significance is

¹ Greek: opsarion epikeimenon kai arton.

² Greek: ton arton kai to opsarion

unfolded in the rest of the chapter. The miracles were parables of the missionary activity of the disciples in the time that lay ahead!

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in John 21:1-25 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

21:15-17

Question 1. Why does Jesus ask Peter three times whether Peter loves him?

Notes.

(1) The event in this chapter is the reversal of the event in which Peter had denied Jesus three times.

After the breakfast with the disciples was finished, Jesus Christ turned to Peter in order to publicly re-instate Peter into his office as apostle. He wanted to make known to the whole Church that he had forgiven Peter as well as the other disciples for denying him and for leaving him when he was tried and crucified. The circumstances and the words of Jesus had to remind Peter of the scene of his denial.

- It was at a charcoal fire in a courtyard that Peter had denied Jesus (John 18:18). Here was another charcoal fire on the beach where he was going to confess his love for Jesus.
- About ten days before this day, Peter had denied Jesus Christ three times by saying publicly that he did not know Jesus Christ (John 18:17,25,27). Now he was compelled to acknowledge and confess Jesus Christ three times by saying publicly that Jesus Christ was the Lord he loved.
- The prediction with reference to Peter's denial was introduced with the words "I tell you the truth" (Greek: amen, amen) (John 13:38). Now the prediction with reference to Peter's future death is again introduced with these same words (John 21:18).
- In John 13:36-38, Peter had vowed that he would follow Jesus and that he would lay down his life for Jesus, but Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times. The order was: to follow Jesus, to lay down his life for Jesus and nevertheless to deny Jesus.

In John 21:15-19, Jesus guided Peter to do the reverse: three times he has to affirm that he loved Jesus, and Jesus predicted how Peter would lay down his life for him and finally exhorted Peter to follow him. Now the order was: to confess Jesus, to lay down his life for Jesus and to continue to follow Jesus.

True discipleship does not happen by following Jesus Christ in the power of the flesh (the human will and human effort). True discipleship will happen when you affirm that Jesus is your first love (Revelation 2:4) and have counted the cost of following Jesus Christ, namely, to take up your cross *every day* (Luke 9:23; 14:25-30).

(2) Peter's boasting was turned into Peter's humility.

In Matthew 26:33, Peter boasted in the presence of all the disciples that even if they all would fall away from Jesus Christ, he, Peter, would never fall away! Peter had a completely inflated self-esteem and had placed himself above the other disciples. Therefore it was quite appropriate for Jesus to ask him if he loved Jesus *more than the other disciples!* Jesus gave Peter a chance to make a humble confession that he loved Jesus without comparing himself to the other disciples!

Jesus and Peter use two words for "love" in these verses.

- The first word means "to love self-sacrificially with your total personality, feelings and actions" (Greek: agapaó) (Mark 12:30-31).
- The second word means "to have a genuine affection" especially a subjective feeling of attachment to the other person (Greek: fileó).

The first time, Jesus literally asked "Do you truly love me with your entire person, with absolute devotion and self-sacrificially more than the other disciples?" But Peter was humbled when he remembered his former denial and saw that Jesus knew everything about him. So he used the other word for love and answered literally, "Yes, Lord, you know that I have a genuine affection for you (I like you)."

The second time, Jesus once more literally asked, "Do you truly love me with your entire person, with absolute devotion and self-sacrificially?" But Peter still did not dare to affirm that he had this highest kind of love (Greek: agapé) for Jesus Christ. So he answered literally, "Yes, Lord, you know that I have genuine affection (Greek: filia) for you"

The third time, Jesus Christ descended to the level of Peter and used the same word Peter used for love and literally asked, "Do you have genuine affection for me (Do you like me)?" Peter was deeply grieved, because it seemed as if Jesus called in question even his subjective attachment to Jesus. Nevertheless, Peter had learned his lesson and

remained humble. He did not dare to appeal to anything in himself anymore. Within his heart, Peter was convinced that he had this humbler kind of love for Jesus Christ and that Jesus was able to realise that. So he answered literally, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I have genuine affection for you (You know that I like you).”

(3) Peter was restored with honour.

Three times Jesus repeated his commission to Peter:

- “Feed (graze) (Greek: boskó) my lambs”
- “Shepherd (Greek: poimainó) my sheep”
- “Feed (Greek: boskó) my sheep.”

All three verbs are in the imperative mood, present continuous tense and active voice.

This does not refer to three different groups of believers in the Church, for example, little children, adults and young people. Rather the different terms refer to *the same flock* of the Good Shepherd, but this flock is *viewed from two different aspects*.

- Believers and their children are first looked upon as “lambs”. They are immature, weak and helpless. They need to be fed with the strengthening food of the Word.
- Secondly, they are looked upon as “sheep”. They are prone to wander away from the shepherd and are dependent on a good shepherd for everything. Hence, they need to be shepherded, that is, they need to be protected, led, fed, rested and cared for with tender love.

After many years of service, the apostle Peter remained humble and continued to acknowledge Jesus Christ as “the Chief-Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4; cf. John 10:11-16) and “the Overseer (Greek: bishop) of the souls of all believers” (1 Peter 2:25). The leaders of the Christian Church (the elders) are nothing more than “under-shepherds” under the Chief-Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4; cf. Ezekiel 34:1-24).

21:18-19

Question 2. What did Jesus say about the future of the apostle Peter?

Notes.

(1) Jesus made a prediction about how Peter would die.

After restoring Peter to his office as apostle, Jesus predicted how Peter would lay down his life for Christ. Jesus first spoke about Peter when he was “younger”. He was then probably quite an independent man, who did what he pleased. “He dressed himself and went where he wanted”.

Jesus said these things about Peter during his seventh appearance in the year A.D. 30. Peter was then probably middle-aged and older than John.

Then Jesus spoke about Peter: “When you are old.” There comes a time in the life of Peter that he would stretch out his hands and another would dress him and lead him to a place where he did not want to go. The apostle John said that Jesus said this in order to indicate how Peter would glorify him in his death. When the Gospel of John was written between A.D. 70 and 98 Peter had already died and it was known how Peter had died. Although the Bible does not tell us how Peter died, the ancient Church History recorded the following: “Peter preached the gospel to the Jews in the dispersion, especially in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Finally, he went to Rome and during the great persecution (of Christians) under the emperor Nero in A.D. 64, Peter was crucified head downward”.

(2) Jesus taught Peter to follow him in every circumstance of life.

When Jesus had finished making this prediction, he said to Peter, “Follow me!” Whatever will happen in the future, Peter must *now in the present* be a disciple and apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and as such follow him in service, in suffering and finally in death.

21:19-23

Question 3. What did Jesus say about the future of the apostle John?

Notes.

(1) Jesus did not make a prediction about the death of John.

As Jesus walked away with Peter, John followed them. Peter saw this and asked Jesus about the future of John. Jesus replied, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me (a command).” Because John was still alive when these words were written (between A.D. 70-98), some Christians were speculating whether the apostle John would remain alive until the second coming of Jesus Christ. If John had not been alive when these words were written, this would of course no longer have been a misunderstanding with some Christians. Jesus did not intend to say that the apostle John would remain alive on earth until the second coming. What was then the meaning of Jesus’ answer to Peter?

(2) Jesus taught that Peter should not occupy himself with God’s hidden will.

Jesus Christ said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?” The Lord Jesus Christ had his own plan for his disciple John, but that was not the apostle Peter’s business to know! John may have to suffer a martyr’s

death or he may live on until the Lord's second coming. Peter does not need to know! Jesus Christ did *not* reveal his hidden will to John and also not to Peter! What is important is not curiosity about the future, but obedience to the Lord's command in the present: "Follow me!" Feed my lambs!" Take care of (shepherd) my sheep!" Feed my sheep!" Peter should occupy himself, not with God's hidden will with regard to the future off people, but with God's revealed will for people! It is none of Peter's business to interfere or meddle with Jesus' plan for John. It is his business to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and to be faithful to his own calling and commission.

Also Christians should not occupy themselves with things, which Jesus Christ had not revealed to them. Instead, they should occupy themselves with God's revealed plan in the Bible. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29)! There is still very much work to be done!

- There is a world full of people that must hear the Good news (Matthew 24:14)!
- people in all the nations in the world must be made disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19)
- Millions of poor and destitute people must be fed and cared for.

Peter and all Christians should rivet their attention on that task! There are times when our questions are illegal and improper! Questions about God's eternal and hidden will are always illegal and improper!

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from John 21:1-25.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application. (Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from John 21:1-25.

- 21:3. Peter returned to his previous occupation: he went fishing. Whenever you do not know what to do, go and do the last clear command of Jesus Christ. Someone said, "Never doubt in the dark what God said to you in the light!"
- 21:4. Realise that Jesus Christ may sometimes come to meet you and that you may not immediately recognise him.
- 21:6. If you trust Jesus Christ, then do what he says. You will never be disappointed that you obeyed!
- 21:12. Never be afraid to ask Jesus Christ the question "Who are you?" It is only when you seek that you will find, and when you ask that you will receive (Matthew 7:7-8).
- 21:14. The Bible records all the important times that Jesus Christ appeared to people after his resurrection from the dead. No other religious leader died to make atonement for the sins of his people. No other religion contains any historical evidence that their religious leader was resurrected from the dead! And there is no historical proof that such a religious leader appeared to people after his death! The resurrection from the dead and the appearances of Jesus thereafter are absolutely unique in world history!
- 21:15-16. How would you answer the question of Jesus, "Do you truly love me?"
- 21:15-17. One of the most important tasks in God's kingdom is shepherding the sheep.
- 21:18. Even when others lead you to where you do not want to go, Jesus Christ will be present (Matthew 28:20).
- 21:19. The business of all Christians is to follow Jesus Christ.
- 21:22. Christians should not occupy themselves with God's unrevealed will, but rather with God's revealed will.

2. Examples of personal applications from John 21:1-25.

I learn from Peter's first lesson to only make realistic and sincere statements about myself. An inflated self-esteem is pride and pride comes before the fall.

I learn from Peter's second lesson not to occupy myself with God's hidden will, but only with God's revealed will in the Bible! And then to invest all my energy and time to follow Jesus Christ!

STEP 5. PRAY.

RESPONSE

LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in John 21:1-25. (Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

5

PRAYER (8 minutes)

**[INTERCESSION]
PRAY FOR OTHERS**

Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray with one another for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

(*Group leader.* Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the Bible study of John 21 together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of **Revelation 15 – 18** each day. Make use of the favourite truth method or questions method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse. (20) **John 18:36.**
Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
6. Update your notebook on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.