

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will do Bible study together from John chapter 21. We will use “the five steps” method of Bible study. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. You may join our Bible study every week by preparing for the next Bible study. You may also gather a few people around you and use this method of studying the Bible together. Doing Bible study together with a few other Christians is one of the best ways to grow to maturity as a Christian.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read John chapter 21 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read John chapter 21 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in John chapter 21. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is about the significance of the first miracle in which Jesus multiplies the catch of fish.

First. The disciples returned to their former occupations.

After Jesus had been crucified and resurrected, the disciples had to gain a livelihood. Some of them had been fishermen, and so they went fishing again. On the basis of John 16:32, the idea that Peter and even the other disciples had for the time being given up their kingdom-activities and had returned to their former occupations, cannot be entirely dismissed. 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 kingdom-work. Nevertheless, God still loved them!

Second. The disciples failed to reckon with God’s plan for their lives.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, 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 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!” Jesus Christ wanted his disciples to learn this lesson once for all: Without the Lord Jesus Christ, they could do nothing, but with him, his extraordinary plan for their lives would be fulfilled!

Third. The eyes of the disciples were opened by a miracle.

The disciples simply answered “no”, they had caught no fish. 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 have 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. Later they counted 153 large fish and yet the net did not tear. This was a miracle! *The purpose of this miracle of multiplication was to open the eyes of the disciples so that they could see that by themselves they could accomplish nothing, but also to strengthen their faith in Jesus Christ, 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 task and a new hope for my life!

Fourth. The probable symbolism of the miracle.

The Bible does not ascribe any meaning to the number of fish. If there was any symbolic meaning attached to this number, it must bear some relation to the subject matter in the context. It probably pointed to the great catch of converts to Jesus Christ through the missionary efforts of the apostles. If there was 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! If there was any symbolism attached to the fact that the disciples could not haul the great catch of fish into Peter’s boat, then it simply means that no fold is large enough to accommodate all the sheep in the Good Shepherd’s flock (Jn 10:3-16); No church is large enough to accommodate all the Christian converts coming into God’s kingdom.

(T) An important truth for me is about the significance of the second miracle in which Jesus multiplies the bread and fish they ate.

First. John was usually quicker than Peter to understand. Peter was usually quicker than John to act.

So when John realised that it was Jesus who did this miracle, 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 fish to the shore. When they landed they saw a fire of burning coals *with fish lying on it as well as bread.*

Second. The fish and bread on the fire is a second miracle.

Some Christians think that the words “fish” and “bread” in verse 9 and verse 13 are collective and refer to several fish and pancakes of bread. They do not regard this passage as a miracle, but as an ordinary breakfast. They also refer to the fact that Jesus asks the disciples to also bring some of the fish they had just caught (vs 10). Other Christians think that the words “fish” and “bread” in verse 9 and verse 13 are singular and refer to just one fish and one bread. Jesus did not use the plural “loaves of bread and fishes” as he did in John 5:8-11. These Christians, including myself, regard this passage as a second miracle. Jesus gave his disciples bread and fish that did not from the fish that they had just caught!

Jesus invited his disciples to come and have breakfast with him from the one fish and one bread that he provided. He took of the bread and gave it to his disciples and he did the same with the fish. This is exactly what happened when Jesus fed the great multitude of five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish (6:11)! Once more Jesus performed a miracle, multiplied the one bread and the one fish so that there was enough food for all of them!

Third. The purpose of this miracle of the multiplication of the one bread and one fish

was to remind the disciples that they had received a calling and mission to fulfil and Jesus would provide for them. The disciples of Jesus Christ were called to be apostles, proclaim the gospel everywhere in the world and make disciples in every nation of the world. They should not occupy themselves with their former occupations anymore. This miracle was also a reminder that it is always the Lord Jesus Christ who multiplies the numbers of converts and who gives spiritual growth in any church!

Fourth. Both these miracles of multiplication are signs.

They point to the reality and authority of Jesus Christ. And they point to the fact that Jesus was going to use his disciples in his task to shepherd his sheep. It is a parable of the missionary activity of the disciples in the time that lies ahead!

(S) STEP 3. QUESTION

Let us try to understand all the truths in John chapter 21 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. “Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?” Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (21:15-17). Why does Jesus ask Peter three times if Peter loves him?

(T) One. The things that happens in this chapter is a reversal of the things that happened when Peter denied Jesus. After the breakfast with the disciples was finished, Jesus turned to Peter in order to publicly re-instate Peter into his office as his apostle. He wanted to make known to the whole Church that he had forgiven Peter and the other disciples for denying him and for leaving him when he was arrested. The circumstances and words of Jesus must remind Peter of the scene of his denial. It was at a charcoal fire that Peter had denied Jesus (18:18) and here was another charcoal fire where he was going to confess his love for Jesus. Peter had denied Jesus three times (18:17,25,27) and now he must acknowledge him three times as the Lord he loves. The prediction with reference to Peter’s denial was introduced with the words “I tell you the truth” (G: amen, amen)(13:38) and now the prediction with reference to Peter’s future death is again introduced with these same words (21:18). In John 13:36-38, Peter had vowed that he would follow Jesus, that he would lay down his life for Jesus. But Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times. In John 21:15-19, Jesus guided Peter to do the reverse: three times he had to affirm that he loved Jesus. And Jesus predicted how Peter would lay down his life. Finally Jesus exhorted Peter to follow him.

Two. Peter’s boasting is turned into Peter’s humility.

In Matthew 26:33, Peter had said, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” Peter had boasted that even if all the other disciples would fall away from Jesus, because they were repelled by what was happening to him, he 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 now gives Peter a chance to make his confession in front of the other disciples.

Two words are used for *love* in these verses. The first word means *self-sacrificial love* (G: agape) and the second means *affection or liking* (G: filia). The first time, Jesus asked “Do you truly love me with your entire person, with absolute

devotion and self-sacrificially more than the other disciples”? And Peter, humbled by the memory of his fall, cast himself on the penetrating knowledge of Jesus and used the other word for love. He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I like you.” The second time, Jesus again asked, “Do you truly love me with your entire person, with absolute devotion and self-sacrificially?” And Peter still did not dare to affirm that he had this higher kind of love for Jesus. He answered, “Yes, Lord you know that I like for you.” The third time, Jesus descended to the level of Peter and used the same word that Peter used for love and asked, “Do you like me?” And Peter was deeply grieved, because it seemed as if Jesus called in question the fact that he liked Jesus. Peter had learned his lesson. He did not dare to appeal to anything in himself. Within his heart, Peter was convinced that he had this humbler love for Jesus and Jesus must have been able to realise that. So he answered, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I like you.”

Three. Peter is restored in his mission.

Three times Jesus repeated his commission to Peter: “Feed my lambs”, “Take care of my sheep”, and “Feed my sheep.” This does not refer to three different groups of people in the church, for example, little children, adults and young people. The terms rather 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 Bible. Then they are looked upon as *sheep*. They are prone to wander and are dependent in everything. That is why they need to be shepherded, that is, to be protected, led, fed, rested and cared for with tender love.

2nd Question. (21:18-19). What did Jesus say about the apostle Peter’s future?

(S) After restoring Peter to his mission, Jesus predicted how Peter would die. He said that when Peter was *younger*, he dressed himself and went where he wanted. Jesus said this in the year 30 A.D. and at that time Jesus already regarded Peter as being *older*. Peter was probably middle-aged and older than John. When he was younger, he was probably quite an independent man, who did what he pleased. Jesus said that in his old age a moment would arrive when Peter would stretch out his hands and be led to a place where he did not want to go. And John said that Jesus said this in order to indicate how Peter would glorify God by his death.

When the Gospel of John was written about 70-98 A.D., Peter had already died and it was known how Peter had died. The Bible does not tell us how Peter died, but the ancient church history records that Peter preached the gospel to the Jews in the dispersion, especially in Asia Minor. At last he went to Rome and during the great persecution under the emperor Nero in 64 A.D., Peter was crucified upside down.

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

3rd Question. (21:19-23). What did Jesus say about the apostle John’s future?

(T) One. 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 John’s future. Jesus said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” Because John was still alive when these words were written, some Christians were speculating whether John would remain alive until the second coming of Jesus Christ. If John had not been alive, this would of course no longer have been a misunderstanding with some Christians. Jesus did not intend to say that John would indeed remain alive on earth until the second coming.

Two. Jesus taught that Peter should not occupy himself with God’s secret plan.

What was then the meaning of the answer of Jesus to Peter? Jesus said, “*If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?*” Jesus told Peter that his business was to follow him and to be faithful to his own commission. The Lord had his own plan for his disciple John, but it is not necessary that Peter should know his plan! John might have to suffer a martyr’s death like Peter. Or he may live on until the second coming. But there can be no advance certainty of this even for John, still less for Peter. The Lord impressed on the mind of Peter the fact that curiosity about John’s future must make way for obedience to the Lord’s all-important command, “Follow me!” “Feed my sheep!” “Shepherd my sheep!” Instead of occupying himself with God’s unrevealed eternal plan, Peter and all Christians should occupy themselves with God’s revealed plan in the Bible! There is very much work to be done! There is a world to reach with the gospel! Peter and all Christians should rivet their attention on that task! There are times when questions are out of order! And questions about God’s eternal and unrevealed plan are always out of order!

(S) **STEP 4 and 5. APPLY and PRAY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*. Then take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in John chapter 21.

(T) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Make a commitment to do Bible study every week. Begin your own Bible study group. Prepare next week's Bible study. Read through the Gospel of John once more and make a summary of the Gospel of John with the help of the following questions:

1. Give a title to the Gospel of John.
2. Give titles and sub-titles to each chapter of the Gospel of John.
3. What are the most important doctrinal conclusions in the Gospel of John?
4. What are the most important practical lessons in the Gospel of John?
5. What do you think is the relevancy of the Gospel of John for our time and our community?
6. Give a presentation of one aspect of the Gospel of John to the group. How would you pass this truth on to others?

Various possibilities are. Explain a truth by means of a drawing or illustration. Give a short sermon on some truth to the group. Write a poem or compose a song and present it to the group. Write a short play or mime and show it to the group. Devise a quiz and carry it out within the group. Tell a short story or testimony that illustrates a truth in the Gospel of John. Next week we will make a summary of the Gospel of John.

Second. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".