



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

John 21:1-14 New American Standard Bible April 8, 2018

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, April 8, 2018**, is from **John 21:1-14**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(John 21:1) After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way.

When Jesus began His public ministry, He went to the Sea of Galilee (also called the Sea of Tiberias) and called Simon (Peter) and Andrew to follow Him, saying He would teach them how to fish for people (see Mark 4:18-20). The ESV, the KJV, the NASB, and NRSV use “the Sea of Tiberias” in this verse. The Sea of Galilee was also called the Sea of Tiberias and the Lake of Gennesaret where Jesus later preached from a boat belonging to Simon and helped Simon, Andrew, James and John fill two boats full of fish, telling them that from now on they would fish for people (see John 6:1 and Luke 5:1-11). As John reports, after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples in Galilee just as He had told them He would (Mark 16:7). It is fitting that He would appear to them in a way similar to their first meeting and confirm that they were now ready to fish for people.

(John 21:2) Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.

Andrew was a partner with his brother Peter in their business of fishing, so he was probably present at this event; but, if so, he was unnamed (see Matthew 4:18). It seems appropriate that Thomas was present (“Didymus” means “Twin;” traditionally he came to be called “Doubting Thomas” — see John 20:24-29). Nathanael, from Cana, was the one who wondered that anything good could come from Nazareth (see John 1:45-49), so it is very interesting that he was present. James and John were the sons of Zebedee and were Simon’s fishing partners (see Matthew 10:2 and Luke 5:10). Philip was from Bethsaida as were Simon and Andrew, so he may have been a fisherman and may have been the other person present (see John 1:44). Though probable that Andrew and Philip were the “two other disciples,” that is still speculation.

(John 21:3) Simon Peter *said to them, “I am going fishing.” They *said to him, “We will also come with you.” They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

The disciples of Jesus had not yet received the “Great Commission” on the mountain in Galilee (see Matthew 28:16-20). Nor had they yet returned to Judea near Jerusalem where Jesus would ascend into heaven from a location near Bethany (see Luke 24:50-53). They were in Galilee where Jesus had instructed them to go (see Matthew 28:7-10). They were not just sitting around doing nothing while waiting for Jesus to appear as He promised. They were doing what they knew to do, which was fishing. They were meeting their daily needs and the needs of their families through their fishing occupation. They were safely away from the authorities in Jerusalem, who might have sought to kill them as followers of Jesus. They were awaiting further instructions from Jesus, and probably discussing all they had learned and experienced throughout Jesus’ public ministry with them as well as other appearances to them and others after His resurrection. Jesus gave them time to think things through together and come to a greater understanding of Him as He appeared to them at various times during forty days of appearances (see Acts 1:3). Jesus’ appearance to

them at the Sea of Galilee was untimed and unexpected by them. They never tried to bring Jesus back in some mystical manner. After Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to indwell them on the Day of Pentecost, He would live within them (and within all who believe in Him) in a closer relationship than when He walked with them in the world (see Colossians 1:27).

When Jesus met them for the first time and called them to be His disciples, they had caught nothing, so He showed them where to fish (Luke 5:5-6). Likewise, on this night, they had caught nothing, but they soon would with Jesus' help. Likewise, they would not be able to fish for people successfully without Jesus' help.

(John 21:4) But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

The disciples were not expecting to see Jesus. They were quite a distance from the shore (at that moment more than 100 yards) so they did not recognize Him in the morning light.

(John 21:5) So Jesus *said to them, “Children, you do not have any fish, do you?” They answered Him, “No.”

A voice will carry quite well over water, and Jesus would have had no problem speaking to them no matter how far away. In the Greek language, Jesus called them “children” (see also ESV, KJV, NASB, NRSV), which means small children who need to be taught and which can also refer to immature Christians. “Children” seems appropriate in this situation, but Jesus also called His disciples His “Friends.” In John 15:14-15, we read these words of Jesus: “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” They were His friends, and not knowing He was Jesus, the disciples in the boat obeyed Jesus' command (probably through the influence of the Holy Spirit).

(John 21:6) And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.” So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish.

At Jesus’ command, even the fish obeyed Him, and the disciples caught more fish than their net would usually be able to hold without tearing. Likewise, after they received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and began to fish for people, we are amazed at how many people came to believe in Jesus (“about three thousand,” see Acts 2:41).

(John 21:7) Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved *said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea.

The writer of the Gospel of John identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Knowing that Jesus loved all His disciples, he probably spoke this way as an expression of his humility, so as not to speak about himself by name with pride when he was involved in the narrative. Though John could not see to identify Jesus at that distance, he knew from the miracle (a miracle of Jesus that he had experienced at least once before) that the man on the shore was “the Lord” Jesus. Known for his eagerness, after putting on his outer garment, Peter jumped into the water and swam and/or waded to shore (probably not even thinking about the water’s depth or knowing it was shallow that close to shore). Because Peter had once walked on water, he knew Jesus could save him no matter what the water’s depth.

(John 21:8) But the other disciples came in the little boat, for they were not far from the land, but about one hundred yards away, dragging the net full of fish.

Since they could not haul the fish into the boat, they towed the net full of fish.

(John 21:9) So when they got out on the land, they *saw a charcoal fire already laid and fish placed on it, and bread.

Jesus had not been out fishing for fish. Jesus fished for people; therefore, as the Lord of creation, Jesus worked a second miracle in their presence. He had created a fire and burning coals, and He had also created the fish on the fire and the bread “out of nothing.” As with creation, He spoke them into existence.

(John 21:10) Jesus *said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have now caught.”

Jesus could have multiplied the fish and the bread that He had created; just as He had multiplied the fish and loaves to feed the thousands who came to hear Him teach (see Matthew 14:15-21). Whatever they did, Jesus wanted His disciples to obey Him and work with Him. The fish they had caught were important to Jesus and to them, and they had worked together to catch them. Jesus gave them a valuable practical and spiritual lesson.

(John 21:11) Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.

Though Peter had left His fellow fishermen to tow in the fish, he immediately obeyed the Lord Jesus before anyone else and dragged the net ashore. As commercial fishermen, they noted the number of large fish that were caught and marveled that with so many the net was not torn. On this morning, Peter demonstrated his desire to be with Jesus as soon as possible and to obey Jesus as quickly as possible. He became an example for all who would believe in and follow Jesus.

(John 21:12) Jesus *said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord.

Jesus knew about their labors of that night and early morning, and He was concerned about their physical and spiritual needs. If they were famished from hard work, they would not be able to concentrate on what He needed to teach them while and after they ate. Throughout His ministry, Jesus showed concern for the whole person, mentally, physically, emotionally,

and spiritually, and He did so here. In these early morning hours, the disciples knew by the way He spoke and acted that Jesus was alive from the dead and speaking to them once again.

(John 21:13) Jesus *came and *took the bread and *gave it to them, and the fish likewise.

Since Jesus was not a ghost, Jesus could personally and physically serve them by taking the bread and the fish and giving them their food. Notice: as King of kings, Jesus could have asked them to serve Him, that is the way of the world, but Jesus came as a servant and to give His life as a ransom for many. Earlier, Jesus had explained His relationship with them and how they should treat one another. In Matthew 20:25-28, we read: “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

(John 21:14) This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead.

The Gospel of John records three resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples. Before He appeared to His disciples, He appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18). On the evening of the first day of the week (on Resurrection Sunday), Jesus appeared to His disciples, but Thomas was not present (John 20:19-25). A week later (on Sunday), they were in the house again, when Thomas was present, and Jesus appeared to them again (John 20:26-29). Perhaps during these two appearances Jesus personally told them to go to Galilee. Jesus’ third appearance to them was in Galilee and likewise totally unexpected and perhaps on a Sunday (not the Jewish Sabbath). These three appearances to His disciples seemed the most important three for John to report. Indeed, John wrote: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his

name” (John 20:30-31).

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What reasons might Jesus have had for telling His disciples to go to Galilee where He would meet them?
2. Why do you think the disciples went fishing?
3. What do you think the disciples learned from their fishing experiences with Jesus?
4. How many times did Jesus appear to His disciples?
5. What fish did Jesus use to feed His disciples?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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Contact: P.O. Box 1052, Edmond, Oklahoma, 73083 and lgp@theiblf.com.