



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 21:9-19 Commentary New International Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

follow the verse-by-verse [*International Bible Study 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 Study 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 Study Forum*](#).

(John 21:9) When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus had not been out fishing for fish. Jesus fished for people; so, as the Lord of creation, Jesus worked a second miracle that morning in their presence. He created a fire and burning coals, then He created and cooked the fish on the fire where He also created and baked the bread “out of nothing.” As with all creation, Jesus spoke their breakfast into being. After fishing all night, Jesus knew His disciples were tired and hungry; so, even though He is the King of

the universe, Jesus helped them meet some of their most basic needs. As the King of the universe, He became their cook and server. Jesus did for them what He wanted them to do as Apostles—He “fed and tended His lambs.” The disciples were truly friends of Jesus, and He was truly their Friend. In John 15:13-15, Jesus had told them, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. [NOTE: They knew Jesus had laid down His life for them.] 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.” As their Friend, Jesus helped them catch fish and then He fed them breakfast. Any other king would have expected these disciples to wait on him and fix him breakfast even though they had been awake all night working hard to catch fish. Jesus is not and did not act like a mere human king, master, or leader. In Luke 17:7-8, Jesus described how someone might act like if they were a king, “Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink?’” Only God the King, only Jesus, would humble himself before His servants as Jesus served them.

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

Jesus could have multiplied the fish and the bread that He created; just as He had multiplied the fish and loaves to feed the thousands who came to hear Him teach (see John 6:1-15). Whatever they did, Jesus wanted His disciples to obey Him and work with Him as friends work together. The fish they had caught were important to Jesus and to them, and they had worked together to catch them as Jesus would always work with them forever. Jesus gave them a valuable practical and spiritual lesson. Remember, in John 6:12, after feeding five thousand people, Jesus commanded His disciples, “When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, ‘Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.’” Jesus did not want them to waste what they had caught, for the fish would be valuable to sell and feed their families after He left. Nor did He want them to expect Him to feed them without working as He commanded. Jesus taught them by word and example. Later, in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Paul reminded Christians, “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.’”

(John 21:11) So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

Though Peter had left His fellow fishermen to drag in the fish alone, he immediately obeyed the Lord Jesus before anyone else and hauled the net ashore. Jesus gave Peter

the strength he needed to do this alone, for John does not say anyone helped him. As fishermen, they noted the number of *large* fish that they caught and marveled that with so many their net was not torn. On this morning, Peter demonstrated his desire to be with Jesus as soon and as often as possible and to obey Jesus as quickly as possible. He became an example for all who will believe in and follow Jesus.

(John 21:12) Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew 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 His disciples were famished from hard work, they would not be able to concentrate on what He needed to teach them during their meal and after they ate. Throughout His ministry, Jesus showed concern for the whole person, mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and He did so here. Jesus is still concerned about all the needs of all His followers, and He meets them as He wisely can. In the early morning hours, the disciples knew by the way Jesus spoke and acted that Jesus was alive from the dead and speaking to them once again. As Jesus taught in John 10:27, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” They knew He was the Lord because they knew His voice and only Jesus would cook them breakfast.

(John 21:13) Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

Since Jesus was not a ghost, Jesus could personally and physically serve them by taking the bread and the fish and handing them their breakfast, even as He broke bread and shared wine with them at the Last Supper when He established the New Covenant in His blood instead of the blood of goats or sheep. Remember: 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 was now the third time Jesus appeared to his 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 when they would not have worked). Perhaps they began fishing in the evening after the Sabbath ended; if so, Jesus appeared to them on a Sunday morning. 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).

(John 21:15) When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

In John 14:21, Jesus taught what true love for Him meant, saying, "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." Just as He promised, Jesus showed

himself to the ones who loved Him. In 1 John 2:5-6, John wrote, “Whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked.” The way with walk with Jesus as our Friend shows Him and others our love for Him and them.

After their breakfast, Jesus addressed Simon Peter using his official Apostolic name (Jesus had earlier given him the name “Peter”), which indicated the seriousness of their conversation (much as our full name would be used in a court of law). Jesus’ three questions related to Peter’s denial of Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested and put on trial. Jesus’ formal questions before the gathered disciples (or at least in the presence of John) began the process of Jesus’ restoration of Peter as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, for Peter answered in the affirmative three times and then Jesus commissioned Peter to serve Him by telling Peter three times to feed and care for His sheep (His people). “These” may refer to Peter’s occupation as a fisherman: Did Peter love fishing with his partners and making his living as a fisherman with these men more than he loved Jesus and serving Jesus? Peter answered that he loved Jesus more than anyone, anything, and doing anything else. Thereafter, Peter began fishing for people as Jesus told Him.

(John 21:16) Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord,

you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, and three times Peter answered that he loved Him. In these verses, Jesus and Peter used two different Greek words for the word “love.” The one Greek word for love (*agape: agapaō*) that Jesus used in His first two questions expressed a greater, deeper, self-giving, and sacrificial love than the other word for love (*philia: phileō*) which indicated a friendship type of love that Jesus used the last time He asked Peter if he loved Him. Peter used the word (*philia: phileō*) each time he answered Jesus. Agape love may show total commitment because agape love involves the person’s heart, mind, soul, and strength, and agape love is willing to sacrifice for another. God the Father and Jesus love us with the agape sacrificial love that Jesus expressed when He came, taught, and died on the cross. Philia has been defined by some as a lower type of love, a friendship type of love. Some have argued there is no real difference in the use of these two words, and volumes have been written about the different Greek words for love. Jesus accepted the type of friendship love that Peter offered Him. And Jesus knew Peter’s love for Him would grow. Though Peter had denied Him three times, Jesus offered Peter friendship love. Jesus knew that Peter would someday express his agape of love for Jesus and His sheep by the way Peter would die.

(John 21:17) The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.

The third time Jesus asked Peter His question about loving Him, Jesus used the word *philia* for love and Peter answered Jesus with the word *philia* for love. God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit love us with both *agape* and *philia* love, which is love in both the highest sacrificial total sense and love in the friendship sense. Peter only used the word *philia* every time he answered Jesus' questions, perhaps because he knew he did not love Jesus in the highest sense possible. There is much room for discussion of these verses. We can say with certainty that as believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, Jesus expects us to love Him and make Him our closest Friend, just as He loves us and is our Friend. Also, we are to love Him in the highest sense as He loved and loves us in the highest, sacrificial sense of love. We love God because God is worthy to be loved and because God first loved us.

Regarding Jesus' use of different words for “lambs” and “sheep.” At the least Peter and all of Jesus' followers are to love Jesus' people (His lambs and sheep) irrespective of their age and other natural abilities and qualities.

Regarding Jesus' use of the different words “tend” and “feed,” at the least these words mean Peter and all of Jesus' followers are to try to meet the real needs of Jesus'

people as wisely as they can with Jesus' guidance and the resources that the Lord Jesus supplies for these needs.

(John 21:18) Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

After Jesus restored Peter to his apostleship, He told Peter how he would die. From that day forward, Peter would remain loyal in his commitment to care for Jesus' people, and he would die as a faithful martyr in the cause of his Lord and Savior. When Peter died by crucifixion, tradition says that he requested to be crucified upside down because he knew he was unworthy to die on the cross as Jesus had died on the cross.

(John 21:19) Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

Jesus glorified His Father when He obeyed His Father and died on the cross to save His people from their sins and grant them eternal life. Peter glorified his heavenly Father and Jesus Christ when he died on the cross as a follower, obedient friend, and loyal servant of Jesus Christ. No matter what happened to Peter day-to-day or how he was to die, the important thing for him and all Jesus' followers is faithfully following Jesus day-by-day and leaving the consequences with Jesus, the Giver of Eternal Life.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How many times did Jesus appear to His disciples?
2. What fish did Jesus use to feed His disciples?
3. What do these verses tell us about Christians who sin being given another opportunity to serve Jesus?
4. What did Jesus ask of Peter before He restored him as an apostle?
5. What type of love has Jesus shown for His people (His sheep)?

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