

The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: A Second Large Catch Of Fish (Part One)

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The gospels record two different miracles displaying Jesus Christ's power in facilitating a large catch of fish. The first instance, recorded in Luke 5:1-11, occurs during the early stages of His ministry, when Christ is "recruiting" His disciples, preparing them for an intensive education. The second, found in John 21, transpires after His resurrection but before His ascension, as He gives His final marching orders to His beloved "graduates."

While this study focuses on the second occurrence, comparing the two "large-catch" miracles adds to our understanding. As Christ's final miracle *before* His ascension, the second miracle compared with the first reveals the progress of His efforts to prepare His students for the next phase of their sanctification journey. Moreover, the comparison provides all of His disciples, then and now, a lesson on the need for self-examination—to measure our growth in faith—as well as our growth in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18).

As a way of introduction and to help establish context, Part One discusses three compelling questions:

1. Why does Christ select Galilee for this final miracle? John 21:1.

Comment: On at least three occasions, Jesus directs His disciples to meet Him in Galilee after His resurrection (Matthew 26:32; 28:7, 10; Mark 14:28; 16:7). Galilee is the location of the first fishing miracle of Luke 5, where He called His first disciples: Peter, John, James, and Andrew. Not only does it invite a natural comparison between the two miracles, but it also provides a sense of completion—of coming "full-circle." Galilee is the disciples' home, and their fishing boats are docked there. Moreover, just as in the first fishing miracle, the Sea of Galilee—also known as Lake Tiberias or Lake of Gennesaret—allowed for an intimate gathering away from the masses while providing a feeling of solace and comfort following their Savior's crucifixion.

2. What should we infer from the disciples' decision to go fishing? John 21:2-3.

Comment: John presents the narrative without Christ commenting on the disciples' decision to fish. Though His promises to go before them to Galilee are clear, in the opening verses of John 21, we find seven of the disciples following Peter to go fishing. No casual occasion for leisure, this fishing trip is a commitment to many hours of hard work.

Obviously, these are difficult days for the disciples. They had spent most of the past three-plus years in the direct company of Jesus. Even though He informed them several times of His impending death and resurrection (Mark 8:31; Matthew 16:21; 26:2), the disciples are still deeply troubled by the former and confounded by the latter (Luke 24:36-41; Matthew 28:17). Peter is particularly distraught, still shamefaced from having denied Him three times (Luke 22:61-62; John 21:17).

Even though they are filled with joy in the presence of the post-resurrection Christ, they also realize that times are changing. They recognize that their future is more uncertain—and probably more difficult—than they desire. We can easily understand their need to engage in an activity with which they are familiar and comfortable, and which removes them from prying eyes and ears.

3. Why can the disciples catch no fish on their own? John 21:3-5.

Comment: Jesus had earlier taught His disciples, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). None of His handpicked devotees was yet capable of confidently anticipating His resurrection into His natural, spiritual state (Luke 24:36-37). Therefore, uncertain of the events surrounding them, six of the disciples chose to follow Simon Peter—probably more restless and impatient than usual—onto the fishing boat. Like Peter, they were not fishing as an activity to prove their faith, but as cover for their unease and uncertainty—their lack of faith. Christ wanted to emphasize upon them that any activity they undertook without Him would be fruitless.

Having set the stage and the context for Christ’s final miracle, in the next issue, we will dive deeper to bring more details to light.