

26-0913p - Detailed Summary

26-0913p - *Just Fish*, John Nousek

Bible Reader: Tom Freed

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Just Fish

Scripture Reading

Scripture Reading (0:04 - 2:35): Tom Freed

John 21:1-14: Tom opened the evening service by reading John 21:1-14. After these things, Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Peter announced that he was going fishing, and the others agreed to go with him. They went out, got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. When day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach, though the disciples did not recognize Him. Jesus asked them, "Children, you do not have any fish, do you?" They answered no. He told them to cast the net on the right side of the boat and they would find a catch. They did so and were unable to haul the net in because of the great number of fish. The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Peter heard this, he put on his

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outer garment, for he had been stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the little boat, which was about a hundred yards from land, dragging the net full of fish. When they got out onto the land they saw a charcoal fire already laid, with fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus told them to bring some of the fish they had caught. Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three. Although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples ventured to question Him, "Who are you?" knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This was now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples after He was raised from the dead.

Summary of Transcript (0:04 -30:31), Preacher: John Nousek

(2:40-4:01) Introduction: The Title "Just Fish" and the Importance of Small Details

John thanked Tom for the lengthy reading and announced that the sermon title was "Just Fish." He immediately asked how many fish they caught and answered his own question: 153. He intended to speak about that number, but first he wanted to address how people often remember what seem like small details. Someone might look at the figure and wonder whether it was 153, 144, or some other number, and whether it even matters. John insisted that it does matter because it is in the Scriptures and is very specific. God said He would not allow even a jot or tittle to fall away, and here the number is given, so it must be important. He then asked how believers go about remembering specific details, phrases, or images that draw attention and help them retain what they need to know. The number 153 in this passage has significance, and he planned to explain it after first laying some groundwork.

(4:05-6:02) Personal Background, Mnemonics, and the Early Christian Ichthys

John explained something about himself as an accountant who likes numbers and who adds and subtracts for a living. He had taken a number of difficult standardized tests. In 1998 and 1999 he

spent six months in focused study with others in a classroom in order to pass the CPA exam, which he described as brutal. That study included memorization tools, two of which are mnemonics and acronyms. He noted that the early Christians did something very similar with the Greek word *ichthys*, which simply means fish, the thing one tries to catch on a hook with a worm. That is how the early Greek-speaking Christians identified themselves: with an image and the word “fish.” Many people today still see the so-called Jesus fish on bumper stickers or on the backs of cars. John said he had wondered where that symbol came from.

(6:05-8:53) How Mnemonics Work, Illustrated by Jonah, Hymns, and the Alphabet

A mnemonic is a technical device that makes information easier to recall by giving it structure or meaning. It works because the brain remembers patterns, stories, and images more easily than simple arbitrary facts. The book of Jonah is one example. People remember the story, but more importantly they can more easily remember its messages: one cannot run from God; God is everywhere; God can do the impossible by keeping a man alive inside the belly of a large fish for three days and three nights; Jonah went to Nineveh thinking it would never work, yet the people repented and God forgave them. All of that is wrapped up in the single name Jonah. Songs and hymns work the same way. The words become familiar and roll off the tongue even when a person’s mind is elsewhere, thinking about laundry or other tasks. Children provide another illustration. No one simply tells a child to memorize the alphabet; instead they are taught to sing the ABCs. The rhythm and sound make the letters stick. Mnemonics exist for that purpose: they help people remember key facts such as the number 153 and what it is meant to demonstrate.

(8:55-11:23) Additional Mnemonic and Acronym Examples

John offered further quick examples. “My very educated mother just served us nine pizzas” helps people remember the planets: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, and so on. “Every good boy does fine” (or “does find”) helps musicians remember the notes on the lines of the treble clef: E, G, B, D, F. An acronym is a similar memory device that takes the first letter of each word to be remembered and turns those letters into a single easily memorized word. FISH itself has significance. In English it is four letters; in Greek it is five. Other familiar acronyms include HOMES for the five Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior) and SCUBA for Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus. These little tricks work. Acronyms are used primarily to simplify long names, phrases, or ideas and to make them quicker to communicate and remember. With that foundation laid, John returned to the sermon title and said, “Let’s fish.”

(11:28-13:41) The Jesus Fish Symbol and Its Five Greek Letters

John directed attention to the Jesus fish displayed on the screen, the familiar *ichthys* symbol. Inside the fish outline are five Greek letters that spell the Greek word for fish. Each letter stands for a Greek word that translates into an English word. He warned that there would be a quiz. The first letter looks like a capital I and is called iota; it stands for *Iēsous*, Jesus. The next letter, which looks like an X, is chi and stands for *Christos*, Christ. The circle with a dash through it is theta and stands for *Theou*, “of God.” The letter that looks like a Y is upsilon and stands for *Huios*, Son. The final squiggly letter that itself looks a bit like a fish is sigma and stands for *Sōtēr*, Savior. Thus a single symbol packs in the confession “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.” The symbol is pronounced *ichthys* (or *ixus*). John then said it was time to get back to the swimmers and the number 153.

(13:45-16:17) Second Scripture Reading: Luke 5:1-11

John noted that the congregation had already heard John 21 and now he would read a similar but shorter account from the New King James Version, Luke 5:1-11. As the multitude pressed about Jesus to hear the word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret and saw two boats. The fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Jesus got into Simon's boat, asked him to put out a little from the land, and sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When He finished speaking He told Simon to launch out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch. Simon answered that they had toiled all night and caught nothing, yet at Jesus' word he would let down the net. They caught a great number of fish and their net was breaking. They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help. Both boats were filled so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it he fell down at Jesus' knees and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He and all who were with him were astonished at the catch, as were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." When they had brought their boats to land they forsook all and followed Him.

(16:17-18:49) Similarities and Critical Differences Between the Two Catches

John pointed out many similarities between the two passages. Similar people were in the boat: Peter, James, and John. In both accounts they had fished all night with no success and caught nothing. In both accounts Jesus instructed them to try again, and when they obeyed they caught many fish. Yet there are critical differences, and the two events are separate. The Luke 5 account occurs at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when He is still calling the disciples who will become apostles. The John 21 account occurs after the resurrection, several years later. In Luke 5 the text simply says they caught "many" fish and the nets were breaking; the net was not sufficient to hold what was caught. Throughout Scripture the people of the earth, the people of the world, are described as fish. The net tries to scoop up everything, but not everything is willing, and the nets fall apart. In John 21, however, there is a specific and limited number, 153, and after the resurrection the nets are not breaking. The net was sufficient and the number is limited.

(18:49-21:58) The Imagery of the Breaking Net Versus the Unbroken Net

John stated that he was convinced there is imagery here as well as the actual historical account, as is often the case in Scripture. The breaking net in Luke represents the unfinished message of Christ, and the unnumbered fish represent the whole world, many of whom are unfortunately unsuited for the kingdom. He supported this by reading Matthew 4:18-20, where Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw Simon called Peter and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. John admitted that when he had read that verse before he had focused on the fact that they left their nets, but he had recently realized the text says "their nets"—not the net that Jesus Christ would later lay out in His ministry, the net that captures and separates the goats from the sheep. In the narrative the people of the world are represented by the fish, and the disciples discard one kind of net for something else. Later, in John 21 after the resurrection, the apostles are still fishermen, but they will use a different kind of net to reel people in. The net that does not break in John 21 represents the completed message of the Lord, the same confession packed into the Jesus fish: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. The 153 fish represent those that belong to Christ.

(21:58-24:33) Why 153? Jerome and the Claim of 153 Species of Fish

John asked why the number is 153 and what its significance is. Many different commentaries exist on this perplexing question. If he were able, he said, he could devote another six months of study specifically to it, but he would give a couple of quick points that might appear on the quiz. Jerome, a fourth-century church father and primary translator of the Vulgate, read about the 153 fish in John 21:11 and contemplated the same question. Jerome cited an ancient Greco-Roman naturalist named Oppian, who lived in the second century and wrote a five-book didactic epic on fishing called the *Halieutica*. Oppian claimed that there were exactly 153 known species of fish in the world. John found that interesting: all the species have been represented, and therefore all the people from the earth have been represented, if they are willing.

(24:46-28:08) 153 as a Triangular Number and Other Specific Biblical Numbers

John, speaking as an accountant who likes the way numbers work, noted that 153 is a triangular number (sometimes loosely called a factorial in this context). If one adds $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5$ and so on all the way to 17, the sum is 153. He asked whether that fact is relevant and then pointed to other instances in Scripture where very specific, non-round numbers are given and appear to have significance. In Acts 27:37, during the account of Paul's shipwreck, there were a specific number of people on board: 276. John remarked that he had never been on a boat and counted every person so he could write down 276. That number is also triangular: $1 + 2 + 3 + \dots + 23 = 276$. Similarly, Revelation 13:18 gives the number 666, a figure even those outside the church would probably recognize. 666 is likewise a triangular number: $1 + 2 + 3 + \dots + 36 = 666$. John said there is something there, though as he stood preaching he could not answer the matter entirely. If he spent the next six months he probably could. His point was that God's Word is very specific and that God has given everything needed, right down to the smallest detail.

(28:08-31:13) The Separation of Sheep and Goats, Right and Left, and Closing Invitation

To illustrate that specificity John read Matthew 25:31-33. When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him—imagery that John compared to the net. He will separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats, setting the sheep on His right hand and the goats on the left. John found it interesting that even in today's environment some people consider themselves "on the right" and others consider themselves leftists. Those who claim they want to preserve the nation, adhere to its laws, and keep godly freedom and liberty in place often refer to themselves as those on the right. Those who claim it is best to centralize power into the hands of a few men, abolish laws, and who have recently advocated total anarchy and atheism in the United States refer to themselves as leftists. That is what John sees and hears when he talks with people. Therefore the net one wants to be part of is the one thrown on the right side of the boat. That is the net in which one wants to be caught. John finished by saying that if anyone found himself or herself swimming somewhere other than under the instruction and protection of the Lord Jesus Christ, or had any other need, they should say so now.