

A summary of John 21:1-14

- 1. Do we merely know Christ in the flesh, or do we know the resurrected Christ (John 21:4; chapter 20).** When Jesus was on the earth with His disciples, for a good three and a half years, His disciples knew Him as a man in the flesh. He was born as a man, just like us, yet without sin. He was subject to all the limitations to which we are subject. He walked and talked with people and His disciples. His disciples generally had no problem recognizing Him. However, in John 20, Mary, because of her love for Jesus, “forced” Jesus to appear to her (v.11-18). Yet she did not recognize Him (v.15). On that same evening, Jesus appeared to His disciples while they were assembled and greeted them. Apparently, they were astounded and may not have recognized Him, because Jesus had to show them His pierced hands and side (vv.19-20). After His speaking and His physical demonstration, they were “glad when they saw the Lord” (v.20). Later, He again appeared to at least seven of His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and they did not recognize Him (21:4). Why was it so easy for them to recognize Jesus in the flesh before His crucifixion and resurrection, but so hard to recognize Him after His resurrection? Why did they recognize Him in 20:20, but not in 21:4? We need to check with our experience. We are like the disciples. We may easily recognize the “physical” Jesus, or the Jesus in the flesh, the One who cares for us, the One who heals us, the One who blesses us. For example, we pray to Jesus, and we get an A. We pray for a job, and even the brothers and sisters around us pray for us, and we get the job. We may even enjoy the church gatherings, or being with brothers and sisters, because everyone is nice to us and takes care of us. This is, in a sense, our experience of Jesus in the flesh. However, we need another turn, just like Mary had in 20:14. This turn is spiritual. The second turn is when we hear the Lord’s speaking to us, just as the Lord spoke to Mary (20:15-17). At this point, our spirit and our heart turn, and it is then that we may recognize the resurrected Christ, no longer just in the flesh. We turn from our need to God’s need (what does God want?). Yet, interestingly, there is no guarantee that we will again recognize the resurrected Christ, as we see in 21:4. In this section, the disciples, led by Peter, decided to go fishing. After all, Jesus had left them physically. They could apparently no longer rely on Him to provide their daily necessities. They had to eat! And were they not professional fishermen! What would be more natural than to go fishing? Nothing wrong with that! We have to study, we have to work to make a living, we have to save etc. for our retirement. Yet, when Jesus stood on the shore and called out to them, they did not know Him! This is the Lord’s mercy, to come to us again and again. Nevertheless, this does not guarantee that we will know Him. Even if we see and recognize the Lord today in our daily life, through His speaking to us, we may not necessarily recognize Him tomorrow. Why not? We will explore the reasons and ramifications in points 2 and 3 (please see below).
- 2. We need multiple experiences of Jesus Christ, and we also need to remember them in order to open us to fresh experiences of Him (Luke 5:3-6,10; John 21:7).** Again, why did the disciples in John 21:4 not recognize Jesus standing on the shore? And why did John (the writer of this Gospel and “disciple whom Jesus loved”) finally recognize Jesus in 21:7? We may find a clue to this mystery if we go to a very similar account in Luke 5:1-11). In that account, the disciples had also fished all night and caught nothing. In the same vein, Jesus had given them instructions, and the result was an abundant catch, in one case tearing the nets and nearly causing both boats to sink, and in the other rendering it impossible to haul the net of fish into the boat, and causing the fishermen to drag the net in the water along with them as they returned to shore. In the account in the Gospel of Luke, John was also privy to this marvelous miracle (Luke 5:10). As soon as Jesus spoke to His disciples in John 21:6, a flashbulb must have triggered off in John, enabling him to remember his same experience of Jesus in Luke 5, and causing him to exclaim, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:7). All the memories must have come flooding back to him. “How could I have

forgotten?" he may have said to himself. "It all comes back now." This is Christ! Such experiences are invaluable in our life. We need them over and over again. Many times, we will find ourselves in situations where we do not recognize the Lord. At those times, by the Lord's mercy, we may remember our previous experiences which may allow us to find Him in a new and fresh way.

- 3. The Lord is the sovereign Lord, providing everything, and in charge of everything (John 21:9-14).** Peter and those with him that day were professional fishermen. They knew how to fish. They had fished all night (21:3-4), the best time to catch fish. Surely they did not need anyone telling them what to do? Who was this man who told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat? Yet they submitted, just like Peter had in Luke 5, even though they did not recognize Jesus. They may have reasoned that they had nothing to lose, since they had not caught anything anyway. This was the Lord's sovereign arrangement. He arranges everything, from the family we are born in to the courses that we take at school. He could arrange for the fish to stay away from the sweeping nets, and He could just as easily cause the fish to flood the nets. Why? Not so that the disciples could catch fish to eat, but to cause them to remember their experience of Him in Luke 5. This is the Lord's mercy. May we grab every opportunity to submit ourselves to the Lord, even though we may not understand why or know who He is. For example, the Lord may speak to us, through His word (the Bible) or through His word in the brothers and sisters, to participate in the corporate prayer gathering, even for a short while (a few minutes or even a few seconds). We may hear that such an exercise is actually a grace to enjoy, and that it will bless the church. Yet we may be reluctant or disregard such speaking. We may not recognize the Lord nor His speaking. Yet the Lord, in His mercy, will come to us again and again. At such times, if we submit to the Lord, we may remember former experiences of Him, and cause us to experience Him in a fresh way.
- 4. As the all sufficient One, Jesus does not need our "fish," but He wants our portion (John 21:10).** The disciples submitted to Jesus and caught an abundance of fish. Yet, when they came ashore, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it and bread (v.9). Where did Jesus catch that fish? Did He go fishing? He did not need the fish that the disciples had caught. He had already made breakfast for them and served them, not what they had caught, but what He had prepared for them. Yet He asked them to bring the fish they had caught (v.10). This seems paradoxical, and shows that He does need our portion. However, we need to realize that anything we offer to the Lord is what the Lord has already given us. For example, we may participate in the financial grace offering and offer to the Lord. The Lord treasures such an offering, and such an offering will bless the church. At the same time, we realize that everything we offer to the Lord has already been given to us by Him. We are not doing Him, or the church, a favor by offering one tenth of what we earn. Rather, it is a privilege to offer our portion to the Lord. However, if we do not offer, we may think that we know the Lord, but we actually do not. If we submit to Him, we will experience the grace and supply of the Lord as the all sufficient One, and bless the church.
- 5. Being together with the brothers and sisters and our companions may enable us to have a revelation of the Lord (21:7).** If we are alone, without companions in the church life, it will be very difficult to know the Lord. Peter was with his companions. No one recognized Jesus until John remembered his experience of Jesus. When he recognized Jesus, Peter jumped into the sea to swim to Jesus, and the others followed in the boat. Such a revelation was contagious and inspiring. If one brother or sister recognizes the Lord and listens and submits to His speaking, other brothers and sisters are liable to follow. This is very healthy. Therefore, we need the corporate prayers, the church gatherings, and spiritual companions, to be able to know and follow the Lord. Even if we misinterpret the Lord's leading, or take our own way, corporately, we may be more apt to again seek the Lord's presence and speaking, and receive fresh revelation and speaking. Such a "togetherness" is a blessing to the church, and our salvation, so we can live a healthy church pleasing to the Lord.