Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Self-Effort or Spiritual Power
Scripture: John 21:1-14
Code: 1578

If you have your Bible, we'd ask you to turn to the twenty-first chapter of John. It's almost kind of a sad note, this morning, as we come to the last chapter in John's gospel. This gospel has been our constant companion for over two years and we still have a few weeks to go, but it's winding down, to say the least, only in a chronological sense, in a sense of biblical truth it's peaking out and it's a great chapter, it's a classic chapter in many, many ways.

In order for us to understand chapter 21, we must take a background look at it, allow the Spirit of God to reveal to us some of the purposes of John so that we can interpret it. In interpreting Scripture, just a little footnote, something for you to put in your file. In interpreting Scripture, you always interpret Scripture according to the context. I remember one man who had a particular Scripture that he was going to speak upon and he said...he read the Scripture and then he said this, "Now I want to tell you my experience so we have a basis upon which to interpret this." Now you never interpret Scripture on the basis of your experience. You interpret your experience on the basis of Scripture. Scripture interprets itself by its context. If you take the Scripture out of context, you get into all kinds of problems. For example, the Bible says, "Judas went out an hanged himself, go thou and so likewise, what thou doest, do quickly." The only thing is, not in that context. And that's pulling it from everywhere. So when you study the Bible, you must be well aware that you are considering the text in its context, that is in the surrounding areas.

And so, as we come to chapter 21, unless we understand everything that's gone before, we will have no idea what's happening and the purpose of chapter 21. Now chapter 21 verses 1 to 14 which we will consider this morning, gives to us the distinction between self-effort and spiritual effort...self-effort and spiritual effort. And it becomes thus to us a very basic study. Now many of you are brand-new Christians and this can be a very, very basic study for you to really build your Christian life on. For those of us who have been Christians for some time, this is not new truth, it's just truth that we need to be reminded of and we need to be reminded of it desperately week in and week out. But it's simple, it's basic, it's practical and yet in its format here it's extremely unique in the presentation.

Now in coming to chapter 21, before we look at that in specifics, let me give you the general context. We find in chapter 21 what we call an appendix or an epilogue. We found at the beginning of John's gospel a prologue in John 1:1 to 18, way back 20 chapters ago. John began with a little introduction. Then he got into the body of his gospel, and now he closes with a little epilogue or an appendix. It's tacked on to the end to put together the loose ends, to pick up the pieces left untied, unrelated. Now

you'll remember that in the prologue of John, he presents Christ before He began His work and here in the epilogue he presents Him after He's finished His redemptive work.

Now all the main features of John's gospel have already ended in the sense of completing Christ's redemptive work because at the end of chapter 20 we had that climactic statement in verse 30 and 31, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written...and here's the purpose of all that he's written...that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ...which means Messiah...the Son of God and that believing you might have life through His name." That's the wrap up of the formal aspects of the gospel. And the whole thing was written that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is God and that by believing you might have life through that faith. That's the purpose and everything sort of sums up in the great resurrection climax of chapter 20. But were John to end at chapter 20, there would be a lot of questions that would be unanswered. And so because the Holy Spirit never leaves us with any dangling ends, because the Holy Spirit always ties everything perfectly together, chapter 21 picks up the loose ends and puts the knot on them. Very important.

Now let me show you what I mean by loose ends. There are at least five things that I find unanswered at the end of chapter 20. And so knowing what these five things are, then we begin to look at chapter 21 and we find out that chapter 21 answers every single one of those five things. And they're kind of picked random because they're important.

First question that I had at the end of chapter 20 was this, now when Jesus came out of the grave, you remember, Mary Magdalene fell at His feet and grabbed Him and hung on to Him and Jesus said, "Don't hold on to Me, I must go to My Father. We're no longer going to have that kind of relationship." From now on it's not going to be a physical communion, I'm going to be gone. The natural question that comes into your mind is does that mean that Jesus no longer will directly provide for His own? Is He going to develop a new technique so that He's no longer closely related to empowering them and providing for their needs? That's a very important question. It's especially important for these disciples who by this time are saying to themselves, "Well, Jesus is going back to the Father, and we don't have that same relationship anymore. He kind of appears and disappears in His glorified body and what about us? Who's carrying for us? Who's going to empower us? Who's going to show us what to do? Who's going to provide for us?" And so it's important that that be answered. Verses 1 to 14 give the answer.

The second question that I find unanswered at the end of chapter 20 is the chapter...is the question, what ever happens to Peter? By the time you get to the end of chapter 20, Peter has been on a serious fade. He started out really strong, but all of a sudden toward the end he just really wound down. First he denied Christ three times. Then he fled, ran away. Then even when he saw the open tomb it says John believed and Peter did...what?...he wondered, he just didn't know. And at this point, Peter who is supposed to be the great leader and the great number one among the Apostles, the

dynamic force of the whole thing is kind of hanging a little bit. And we're not too sure about Peter and so we'd like to know what happens to Peter. So just to make sure we do, the Holy Spirit adds verses 15 to 17 and that answers that question.

The third question that's in my mind at the end of chapter 20 is this question, what about the future of the disciples now that they're at the mercy of the world? Does God still control that? Is Jesus still their protector? Is Jesus still going to take care of them to make sure they live as long as He needs them to live? The answer to that is in verses 18 and 19.

Another question that evidently arose was the question about whether John was going to die. And so Jesus answers that question in verses 20 to 23.

Then another question that's left unanswered that you immediately have if you read chapter 20 verse 30 is this, it says, "Many other signs did Jesus, they're not written." And the question is, why? If they are important why weren't they written? The answer is in verses 24 and 25.

So, you see, in moving through the chapter, the Holy Spirit picks out every specific unanswered question and answers it so that the gospel when done is complete. And this is the mastermind of the Holy Spirit leaving no dangling ends. Now for our study, we're going to consider the first 14 verses which answer that first question and that is this, now that Christ is risen, He's the risen Lord, He's back to running the universe in His deity sense, is no longer in humility, He's glorified, He's got His *hetera morphe, hetera morphe,* His new form, His new body, glorified body. And we're not going to know that human physical relationship anymore because He's going to the Father. Is He still our provider? Is He still caring for our needs? Is He still the one who's going to give us the power to do things? Or are we going to find some new source? Is He done with us?

And this was a legitimate question, because, you see, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. You understand, they didn't receive the Holy Spirit till the day of Pentecost. So all those days that kept going by when Jesus was coming here and there and wasn't with them all the time, they were having to fend for themselves. For the first time in three years they were having to get their own food, they were having to do their own daily tasks. They were having to just wait for Jesus here, there and everywhere. And they were impatient. And they were misunderstanding. And they weren't sure what was going to go on and they were a little bit confused. And so they were beginning to wonder whether Jesus was still their provider. And it was legitimate. And so chapter 21:1 to 14 gives us a classic, graphic, vivid answer to that question and the answer is "Yes, He is still their provider, He is still their power." And he answers the question in a living illustration.

Now many times in Scripture when the Bible teaches, it teaches by direct word from the mouth of God. That's primary. It also teaches from the Word of God in prophets and apostles. But God also teaches in living illustrations, doesn't He? Throughout the Old Testament there were great symbolic

types of the New Testament truths revealed in Christ and His work. And many times Jesus spoke in parables, did He not? And in *paroimias*and Jesus often expressed Himself in illustrations rather than direct statements. And here we have such an occasion. Jesus doesn't tell an illustration, He acts one out. Here is a vivid, historical event that teaches a profound spiritual truth about the provision of Christ for His own and the empowerment of His own. And it shows us by vivid, living illustration that Jesus does care, that He is loving, that He is sympathetic, that He continues to minister to His own, even in His post resurrection glory. And you're going to see what is a thrilling, thrilling insight in these verses.

Now I want to show you two contrasting things. There is, first of all, here a contrast between fleshly effort and spiritual effort, or spiritual power. Now this is what the whole Christian life really boils down to. As a Christian, you can go two ways. I'll try to give you a vivid illustration just visually. As a Christian, you're here, you can go down, you can go up, it's your choice. The road down proceeds on this basis, self-effort is step one; disobedience immediately follows and is involved, step two; failure, step three; loss of intimate fellowship, step four. As soon as you go your own way, do your own thing, it's a decline. You start out: self-effort, disobedience, failure, loss of intimate fellowship. The other option, divine effort, obedience, success, intimate fellowship. And every Christian goes one of those two ways and most of us jump back and forth. And the mature Christian is the one who has the increased frequency on the upswing. You see, the Christian life is a matter of frequency. It's not a matter of perfection, it's a matter of frequency. And the more you grow in Christ, the more frequently you're on the up. It's as you grow in Christ that obedience begins to outweigh disobedience. And so you see what happens here is you can go two ways...you either go down and the road down is self-effort, disobedience, failure, loss of intimate fellowship, or, God's effort, divine effort, supernatural effort, spiritual effort, whatever you want to call it, obedience, success, intimacy. And this is what I want to show you.

Notice all...first of all, how fleshly effort works. And in this illustration, Jesus is showing them how He's going to provide for them. Hang on to this, it's really got some rich basic truth. First, verses 1 to 5, show us fleshly effort. And Jesus wants to show them that He's going to provide for them by, first of all, showing them they can't provide for themselves. Notice verse 1, "After these things," now that indicates there's a break here and that's one of the indications, that formula in the Greek, that there is an appendix here and that the formal message really ends in verse 31. This is kind of an afterthought, not in the sense of importance, but in the sense of the pattern of the book. So, "After these things, Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias and in this manner showed He Himself."

Now you'll notice that it says twice there that Jesus showed Himself. Jesus revealed Himself. Jesus manifested Himself. Why? Because it does not say the disciples saw Jesus, the disciples saw Jesus...no. After His resurrection, He was not recognizable unless He manifested Himself to them. Do you see? In His new glorified form they could stand and look at Him face-to-face and not know who He was unless He revealed Himself to them. That's part of the glory of His new body. And that's why

even today, no man can say that Jesus is Lord except the Spirit of God is within him declaring it to be so. We cannot know Christ by human mind, can we? Human recognition does not know Christ. The natural man doesn't know Christ at all. And the post-resurrected Christ was invisible though perceptible by the human eye, invisible to the soul unless He manifested Himself by direct will on His part, as indicated in Mary Magdalene who stood there and looked at Him and didn't know who He was until He said, "Miriam." As indicated by the disciples in the room, they weren't too sure who He was, whether a phantom or a ghost until He held out His hands and said, "See who it is." Jesus then showed Himself to them. By a direct act of His will, He made Himself manifest. And that's the way it's been ever since. No man will ever know Jesus Christ until Jesus Himself manifests Himself to that individual. That's why the Bible says, "No man seeks after God." Did you ever read that in Romans 3? And we always say, "The world is seeking for God." Don't you believe it. The world is seeking for happiness, peace, money, success, not God. If God's in on the bargain, that's a good deal. The Bible says this, "The Son of Man is come to...do what?...seek." Because it's a self-disclosure on God's part that reveals Christ, not a finding on the part of man. And so, Jesus then manifests Himself to His disciples.

Now it's a very interesting thing that they're at the Sea of Tiberias, which is another name for the Sea of Galilee. Tiberias is the Roman name. It's also called the Lake of Gennesaret. Today it's sometimes called Chinneroth. It's all the Sea of Galilee up in the northern part where Galilee is. Now the interesting part is that they probably had no business being there. Jesus had appeared to them in Jerusalem. And according to Matthew 28 verse 16 it says this, "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them." Jesus said, "Men, I'll meet you in Galilee," right? Remember that? Now He said, "I'm going to meet you in Galilee in a mountain." Now we arrive in Galilee and where are they? They're not in a mountain, they're down at the Sea of Galilee. Now you say, "What are they doing down there?" Well it's very hard to know what exactly and totally was their motive. But let's try to construct it as best we can. Jesus said, "Meet Me in the mountain." So let's assume they went to the mountain and they were hanging around the mountain for a long time. And they're waiting many days in the mountain and Jesus has not showed Himself to them yet. And they do not have the indwelling Spirit and so they're on their own and without the presence of Christ for the first time in three years, and without the indwelling Spirit, they're really a little bit lost. They wait in the mountain for a while and they're becoming impatient. And maybe they're a little bit discouraged because in some sense they may feel they failed their Lord, especially Peter may have felt that. And they really don't know what to do with themselves and their faith is running really low and they're not too sure that Jesus is going to show after all and they just really don't know what to make out of it and so they decide, "Men," Peter really is the leader, and so Peter decides, "Guys, there's no sense in hanging around here. I mean, if we don't get down there and taking care of ourselves, Jesus is maybe not going to take care of us anymore. That whole thing may be over, men." And they don't know about His provision anymore. They don't know whether He's going to be with them to provide. And so they decide, "We've got to go back to doing what we did before this whole thing began."

Now with that in mind, we'll look at verse 2. This begins the story. "They were together, Simon and Peter and Thomas, and Nathanael of Cana and Galilee and the sons of Zebedee and the two others of the disciples," and incidently, those two others probably could be Andrew and Philip since they were all together. If you go back to John 1, they were with the sons of Zebedee who were James and John, and Peter at the same time, and Nathanael from the same area. And all of them were familiar with Galilee and all of them either plied their trade as fishermen or knew about fishing. So this is the little band that's together that were together in the original. The only one who is an odd ball in the group is Thomas, and by this time Thomas wants to be sure that he's around for anything that happens. He's not going to miss it again. So Thomas is with this group and there are seven of them and they're gathered there, likely they're waiting in the mountain for Jesus. And then Peter, being the leader that he is, decides it's time for action. If we stay up here, maybe nothing's going to happen. Our Lord isn't around, we don't know what's going to go on. We need food, we need our livelihood. We've got to eat. We've got to have clothes. We've got to take care of ourselves.

So we go to verse 3. "Simon Peter saith unto them, 'I go fishing.'" Now Peter was a man of action. He didn't stand around very long doing nothing. And this is perhaps an indication of their impatience. And so Simon decides, "I'm going fishing." What do you mean by that? "I mean, I'm going back to what I know I can do to provide for myself. I'm not sure whether this whole thing's going to work out the way I hope it is, I haven't seen Jesus around. And so I'm going to go back to do the one thing I know how to do, I'm going fishing." And since Peter is such a dynamic leader, everybody says in verse 3, "We also go with thee. And they went forth, entered into a boat immediately and that night caught nothing."

Now what you have here is a great example of how to get into your own will. Peter says, "I'm going fishing." They said, "We're going fishing." Zap, they went down the mountain, immediately jumped in the boat, took off out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee.

Now you say, "Where's the prayer? At what point did they consider God? When did they ask God if that was His will?" Well that's the point, they never did. You notice how the Spirit of God points up the immediacy of all their activity just like that? Peter didn't say, "Men, I have a suggestion, have we thought about fishing?" That's not Peter. "I'm going fishing." Boom, that's it. "Peter, we're going with you," and away they go. And immediately in the boat and out.

Now this is an indication, to begin with, of self-direction...self-effort...self-will. Jesus had wanted them to fish, but not for fish, for what? For men. And here Jesus is going to have to come and re-commission them all over again because they have gone back to their beginning again. Three years before they had left their nets to follow Him and become fishers of men, and now they've gone back because they don't trust in His provision post-resurrection. They could only trust Him when they could see Him in their midst. Oh how like that we are. That's the weakest kind of faith.

You say, "Well, MacArthur, you're sure reading a lot into that. Maybe all Peter's saying is, 'Guys, it's a warm afternoon, let's go catch a few fish.' How do you know he's going back to his livelihood? How do you know he's returning to his former manner of life?"

Well, there are several things that reveal it to me. One of those is in John chapter 16 and verse 32, in John 16:32 Jesus said to the disciples, "You will be scattered every man to his own." And the word "own," *ti idios*(?), means own in the sense of everything he has. It's not that He just said, "You're going to be scattered when I die, and you're going to go running back to your houses for the evening." When He said, "You go back to your *ti idios*, He meant your own, that is your own things, your own home. The lexicon says your own property, your own friends, your own work, your own country, etc., etc. In other words, you're going to return to your former things. And so because of that prophecy and if we can use the word *ti idios*in its fullest sense, they went back to everything that was theirs. But even beyond that, there's another important point and that's down in verse 15 of chapter 21. Just after they had finished their fishing, after Jesus had performed the miracle, Peter had gone back to his fishing, Jesus had got Peter in verse 15 and said, "After they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?'" Now what is He talking about, do you love Me more than these...what? Some people say, "These other disciples." Oh, that wouldn't be a fair question. That wouldn't be fair at all. In other words, would Jesus say, "Peter, do you love Me more than you love these other disciples?" Of course. That wouldn't be fair to say anyway because that might disparage Peter's love for them. Jesus would never ask for that. Some other commentators say, "No, He's saying, 'Do you, Peter, love Me more than they love Me?'" Well that's ridiculous too because Jesus never wanted to compare people's love for Him, not people who were His own. That could be a matter of spiritual pride.

What's He saying? I think He's saying "these things" in reference to nets, boats, and fishing apparatus. Look at it that way. "Peter, do you love Me more than all this that goes with fishing?" In other words, "Peter, you committed yourself to Me. Do you really love Me enough t walk away from your whole livelihood and trust Me to provide for you the rest of your life? Do you love Me that much? Do you love Me more than these things, Peter? I mean, as soon as that was out of your sight, you went right back to that. How much do you really love Me? Do you love Me more than this?" And I imagine Peter loved to fish. I mean, I just walked out of that little place where they say Peter's house is, right on the edge of the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum and you could make a fisherman out of me getting up every morning looking at the sun coming up over those hills-the crystal beauty of that lake. And Peter loved it. Jesus said, "Do you love Me more than you love all of this?"

So, you see, I think what had happened here was because of a lack of faith and because of weakness in their own minds, they had begun to fall from their original commission. And they were going back to the only thing they knew. And Peter was going back to what he knew he could do to provide for himself, and the rest were too.

Another thing that indicates that to me is if you look in verse 3 you'll see that it says this, "They went forth and entered into a boat." In the Greek, the definite article is there, they went into THE boat...THE boat. What does it mean THE boat? It means the one that belongs to somebody in specific. They went to Peter's boat. I think what you have here is a good illustration of how the Greek points up the involvement of something. It takes it further than the English does and it should say THE boat and it indicates that it belongs to somebody, it's a specific boat and likely was Peter's boat. And that indicates they were going back to the profession they were involved in. They launched his boat again and they went out fishing. But they didn't catch anything.

Now, my friends, you have in those verses a classic illustration of self-effort. You say, "I'm a Christian and I've committed my life to Jesus Christ. And I've asked Him to come into my life and be my Savior and I've said, 'God, I want to live for You, I want Christ to live in me.'" And then you say to yourself, "I'm going...." and away you go. And without any prayer, like Peter, without an consideration, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" you just take off, self-effort, disobedience, failure, they didn't catch anything, did they? They didn't catch anything. And that's how self-effort works. A classic illustration. They did it on their own, according to their own will, according to their own ideas, they did their own thing. And let's face it, it's a good thing to fishing, it's not a sin. Don't ever say MacArthur said it's a sin to fish. It's not a sin. It's a good thing. Going fishing, earning your livelihood is a wonderful thing unless it is not the priority that God has given you to do. Then it becomes sin. Now if I decided to be a fisherman, fishing would be a sin. God didn't call me to be a fisherman. If He had, He would have given me a different stomach. So self-effort if it's self-effort in the direction that is a good thing, doesn't necessarily mean your thing is bad, but it becomes bad when it's self-effort, not when it's spiritual effort in God's plan.

Now I'll show you how this works. So in self-effort they did a good thing but it became sin. Hard work is good, oh, it's good. Listen, if you're a slob and if you're slothful and so forth and so on, that's bad. The Bible says if you're a man and you don't provide for your family, you're worse than an infidel. That's a bad thing. It's always good to earn your keep. It's good to work. It's good to earn your toil by the sweat of your brow and so forth and so on. But when God gives you a higher priority than what you're doing, then that becomes a sin. And so it was disobedience because God wanted Peter to fish for men, not for fish. And here they were, it says immediately they went out, they disobeyed, they were not in the mountain waiting for Christ where they were supposed to be. They had rejected their calling and in disobedience they went back to their old life. All self-effort is disobedience, friends, catch it, it's all disobedience.

And, you know, there are so many Christians like that. They're doing good things, oh, a lot of good things. But they're disobeying the Lord and they're sinning because they're not doing what God has called them to do. They're not establishing the priorities. And as a result, they...they catch nothing. They fail. Self-effort, disobedience ends in failure. It's a failure process all the way because it's

moving away from God's design. And Jesus said this in John 15:5, "Without Me you can do...what?...nothing...nothing."

All right, now watch verse 4. "When the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore. But the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." Now they were only a hundred yards away and they might have been able to recognize Him except that they could only recognize Him when He revealed Himself. So He's standing on the shore. You know what the fourth problem is when you go on your own? You lose the intimacy of fellowship. You see it there? They were...they were...if they had stayed in the mountain they would have been in His fellowship. They would have been in the intimacy of His fellowship, but here they were a hundred yards off shore and they blew it. Self-effort leads you away from the intimacy of real full fellowship with Jesus Christ. And Jesus speaks, I like this, verse 5, "Then Jesus saith unto them, 'Children, Children...'" Isn't that interesting? That's not the word for "little children" like Jesus in 13:33 which is, "My little dear children." And it's not the word brothers, you know that new wonderful relationship they had, commonly children of God, that intimate relationship. No, it's a word that means sirs, or fellows, or lads, it's a term of distance, not a term of intimacy. It's not a friend, brother, My beloved child. No, it's "Hey, you, over there. Group." It's a term of distance, not intimacy.

You say, "What are you saying?" I'm saying that whenever you go on your own path, my friend, you wind up leaving the warmth of the intimacy of Jesus Christ. There's a loss of the full fellowship of His presence.

If they had obeyed, they would have been in the mountain and Jesus would have been with them and they would have known full fellowship and they would have known full joy, the sweetness of His presence. But no, self-effort, disobedience, failure, loss of the intimacy of Christ's presence. Carnality always goes in that pattern and the broad principle is stated for us in an indirect sense in John 14:21, listen. "He that hath My commandments and keeps them," that's obedience, "he it is that loves Me and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father and I will love him and manifest Myself to Him." The promise there is if you're really obedient, you have the full manifestation of Christ. Verse 23, it says there the same person who obeys, "The Father and I will come to him, make our abode with him." The general principle is this, you obey, you get the full presence of God. You disobey, you cut yourself off from the fullness of His presence. And that's the point. So carnality is the problem when you decide to do your own thing.

Now let's say...let's say honestly in our own lives, we've been there, haven't we? I've been there. And it's a terrible place to be. I've said to myself a lot of times, "MacArthur, I'm going fishing." Right out there. And I never even considered God. Remember the old prophet in the Old Testament, just thinking of him, Nathan, 2 Samuel 7, David says, "You know, it's a bad deal. I've got a beautiful house of cedar and God lives in a tent, tabernacle. That's no good." David says, "Nathan, I'm going to build

a house for God." Nathan says, "David, right on. Get out there and build it." In the middle of the night, God says to Nathan, "Nathan, you didn't ask Me. You can't do that because David is a man of blood, I'm not going to let David build that place. Solomon is going to build it."

You see what happened is Nathan thought he saw a good thing, but he presumed on God. And he moved out in the direction that God didn't want him to go and that was not God's priority. And so many Christians have done the same thing. We decide we're going to do something, it's disobedient to God's purpose, everything flops and fails and we lose the joy of the intimate fellowship of our Savior. And you wonder why so many Christians are so bent out of shape and so sad and so miserable and so at loss for the joy of their salvation and it's because they live their life on their own terms. And it may not be that they're running around committing adultery and immoralities, and that they're going around robbing and stealing. They have just...it's not that that's the real issue. It's that what they do that is good becomes evil because it's not God's will for their lives.

Now Jesus confronts them with a tremendous question. He says, "Have you any food?" And the Greek construction is, "You don't have anything to eat, do you?" See. He confronts them with the obvious no. All night long fishing on that sea and you've got nothing to eat. And they are admitting their failure. They cry back, "No, we don't." You see how Jesus operates here? Now He's going to show them that the post-resurrected Christ will provide and He first shows them by showing that they can't provide for themselves. Peter figured, "Guys, I don't know what the Lord's doing, but I know one way I can make it, I'm a fisherman, I'm going to go back and fish, man. I'll make my own way." He goes back and fishes and collects nothing. God rerouted every fish in the Sea of Galilee around Peter's boat. There was no way...there was no way he could catch anything. The reason he couldn't catch anything was God was showing him that he couldn't make it on his own, that he was a failure on his own, that he couldn't design his own life and do his own thing and come out ahead. It can't be done...can't be done.

You say, "Well you don't know me very well, I'm very successful." No you're not. You say, "Well, I'm rich, I have a lot of money and it's worked for me." Since when do we measure success by money? Why in the book of Revelation chapter 3 verse 17 it says, "You think you're rich, you increased many goods, you don't know you're miserable, wretched, blind, poor and naked." Hummm. See, God's the one calling the shots. He's the one who says, "Such-and-such is success, and such-and-such is failure." And so they say no and Jesus has confronted them with their failure, they can't make it on their own. Peter thought, "Guys, we can go back to what we used to do and it will be all right," and they couldn't. It didn't succeed.

Isn't that like the Lord though? Before He ever supplies, He makes sure you learn the lesson that you can't do it. Before He ever comes into fill the supply, He makes sure you're conscious of your emptiness. Before He ever gives you the strength, He wants you to recognize your...what?...your weakness. And until you recognize your weakness, His strength can't apply. So He says, "Guys,

you're not catching anything, are you?" And they say no. And that's where you've got to be.

Christian, if you've been going on your own self-effort, disobedience, and you've been failing and you've lost the intimacy of the fellowship with Jesus, there's one thing you need to do and that's say to the Lord, "I confess, I'm not making it. Lord, I'm not cutting it." And that's the beginning of the change, isn't it? Self-effort, oh it's a tragic thing. When you think you can hack it on your own, you're finished, can't do it. You weren't saved by self-effort, were you? Did you save yourself? The Bible says, "As you have received Christ Jesus, so...what?...so walk in Him." If you've received Him by faith in Him, how you going to walk? By your own self-effort? By faith in Him. You couldn't get yourself in, you can't keep yourself in, you can't make yourself grow while you're in. It's all Him. And our Lord doesn't want the activity of a fleshly designed pattern or program for our own self-glory, even if it's a good thing of itself that we're doing. He wants us to obey His will....His perfect will.

And I ask you this morning, in all honesty, look at your own life...just really frankly look at it. What are you working on? Where do you spend your energy? Where are you really diligent? You say, "Well, I'm diligently working to earn money." That's good...yeah, that's good. Money...nothing wrong with money, just the love of it, there's something wrong with it. And you can not have any of it and love it like mad. Look at your own life. If you're diligently working at money and promotion and prestige and you want to get up in your business and you want to build your own private business or you want a promotion or you want this or you want that...no, it's no shame to be a faithful employee. According to Ephesians 6, that's a wonderful Spirit-filled trait unless God doesn't want you to be where you are. Then it's not only not spiritual, it's sinful. You see, the Lord is trying to show us in this passage this morning that we're to follow His commission and let Him worry about how He provides.

You say, "Well I can't forsake everything and go away to Bible school and prepare to be a missionary. Who's going to feed my family?" Guess who...guess who. You say, "Well, I have time for a lot of things, but I don't have time for that because I've got to do this and I've got to do this and I've got to do this or I won't make it." Oh really...really. You don't think you can make it on the resources of God? Obedience brings blessing. And I'll tell you something, you do it on your own and you'll fail. You work as hard as you want, and you'll be a colossal failure in the end because you didn't do what God called you to do. And it will be a failure as God measures failure. And I say it's true. Some of you are too busy to teach Sunday school, got too much going, you're working too hard. Too busy to teach Sunday school, too busy to come on Sunday night, we've got too much going. Got to get up in the morning and get at it. Sunday night, I can't come, too busy. Some of you are too busy for Wednesday night, you can't fellowship, you can't pray, too busy to pray daily, too busy to visit the sick in the hospital, too busy to go down the street and share Christ with your neighbors, too busy to minister your spiritual gifts. But you're busy doing this and maybe you're organizing the Ladies Brigade and you're helping the Blue Birds and the Boy Scouts and the Peanut whatever and you're doing this, that and the other little ditty and you're doing all these little goody things and God says, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin, sin cause you're not doing the thing God said for you to do. You see, it's all a matter of priority in your life.

And you can substitute a whole lot of self-effort in the area of good things and they turn out to be sin and they'll fail. And the question that you need to answer is the question that the disciples needed to answer. Jesus is saying it to you this morning, through this mouth. Are you making it? You're doing what you're doing, how is it turning out? Are you experiencing fantastic success as God measures it and are you enjoying the full, rich enjoyment of intimacy with Jesus? If you're not, back up, you're not making it.

And so, we see then that first of all, self-effort is disobedience, results in failure, ends in a loss of intimacy. And oh some Christians will come into my office and they'll cry and they'll weep and they'll say, "How do I get back to the fullness of His presence?" And the road back, my friends, is the first thing, confess that you're not making it. That's where it all starts.

Now let's look at the second part, what happens when you take the other path? Spiritual effort, beginning in verse 6, is characterized by obedience, produces success and results in full intimate fellowship. Here's just the opposite. Look at verse 6 . This is great. "He said unto them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat and ye shall find.'" And if I had been there I would have mumbled, "Yeah, right, sure. Do you think we've been fishing on the left side all night?" Cast the net on the right side of the boat and ye shall find. But they didn't argue. It says in verse 6, "They cast therefore and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fish." All the fish that Jesus had been diverting all night all of a sudden attacked the right side of the boat. Everyone of them right there on the spot. They threw that net in there and they hauled in...there were so many fish that seven guys couldn't get it in.

You say, "What are you saying?" I'm saying this, that's an illustration of spiritual provision. God says here's the way to do it, you obey, you have success. Do you see? And what He was showing them was you can fish all night, guys, you can do your own thing all your life, guys, and you'll never make it. Just listen to Me for one moment and you'll know great success. It was a miracle...a fantastic illustration of His provision for them. Now you know, chapter 21 verses 1 to 14 could have been condensed into one statement, "I will provide," period. But He didn't do that, He gave us a classic kind of illustration, didn't He? Oh it means so much more like this, doesn't it? So He says, "Guys, you throw it out there," and they did and it was there. The lesson was obvious.

How do you succeed in the Christian life? How do you succeed? Self-effort? How do you succeed? You succeed in obedience, the spiritual power. You find great success. Obedience, my friends, brings blessing. God said to Abraham in Genesis 22:18, He said, "Abraham, indeed in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Why? "Because you have obeyed My Word." The first book in the Bible says blessing comes from obedience. The last book in the Bible, Revelation 22:7 says, "Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book." From the beginning of the Bible to the end of the Bible, the principle is always the same, you obey, you get blessed. You disobey, you slam the doors of blessing. That's always been God's pattern.

And so we see then that if we follow the effort in the direction of God's leading, if we do His will, not our will, no matter how ridiculous it looks, no matter if it's not the right way to do it, you do it in obedience. And what happens? Success...success.

But I want us to notice a little footnote here. Verse 6 could have said this, "And Jesus said unto them, 'Stand back,'" and then every fish in the Sea of Galilee jumped into the boat. Right? He could have said that. Jesus could have made all those fish jump in that boat already fried, you know, or frozen. He could have done anything. But He didn't do that because when God works, He works through us. And so He said to them, "Men, do...what?...you cast your nets and then you pull your own nets in." Listen, God works through your own effort. Spiritual effort is a combination. Kenny Perol(??) used to use an illustration, I'll use it this morning, help you to see this. Everybody in the building raise your right hand right now. Hold them up just for a second. Okay, everybody raise your right hand. Okay, now just wave your hand a little bit like this. Okay, put it down. That's very good. Why did you do that? Was that my will that made you do that? Was it my will that made you do that? Was it your will? It was both, wasn't it? You see, it was your will cooperating with my will. That's exactly what spiritual effort is all about. God says do this, I say okay, Lord. See. And it's my will agreeing with His will and away we go. And the job is done. And so the Lord didn't say stand back, men, the fish are going to jump into the boat. He says, "You guys put your nets in there and you pull it out and I'll provide what's in it." And that's how God works through your life if you follow His leading. You don't sit back and do nothing, you get involved and His energy surges through you and through your obedience.

It's kind of like...I told the men at the men's retreat in the Old Testament when Gideon's army was gathered, not really an army, were gathered around the Medianites, Gideon said, the battle cry was this, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Isn't it interesting that they threw the "and of Gideon" in there? You say, "If you've got the sword of the Lord, who needs Gideon?" Wait a minute, somebody's got to wave the lamp and break the pitcher. See. God needs you to work through, but He needs you to be a vessel, not a stone. That's the point.

All right, verse 7. And there's only one thing left, right? Are you with me? If they've gone in the direction of spiritual effort, if they've been obedient, and successful, what is the one thing left? Intimate fellowship. And guess what's going to happen right now? They're going to get that fellowship restored. They're out in the boat, Jesus on the shore, but watch verse 7, terrific verse. "Therefore..." you can imagine, John, he knew right away when those fish got in that net, he says, "I know who's doing this. That's the Lord." And look at verse 7, "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved," that's John, "saith unto Peter, 'It is the Lord.'" Now John never missed that one. "It's the Lord." Well, you know, impulsive Peter, right? If he hears Jesus is anywhere that he isn't, he will take the straightest line to get to Jesus, right? I mean, Peter always wanted to be where Jesus was. And so look at Peter, as soon as it happened.. "Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him for he was naked," that means stripped to his underclothes, "he was stripped, he grabbed

his fisher's coat, threw his belt on and dove into the sea." That's Peter. I mean, he isn't saying, "Men, let's turn the boat around." He just throws that thing off, and he made sure to get his coat on because he had respect for Christ. He wasn't going to arrive on shore in his underwear. Put his coat on, wrapped his belt around and dove in. I mean, he was going to meet the Lord. You see, this is...this is Peter, this is the impulsiveness and yet the beauty of him. I tell you, I wish I had more of that kind of Peter in me, more of that kind of attitude that says, "I want to be near to Jesus every time I can get near Him." So easy for me to drift away and be contented with being away, you know. Peter just heard John say it's the Lord, and....whew....he was in that water.

Well the rest of the guys had a little more, you know, they've got to get the net tied down and drag the fish in and get the boat around and so forth. Not Peter, he didn't care about anything, just get where Jesus is, let everything else take care of itself. So he's in the water. His love causes him to be impatient. And I can imagine, if I know anything about Jesus, He must have had a smile on his lips because that was so Peter, so imitable to him. And so great big burly Peter slashing through the water to get to the shore, in the meantime the disciples turn the boat around and they're coming. Oh there's so much you can learn from that kind of love, isn't there? How sick it is when we willingly forsake the warmth of His fellowship, how much we need to be like Peter and run to Him, you know.

Verse 8, "The other disciples came in a little bit," and the article is there again, the definite article "the" THE boat, Peter's boat evidently. "For they were not far from land but as it were 200 cubits," which is 300 feet, a hundred yards, "and the boat came in dragging the net with fish." They couldn't get it into the boat, so they just dragged the net in with all these fish.

Now you see what's happening here? Fellowship is being restored, isn't it? As the distance narrows. Now watch this in verse 8, this is beautiful...verse 9, "As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there and fish laid on it and bread." That's just terrific. Jesus had made breakfast for all of them. And He didn't have to use their fish, you know? They came in and here He is with breakfast all cooked for them. That's a fantastic insight, the God of the universe takes the time to cook the breakfast for seven guys. Oh, that's overwhelming. You know, we think of God as a great cosmic thing way out there, you know, who sort of says, "Here's the rules. You either make it or..." see. And God sort of lets us on our own and He's a little indifferent about our lives. That isn't so. You don't believe...you must believe this, though maybe you don't in your mind, you must believe that He cares that you have your breakfast. He cares, believe me He does. He's not one that cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, He knows. So He makes sure they have a nice breakfast cooking over the fire and some nice bread cakes.

And they see this all, you know, as they get there. How wonderful it is, He has everything ready. They didn't need to do anything. Not only did He provide the catch for them but He had His own thing right there ready with the cake already made. Listen, Jesus will supply your needs, will He not? Does Philippians 4:13 says, "My God shall supply some of your needs according to His riches in Christ

Jesus?" What does it say? "All your needs, all your needs."

You say, "Well it's one thing to catch a fish, another thing...I mean, He goes so far as to make breakfast." Not only that, in a minute He'll even serve it to you. Verse 10, He says, "Jesus saith unto them, 'Bring of the fish which you have now caught.'" In other words, "Peter, wrap up your fishing. Drag those onto shore which you've caught." And what this...what's involved in this evidently is let the little ones go. They had so many, you remember, that seven of them couldn't get it into the boat. And so at this point, He says, "Filter out the little guys and just keep..." you know, all fisherman would do, drag it to the shore and then let the little ones go. They wouldn't do that in the water, they would lose the big ones, too. So they would just throw back the little ones. Well...so He says, "Bring up the fish which you have now caught." Get your full catch in, Peter and let the rest go...is implied. And so Peter sorts out the fish.

"When he gets all done, Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land," now we know that if Peter could draw it to land, he's only one man, and seven couldn't draw it into the boat before, that it must have been lightened some, right? And that we believe to be the little fish being sent out so that only remaining in verse 11 is he drew the net to land full of what kind of fish? Great fish, you see, full of great fish, a hundred fifty-three. Now I don't know how strong Peter was but let's assume he could haul around 300 pounds if he was really strong, he had a couple...he had a hundred and fifty-three couple-pound fish, two-pound fish. Now for the Sea of Galilee, those are little fish. They call them now, "St. Peter's fish." And you can get them when you go there, if you do, and they don't taste too good. But anyway, it's the way they cook them, I think, they just take the whole fish, throw it in the frying pan and then hand it to you. But if you can get over the stare, you're all right. But that's a very small fish and it would weigh easily under a pound. But if they were to haul in a hundred and fifty-three of them that weighed two pounds or more, that's a tremendous catch and their nets shouldn't have been able to hold them, it says at the end of verse 11, there were so many, yet was not the net broken. It should have been but it wasn't. So God not only handled the fish, He handled the net very well.

And so, Jesus provides. He provides in full. And you know what? You say, "What are they going to do with all these fish?" My dear friends, that was the wonderful provision for their food for days to come, I imagine. And Jesus had already made breakfast for them for that morning. But He always took care of the future. Remember when He fed them with the five thousand and He had enough baskets full left over, twelve, one for each of them for breakfast. He always took care of the future as well as the present.

Then in verse 12, this is so wonderful. "Jesus saith unto them," here it is, "Come and...what?...dine." Now in dining in those days, that was full fellowship, wasn't it? When they ate in those days, they really were together. They supped together, that's full fellowship. You see what's happened? Now watch it. When Peter and the disciples took the path of self-effort, they wound up disobeying, failing,

and losing fellowship in its intimate sense. When they took the path of spiritual effort, they were obedient, successful and now what are they experiencing? Full intimate fellowship with Jesus. It's a graphic illustration. And He said, "Come and dine." And I love this, "None of the disciples dared ask Him, 'Who art Thou?' knowing that it was the Lord." Don't you like that? That's John's mind, see. He's saying, "Oh, we all knew it was the Lord." Well why would you want to ask Him?" Well, you know, you never know, see. I mean, none of them wanted to admit that they weren't that sure. Anybody want to say, "Ah, are You really the Lord?" And have Him say, "Why you should know that." You know, and then embarrass them. So none of them would dare ask whether He was the Lord, knowing that He was, of course, all the time.

And so, He dines with them. This is full and glorious and beautiful fellowship. You know, this is so like the first time, isn't it? Do you remember the first time that Jesus called these guys? In Luke chapter 5 it tells us about it and it's a fascinating thing because it's almost identical. Listen to this, I'll read it to you. Luke chapter 5, "It came to pass that as the people pressed upon Him to hear the Word of God, He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret," same place, Sea of Galilee. "Saw two boats standing by the lake that the fishermen were gone out of them and washing their nets and He entered into one of the boats that was Simon's boat, and He asked them that He would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the people out of the boat." Jesus was being pushed back into the water, so He got off the shore in a little boat. "And He begin to speak and when He was through speaking, He said to Simon, 'Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draft.' And Simon answering said, 'Master, we've toiled all night and haven't taken anything. Nevertheless, at Thy word I'll let down the net.' When they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fish and their net broke and they beckon unto their partners who were in the other boat that they should come and help them, and they came and filled both the boats so that they begin to sink. Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, 'Depart from me for I'm a sinful man, O Lord.' And they were astonished." Verse 11, "And when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and...what?...followed Him."

The first time He called them, you know how He called them? He called them by doing a miracle to show His provision and accomplishing what they couldn't accomplish. You know what He did here in chapter 21? He did the exact same thing. That's another reason I believe they had gone back to their professions, He had to go back and renew their entire calling all over again and prove Himself faithful to care for their needs, and He did...and He did.

And then in verse 13, "Jesus then cometh and taketh bread and giveth them and fish likewise." He actually fed them. Is that a tender Savior? Jesus Christ is no indifferent God, He's a loving, gentle provider, is He not?

And verse 14 closes the record. "This is now the third time...that is the third time to the intimate Apostles that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was risen from the dead." You see, John wants to remind you that this is a resurrected Christ, literal, alive from the dead. This is the third

time He has showed Himself to His disciples.

Do you see what you've seen here? Do you see it with a spiritual eye? The pattern is complete. Carnal, fleshly self-effort, responding to your own will is characterized by disobedience, ends in failure and a loss of intimate fellowship. Spiritual effort characterized by obedience produces success and intimate fellowship with Christ.

I say this to you and listen well. If you're struggling with your own self-effort, if you're struggling in the flesh and maybe doing some things that in themselves are good, but you're disobedient to God and you don't have time in your life to pray and you don't have time to teach your neighbors, your friends, your children. You don't have time to love. You don't have time to really fellowship with others, to study, to serve Christ. You don't have time to go to the world with the gospel. You don't have time to give or money to give. You don't have that which it takes of dedication, to minister your gifts and use your abilities. Then I say you are disobedient even if you're involved in the church, you're disobedient.

Some of you are working in a job you ought to be declaring Christ on a mission field somewhere. Some of you are thinking about going to school right now and you're going to study to work in some kind of secular work and God's telling you to go into the world and preach the gospel, telling you to be a Bible teacher, or to do this, or to do that and you're being disobedient. And what you're doing may not be evil, but it becomes evil and Satan will make you think it's success and it isn't.

You say, "What do I do if that's my case?" And I say to you what Jesus pointed up to them and confess your failure that you're not making it and take the upward path. Let's pray.

Father, we're thankful this morning that You've shown us simply with an illustration how to look at our lives, that we view our lives as simply as that, either we're moving on the ground of what you've told us to do, we're obeying Your will, obedient, successful as You measure success and You get the glory and we're experiencing intimate fellowship. Or, Father, on the other hand, we are going our own way, following our own designs and our own path, doing that which pleases us and the end is that we're disobedient, unsuccessful, failures. God, help us to move for You. Help us to know what intimate fellowship, the warmth of really experiencing all that You are and have for us.

As we close our service this morning, Lord, we would ask that each of us would be honest enough to examine our own hearts to see whether our lives are characterized by a decline or an incline, whether we're moving on the basis of our will or Your will, whether we're disobedient or obedient, successful or failing, experiencing intimate fellowship or not. Work in our hearts, Spirit, do Your perfect work that we might be what You want us to be, that we might be the sent ones willing to go whatever the cost and trust You for the provision. Father, may we recognize that we don't have to worry about what we eat, drink, wear, how we're going to take care of things, just to be obedient and You will provide. We

pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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