

Chapter 94

"Lovest thou Me?"

John 21 vv 1-14

One calm, peaceful evening a group of men are walking towards the Sea of Gennesaret. That lake is also called the Sea of Tiberias in God's Word. The sun has already gone down behind the Galilee peaks. Dusk falls quickly and evening shadows lengthen. Before long it will be dark.

At eventide nearly everyone goes home. Their day's work done, they look forward to a well earned rest in their own home.

These men however, of whom we can count seven, make their way towards a waiting boat. They step aboard, let loose the ropes and slowly the fishing boat drifts away from the shore.

Who are these men? ... Why are they setting out upon the lake at evening time, just as night is approaching? ... These seven men are seven disciples of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord had told them to go to Galilee. He had already told them to do this, before His death, and the command was repeated after Jesus arose from the dead.

Accordingly the disciples had departed for Galilee. What are they to do there? ... Well, they must wait! Wait for the Lord Jesus, who would there appear to them. Now therefore His disciples are to be found in Galilee, waiting for the Lord's appearing. Waiting always lasts a long time. What are they to do during those waiting days?

That is why Peter had said to the other

disciples: "I go a fishing."

As you know, they had originally been fishermen by trade. Before Jesus called them they had earned their living by fishing. They now decide to go fishing once more, for then they will not be idle. So, you see boys and girls, that is why these seven men make their way to the shores of the lake, board the ship and cast off.

But why should they do that in the evening? ... Well fishermen in those parts frequently did so, because it was the best time for fishing.

Steadily the boat moves away from the shore. The men throw out their nets. Some time later they haul the nets in again, hoping to find them full of fish. But what a disappointment! Not one fish have they caught. Once more they cast out their nets, but when they haul them in for the second time, they again appear empty.

Hour after hour goes by, but all their labour is in vain. That night they catch nothing. Morning begins to dawn as they make for the shore again.

When they get closer in, they see a stranger walking along the shore of the lake. Well, that was nothing extraordinary, that often happened. The disciples take no particular notice of him.

All at once the stranger enquires: "Children, have ye any meat?"



On the sea of Tiberias

Oh, how annoying. If only they had caught something, they could at least have given this man some of their catch. But they have nothing - nothing!

Somewhat resentfully, they give the shortest possible answer: "No."

They are really a little bit ashamed, and hope that he will soon walk on. But that does not happen.

"Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find," calls the unknown walker.

Hesitantly the disciples look at each other for a moment. Shall they do it? They are not really very enthusiastic about it, yet they dare not refuse. Finally they do just as the stranger requests them.

The net disappears into the water on the right side of the ship. Shortly afterwards they try to draw it back. They cannot do it though, for the net is full of fish. See the look of amazement on

the faces of those sturdy fishermen. They look from one to the other astonished. How can that be, all at once? That is a question they cannot answer.

One of the disciples stares pensively at the stranger. That fisherman is - John. Suddenly he turns to Peter and says quietly: "It is the Lord." He recognises the lonely wayfarer. That is his Master, who loved him so dearly.

At the sound of these words Peter stands up and looks, and a happy smile spreads over his face. He too recognises the Lord Jesus all of a sudden. Hurriedly he takes his fisher's coat, for he had put it off while working. In the Bible it says that he was naked. That does not mean of course that Peter had no clothes on at all - he was probably working in a loin cloth. Now that he hears and sees however that his Master stands on the shore, he girds himself with the coat and jumps into the sea. Since the ship was close to

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land, the water was not too deep at that point. Look, there he wades through the shallow water to the shore. He wants to be the first by Jesus' side.

The other disciples follow with the ship. The net with fishes, which they are unable to haul aboard for fear of breaking, they drag behind the boat. They beach the ship on the sandy shore and wade to land also. Soon they all stand around Jesus.

Then they see that there on the sand a fire of coals is burning, upon which lie some fishes. Bread too is lying there. Well now, how did the Lord Jesus get that food? ... Oh, is anything too wonderful for the King of kings? Is he not the Almighty? ... The Lord does not need their fishes. He has already provided fish and bread.

Yet He will also use something of their catch, and so the Lord says: "bring of the fish which ye have now caught."

Immediately Peter stands up. He walks to the boat, to which the net was made fast and draws it further to land. That is heavy work, for it is quite full. The net does not break however. They shake it empty and find that there are one hundred and fifty three large fishes. No, this time there are no small ones, only great ones. What a wonder! The Almighty so orders it that only large fish are caught in the net. Truly, He is the King of the whole earth. The fish too must obey His command.

They take some of these fish and bring them to Jesus.

John 21 vv 15-25

Look, there sit those men on the sandy

shore. They are going to dine. Astonishment, respect and deep reverence, but also joy, fills their hearts. None of them dares to ask: "Who art thou?", for they know that He is the Lord.

Then Jesus, the Host, takes the bread and shares it among the seven disciples. After that each of them receives a portion of fish also, silently they partake of that simple meal. Each of them is wrapped in his own thoughts.

At last the meal is finished and all are satisfied.

Suddenly the Lord Jesus turns to Peter and asks: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?"

Is your love greater than the love of the other apostles, Peter? You have thought so. You have exalted yourself above the other disciples, for you thought that your love was the greatest.

Peter looks up surprised at that question. Now, why should that be asked of him in particular? He does not delay to answer however, for at once he replies whole heartedly: "Yea, Lord: Thou knowest that I love Thee."

Then the Lord says: "Feed My lambs." By these words the Saviour means that Peter, as an apostle, as a teacher, must instruct and encourage God's people.

For a moment silence reigns.

But then Jesus asks Peter for the second time: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?"

Uncomprehending, Peter looks at his Master. Does the Lord not believe him? Or did He not understand him properly? Promptly his reply rings out: "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee."

"Feed my sheep," says the Lord Jesus.

Peter is told for the second time that he

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must teach and instruct the Lord's people.

For the third time the Lord Jesus then asks Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?"

A grieved look comes to Peter's face, his eyes fill with tears. He becomes saddened.

No, he does not become angry because it appears that the Lord mistrusts him, he becomes sorrowful. Oh, it would not be surprising if his Master trusted him no more. Had he not denied Jesus three times? ... His thoughts go back to that dreadful night, and cause him pain. And yet ... love burns in his soul.

Listen, for the third time his answer comes softly on the ear: "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Oh, it is just as though Peter says: "Lord, I am certainly not worthy that Thou shouldst look upon me again, but Thou knowest that my heart is filled with love to Thee; that I cannot do without thee."

And then the Lord says: "Feed My sheep."

Three times Peter had said that he did not know Jesus. Now the Lord lets Peter say three times that he loves Him with all his heart. This story is indeed rather difficult for you, boys and girls, but you can well remember that Peter was here restored in his apostle's calling.

The Lord Jesus also foretold to Peter here that later he would be taken prisoner, and that he would be bound. Peter is now still free, Peter can still go wherever he will. But the days will come when he will no longer be free, when he will be taken away as a prisoner.

After this the Lord stands up and departs. The disciples follow Him.

Peter is thinking over what he has heard.

Then his glance fails upon John. Suddenly the thought comes to him: "What will become of John later?" He decides to ask. He is curious to know whether the same lot awaits John. He wants to know whether dark days will dawn for John too.

"Lord," he says, "and what shall this man do?", and with those words he points to the apostle John.

"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Jesus answers in reprimand.

Peter was inquisitive and so he was rebuked by his Master.

Yet these words of Jesus are misunderstood. The disciples think that the Lord Jesus has said that John would not die. They are mistaken however, for Jesus did not say that. He had said: "IF I will that he tarry.", but He had not said that he WAS willing.

No, John lives no longer. He is long since dead, and his soul has rejoiced for many ages before God's throne.

If the Lord Jesus were to ask you: "Lovest thou Me?" what would you answer? Could you also say wholeheartedly: "Yea Lord, Thou knowest that I love thee?"

Oh, by nature nobody loves the Lord Jesus, in every heart by nature there lives hatred and enmity towards the Lord Jesus. Do you believe that? ... It is true. We are enemies of God and of His service.

Only when God BESTOWS that love, do we truly love Jesus. Not otherwise. Only when the Lord gives us a new heart is the enmity taken away.

Oh, may the Lord grant you also that love, which Peter possessed. Bend your knees and

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ask daily for renewing of heart. He is not under any obligation, but He can bestow it through grace.