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Breakfast is Served

By Lee Thomas

Sometimes it can be a song on the radio that does it, or maybe background music in the shops that can sweep us a thousand miles away to another time and place down memory lane. Sometimes it might be a taste or a smell or an incident that does it and we're all of a sudden back in childhood and in memories from a long time ago. And here in John 21 you can imagine what the sound of Jesus' voice did for his disciples, for Simon Peter, for John when he called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" And the very blunt answer came back "No."

You can imagine what the voice of a stranger from the shore did when all of a sudden they were transported back to memories from three years earlier. That same voice which had called out "Come and follow me." That same voice which had said from the cross "It is finished." Now even after his death and resurrection that same voice calling out to them again.

And these resurrection appearances of the Lord are his gift to us, his reassurance to us that he is alive now and with us in this moment, in another dimension of life beyond our physical senses, beyond what our eyes and ears can detect, but nevertheless on another vibration of being that he is alive right now in this moment.

And this incident in John 21, I think is such an appealing resurrection appearance of the Lord. It's so simple, calling out to friends from the beach, and at the same time so grand. On the one hand, it's so everyday and ordinary, preparing and cooking breakfast for your friends, and at the same time completely out of this world. Here, on a beach, the Lord Jesus himself builds a barbecue and cooks breakfast for this group of failures and flaky followers who have deserted and let him down, and he invites them to come and to have breakfast with him.

And there is a joy in that message this morning that I want us to unfold as we look at this passage, that he invites us to come and to share in breakfast that he prepares for us.

The Catch of Fish

It's Peter here who instigates things. He says, "I am going out to fish." He does the normal thing for believers: go out to work, provide himself with a living. And he does that, and they catch absolutely nothing. But by following the instructions of Jesus, the net is filled, filled to bursting and overflowing.

And the strange thing is that this has happened before. It happened three years ago. When the disciples protested that they had caught nothing, Jesus said, "If you go out again and let your net down on this side, then you will be refreshed with a catch." And their response was, "Because you say so, we will let down the net." In other words, they weren't going out to fish because they believed there was anything to be caught. They were going because the Lord had commanded them.

And there's a very powerful principle in that: we go about our daily work not just because it's our routine or the thing that we need to do to provide ourselves with a living, or to pay our mortgage or our rent or our bills or to provide food for our family, important as all of those things are. We also go because the Lord calls us to go. These men were fishermen. They knew about fishing, and they knew when there were no fish to be caught. But they went because it was the Lord's command. And by obeying him, their net was filled to bursting, and they were refreshed with abundance.

You see, the Lord is interested in our day-to-day activities, in our care for our friends and our family, in bringing up children, in our voluntary activities, in going to a place of work. He's interested in all of those things as much as he is interested in our gathering to worship this morning. Because he is a seven-day-a-week God. And he's interested in those things because that is where we understand and we learn the fundamental qualities of the Christian life: integrity, honesty, reliability, service. We learn those things and we demonstrate them in our day-to-day life.

And we can't separate those things and say, "This is my work life and this is my church life and this is my family life and this is my hobby life." Because as Paul writes to the Colossians, in Christ all things hold together. He is as much the God of the banker and the building society as he is the God of the gospel here. In him all things hold together. And he has authority over all those things.

He meets his disciples at the shore not when they have enjoyed a great success. He meets them when they've been out to fish and caught nothing. He meets them in the middle of their disappointment. He doesn't meet them in the middle of their joy. This is the same Jesus who also stands on the shore of your life and my life and calls out to us and meets us not when we have everything together and our net is full and everything is sorted. This is the Jesus who stands on the edge of the shore of our life and calls out to us when the net is empty and we are disappointed and there is nothing there to be had. And there is a terrific confidence to be found in that message: he finds us in failure just as he finds his disciples in

failure and he refreshes them with a catch. 153 to be precise. Typical fishermen, they count them. They want to see what the measure of their success will be. But this is the Jesus who they knew. Yet somehow different. No longer confined to time and space. But raised and glorified and transformed forever. Not back from the dead. But having passed through death. Defeated it. And come out the other side as the mighty conqueror.

What does this catch of fish show to us? It tells us that Jesus, yes, he's interested in feeding. But he is also interested in demonstrating who he is. That he has ultimate power and authority over all things. This catch of fish isn't a lucky break. It's a demonstration that he has authority over all creation. Whether that is a shoal of fish or the fate of the nation or your life or mine. All things are under his supreme authority. And he has the power to turn nothing into something. Just as he did at the very beginning. Before time itself began. In the darkness before anything came to be. When nothing rolled over into something. He has the power to create something from nothing.

And Jesus is the master at taking small things and turning them into great things. Here he takes the results of a night of failed fishing and he turns them into abundance. Just as he can turn failed exam results or a redundancy or a negative hospital result into a new lens of seeing things to bring hope. He has the power to turn nothing into something. You remember that little boy's packed lunch of a few pieces of bread and fish turned into abundance so that 5,000 men plus women and children could be fed. You remember those stone water jars at the wedding in Cana in Galilee, empty, filled with water, and then the finest wine because the command of the Lord was followed. He has the power to take ordinary everyday things and turn them into something extraordinary. He has the power to take what we might consider our small gifts, our small offering and turn it into something extraordinary that can bring blessing and abundance.

And so there is the question for us this morning. What do we have in our life that desperately needs to be put into his hands? Is it our finance, our marriage, our relationship, our career, our health, our mental health? Whatever it is, what do we need to place into his hands and to say, "Lord, these are my ordinary everyday things. And sometimes I don't know what to do with them, but I hand them over to you to see what extraordinary transformation that you can bring."

Now that sounds very simple on Sunday morning, but it's incredibly difficult because we want to hold on to things and control things, and we trust in our ability to plan the way forward, and we're full of fear and doubt, and the desire to keep everything together. But sometimes we have to take a step of faith and to say, "Lord, I don't know the answer in this situation, and I don't know what the right words to say are, and so I simply have to hand it to you and trust that you keep your promises, that you are faithful to your word, that you can turn something ordinary into something extraordinary."

And we can trust that because Jesus comes with a promise in John 10:10 when he says, "I

have come that you may have life and have it in all of its abundance." He comes to bring life in its richness, not misery or rules or control or judgment. He comes to bring life and everything that that means for our growth.

So, that's the first point this morning: we have an extraordinary catch waiting for us.

Breakfast is Served

And the second point, as the title of this morning says, "Breakfast is served." Verse 12 that we heard read to us: Jesus said, "Come and have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus is occupied with preparing breakfast. He puts them at their ease. He barbecues fish. It's such a normal, natural thing to do. But it's a sign of who Jesus is: this is the one who served at the Last Supper when he got down on his hands and knees and he washed the dirty, dusty feet of his disciples, including the one who would betray him. He served them then. This is the one who went to the cross and said "I thirst" on your behalf, and he served them then. And now, in his new resurrected life, he serves again. Even those who have denied him, and he prepares them breakfast and he is still serving now. Because he is the one who came not to be served but to serve.

And there's a very important detail here: when the Lord calls the disciples to come and to share a breakfast with him, that barbecue already has fish on it that he is grilling. Now, where did those come from? Because they didn't come from the net that the disciples are just dragging in.

You see, there is a powerful principle here: the Lord has already provided. He's already got breakfast underway. He's already grilling those fish. He says, "Come and bring what you have caught." Does he need it? No. Does he accept it? Yes. Because the Lord must always remain bigger than our success. He must always be bigger than what we have in our net to offer. And there is a great reassurance for us there: whether we can drag in a net which is full or whether we pull in a net which is empty, the Lord has already provided. Whether you have great gifts to offer him or you have something small, the Lord has already provided. Whether your pocket is full or whether it is empty, the Lord has already provided. And there is a great equaliser there. Because the person whose bank balance is overflowing and the person who is in the red, the Lord has already provided. And he is already preparing breakfast and he is already inviting us to come to him because of what he has provided, whether we have anything to bring or whether we have nothing to bring.

What do we think about when life becomes really difficult? When we lose our job, what sustains us then? When we have hopes and ambitions and they don't come to pass? When we're waiting for the test results from the hospital and we're anxious about what they might contain, what keeps us going in that moment?

You know, on Thursday, it was Ascension Day. When we think about the time when the Lord was raised into heaven to take his rightful place at the right hand of the Father. And what keeps us going is to remember that right now, in this moment, sitting at the right hand of God, is a man who understands what it is to suffer pain. Who understands what it feels like to be tempted. Who understands what it feels like to be rejected. Who understands what it feels like to have the people you thought were closest to you turn their back on you and walk away. At the right hand of God, right now in this moment, is a man who understands all of those things. And that keeps us going.

But our God has not remained distant and far away from pain and from suffering, but has in himself become a part of it. In Ireland, they have a chant. They say, "I have a man in the glory tonight." In other words, in heaven there is a person. There is a person who understands because he has experienced those things.

In this passage, Jesus gives reminders to his disciples who he is. His voice that they recognise, the breaking of bread like at that final Passover meal, the miraculous catch of fish, a reminder of what happened before. But despite all of that, they still don't fully recognise who he is. And so often we don't fully recognise the work of the Lord in the moment that it's happening. Before we experience breakthrough, even ten seconds before, it's almost impossible to believe that it will ever come.

But when we look back at the work of the Lord, and we look back on our lives, and we look back at the patterns, and we trace the threads, then somehow we can see the fingerprints of the Lord at work. It's like one of those tapestries. When we look at the back, all we see is a collection of tangled, dangling, multicoloured threads. But when we turn it over, we see the complete picture as it was designed and created and intended to be. And we can see the fingerprints in the work of the Lord tracing its way through the pattern of our life, lovingly woven and designed to bring about something extraordinary.

Feed My Sheep

And my third and final point this morning is to echo the command that Jesus gives to Peter: "Feed my sheep." We've had a catch of fish, we've had breakfast served, and a command to feed my sheep. After the meal, Jesus talks to Peter about being a shepherd. He says, "Simon Peter, son of John, do you love me more than these?" And he replies, "Lord, you know that I love you." And Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Three times they repeat the same question, "Do you love me?" "Lord, you know I love you." Again and again and again.

And in verse 17, it tells us Peter was hurt. He was hurt that the Lord had asked him three times the same question, almost as though there was some doubt over his discipleship. He was hurt by Jesus' telling off. There's another important principle here: before Jesus tells anybody off, he warms them and he feeds them. Are we applying that principle to our own life? Before we give out rebuke and correction, maybe to our own children, to our loved

ones, before we challenge and tell off and correct, have we warmed them and have we fed them first? Because that's the principle that the Lord Jesus follows. But when he's done that, he brings about a correction.

And he corrects Peter because Peter has denied the Lord three times. He's denied the Lord three times before the Lord's crucifixion. And there's a message for us here: Peter shows us that even the biggest failures and the greatest disappointments can become the greatest followers because there is forgiveness to be found in between.

If I was to take you back a few chapters before Jesus' crucifixion, on the occasion when Peter denied the Lord Jesus, he was standing around a charcoal fire warming himself because he was cold. When the Lord asks him three times, "Do you love me?" he does so at the side of a charcoal fire which he prepares to warm Peter.

You see that first charcoal fire when he denies the Lord? We've all stood there. We've all stood around that fire of denial made by ourselves to keep ourselves warm and to go our own way. We've all chosen our own way and our own decisions because the Lord's decisions are a bit awkward in the moment. We've all done that. But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus builds another fire. He builds another fire for those who have denied him. And he says, "Come and warm yourself here and be recommitted to me." And however many times we've denied and gone our own way, there's another opportunity to be warmed and fed by him. That's the good news that we have to offer.

You know, I want to just share with you before we conclude the gospel message this morning. I was at a house party gathering not so long ago with friends gathered around and I was just sitting there quietly and the topic of religion came up and they were chatting away about religion and different transcendent experiences and all that sort of thing. And somebody said, "Oh, you're religious, aren't you?" And I said, "No, not me." But I meant it. I'm not. I'm not.

And they said, "No, you are. We know that you go to church and you've said before you're a Christian." I said, "Oh, that's true. That part is true. I am a Christian." They said, "Well, what's the difference?"

I said, "Well, it'll take a long time to explain. Perhaps I can illustrate it to you and give you an example." And I drew a picture. I'm not an artist, as you can see, but it's a simple illustration. I said, "Let's draw what religion is."

And so I drew this out. I said there's a doorway at the beginning, which might be some kind of initiation ceremony, might be a ritual to go through. And then we go along the bumpy path of life with all of its ups and downs. And you might have teachers along the way to help you. And when we get to the end of that, there'll be a judgment like a set of scales. And if all of the good things outweigh the bad things, then you'll get through the doorway at the end

into this experience of heaven.

I said, "It's a bit like going to university, isn't it? You go through an initiation at the beginning, and you pass a test to get in, and then you might have teachers along the way, but however good those teachers are, they can't guarantee that you'll get the degree at the end, can they? Because you have to take an exam. And if you get more marks and not less marks, then you get through and you'll get your degree."

I said, "Right, that's what religion is. But that's not what I believe. That's not what the Christian faith says. So then I put a cross. At the doorway at the beginning. I said, 'That's what Christianity says: that all of the ups and downs of life, and all of the tests and trials, is already dealt with at the beginning. It's already done the moment you go through the doorway.' Religion says that you've got to do, do, do. Christianity says, 'Done.' It's already done.

You see, friends, I'm not standing here this morning because I'm hoping that one day God will say, 'You've been a good boy.' Because I know I haven't. It's because of what he's already done. You know, when the Lord went to the cross, he spoke three words. Well, he spoke more than that, but three of the words that he spoke were of the greatest reassurance to us. He said, 'It is finished. It's done.' You're not going to heaven because of your merit. You don't have any. You're going to heaven because of the merit of the Lord Jesus.

Why does God look at you and think that you're beautiful? It's because when he looks at you, he doesn't see you, he sees the face of his son. And everything that has been done for you already at the beginning of the pathway.

What a weight and a burden that he has lifted from us so that we can go forward through those ups and downs in life knowing that the end will not depend on my merit but will depend on the merit of the Lord Jesus. That's the opposite of religion. And that's the opposite of anything that we would expect. But Christianity is always the opposite of what we would expect because it takes what we would expect and turns it on its head and says, 'No, all of the values of the world don't apply. It's the last who are going to be first. It's the poorest who are going to be richest, and it's the dead who are going to be alive. Everything that you don't expect is what the cross at the beginning represents.'

What an assurance to us. And that is the gospel message for us this morning.

Conclusion

So, to conclude, are we going to come to him? Are we going to accept his invitation when he says, "Come and have breakfast. I've lit the fire. I've grilled the fish. I've prepared it for you, and it doesn't matter what's in your net or what isn't. I've already provided. It's already done. Are you going to come and share that with me?"

And he invites you this morning when he says, "Come and have breakfast." What he really says is, "Come and share in my risen life so that you can have life not one day in the future when you go to heaven, but that heaven is right now in this moment, and that you can have that life right now with me. And that it will last into all eternity.

And we can have that because the risen Lord Jesus, who has died and is alive, stands at the shore of our life and calls out to us and says, "Come and have breakfast." And we can have faith in that because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because I know he holds the future and life is worth the living just because he lives. Amen.