

John 21:1-14 “The Gospel Panorama: Christ Appeared”^{**}

Series: “The Gospel Panorama: Seeing and Savoring the Good News”

Main Idea: According to the gospel panorama, Christ appeared, and because He did, there is hope for each of us. This morning, we’re going to look carefully at one particular post-resurrection appearance, in John 21:1-14, and see a powerful example of what can and needs to happen in our lives.

Key: When we look carefully at the gospel panorama, we see that Christ appeared.

1. According to 1 Corinthians 15, Christ appeared to Cephas, the twelve, over 500, James, all the apostles, then to Paul.
 2. According to the rest of the New Testament, Christ appeared at least ten times during the forty days following His resurrection.
 3. Christ’s final appearance took place on the Mount of Olives, where He will return.
- I. We see regret (1-3).
 - A. We see it in Peter.
 1. He fell asleep in the garden.
 2. He abandoned his Savior.
 3. He denied knowing Christ three times.
 - B. We see it in many people today.
 - II. We see recognition (4-8).
 - A. Seeing Jesus as He is changed Peter.
 - B. Seeing Jesus as He is will change us.
 1. The church isn’t a place for perfect people.
 2. The church is a place for people who have come to grips with their regrets and looked to Jesus.
 - III. We see restoration (9-14).
 - A. Jesus restored Peter to fellowship.
 1. Christianity is not a religion.
 2. It’s a person to person relationship.
 - B. Jesus restored Peter to service.
- Make It Personal: If we feel like Peter, let’s do what Peter did.
1. Let’s face the facts about the risen Jesus.
 2. Instead of running from Jesus, let’s run to Him.

For the past month we’ve been gazing together at Jesus Christ and His redemptive work, in our series *“The Gospel Panorama: Seeing and Savoring the Good News.”* Our home text has been 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, which we examined four weeks ago, and identified four key components of the panorama.

The first, *according to the Scriptures*, which was our message three weeks ago. Then, *Christ died for our sins*, which was two weeks ago. Then, *Christ was buried and raised on the third day*, which we considered last week for our Resurrection Sunday message. But there’s one more component in this visual narrative, which we’ll explore today. *Christ appeared.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

There’s more than one way to communicate. We certainly communicate by what we say. But we also communicate by what we *don’t* say, and by how we say it we do say.

When your child answers the question, “How was your day?” with, “It was good,” that says something. But when instead of giving you three words, he goes on and on about who sat next to him at school, and what they did at lunch, and how science class went in the afternoon, he just took “it was good” to another level.

We get that. When people are talking, we listen not only to what they say, but what they don’t say, and how they say what they do say, including how many words they use to get across what’s on their mind.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC in April 2004.

^{**} Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

I want you to notice something. As Paul rehearses the gospel, he does not even mention Christ's perfect life, nor His ascension, nor His sending of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It's not that those events didn't happen, for they did, nor that they aren't important, for they certainly are.

But these works of Christ are at the heart of the good news that saves sinners. Christ died, was buried, was raised on the third day, and appeared to witnesses.

Yet there's something else we must see. Notice how much ink Paul devotes to these activities. Christ died. Paul devotes one verse to that event, verse 3. Christ was buried and raised on the third day. He devotes one verse to this, verse 4. Then he says that Christ *appeared*, and how many verses does he take? Four verses, verses 5-8.

There's something quite significant about the fact that Christ appeared. Frankly, this is a neglected part of many gospel presentations. His death? Yes, He died for sinners. His resurrection? Yes, just like the Scriptures said. But His appearances? Are they important? Apparently more important than we often think.

Why so? Think of it this way. If you say to your unsaved neighbor, "Friend, I have good news. Christ died for our sins," he might respond, "So what? That's just your opinion." But it's not just your opinion, is it? What he needs to know is, "No, my friend. After Christ died on the cross and walked out of His tomb, He appeared to nearly 530 people, over the next 40 days, and He even ate a meal with some of them. They are the ones who first said that He died for our sins. Wouldn't you like to know more?"

Key: When we look carefully at the gospel panorama, we see that Christ appeared. In fact, Paul says it four times. He appeared (verse 5). He appeared (verse 6). He appeared (verse 7). He appeared (verse 8). And Paul identifies six of the people or groups to whom He appeared.

According to 1 Corinthians 15, Christ appeared to **Cephas** (Peter), then to **the twelve** (the apostles minus Judas), then to **over 500 brothers**, then to **James** (the half-brother of Jesus, who did not believe in Jesus during His life, but became a believer once he saw the resurrected Savior), then to **all the apostles**, and then to **Paul**.

But this is not an exhaustive list. According to the rest of the New Testament, Christ appeared **at least ten times during the forty days following His resurrection**. Norman Geisler identifies twelve appearances of the Risen Christ (but he includes Christ's appearance to Paul which happened on the road to Damascus four to seven years after Christ returned to heaven). See <https://jashow.org/articles/who-saw-the-risen-jesus-the-12-post-resurrection-appearances-of-christ/>.

Appearance 1: Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-17)

Appearance 2: The Other Mary and Salome (Matthew 28:9-10; Mark 16:1)

Appearance 3: Simon Peter (Luke 24:34)

Appearance 4: The Two Disciples Walking to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32)

Appearance 5: The 10 Apostles, all except Thomas (Luke 24:33-49)

Appearance 6: The 11 Apostles, a week later (John 20:26-30)

Appearance 7: The Seven Apostles, in Galilee (John 21:1-14)

Appearance 8: The Apostles, in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20)

Appearance 9: 500 People at One Time (1 Corinthians 15:6)

Appearance 10: James (1 Corinthians 15:7)

Appearance 11: The 11 Apostles (Acts 1:4-9; some believe Matthew 28:16-20 records the same event)

Appearance 12: The Apostle Paul (Acts 9 and 1 Corinthians 15:8)

Some consider appearances 8 and 11 as the same event, so if you take out the appearance to Paul, this results in ten appearances by the risen Christ.

Christ's **final, post-resurrection appearance** took place on the **Mount of Olives**, where He will return one day. Remember what we saw in our first message, *according to the Scriptures*. The Old Testament Scriptures predict a special person and a special

place. The special person is the Messiah, and the place is a city surrounded by mountains, Jerusalem. One of the mountains is Mount Moriah, where God provided a substitute lamb for Abraham, and where God's Son became a slain lamb to take away the sins of the world.

But there's also the Mount of Olives to the east, from which King Jesus descended on the colt of a donkey on Palm Sunday, also from which the Risen Jesus ascended back to heaven in Acts 1. And it's on this very mountain, the Mount of Olives, that His feet will land when He appears again, not as a meek and lowly Savior, but as the Righteous Judge and Mighty Conqueror predicted by the prophet Zechariah.

Listen to Zechariah 14:4-5, "On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. ⁵ And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him."

So yes, the gospel panorama is incomplete without this final element. Christ appeared. The person who died, and was raised from the dead, appeared some ten times to amazed witnesses who say to us, "He truly is alive. Believe in Him, and get ready to see Him, for He's coming back."

We don't have time to investigate all ten appearances. Just one. This morning, we're going to look carefully at the fascinating, post-resurrection appearance in John 21:1-14, and as we do, we're going to see a powerful example of what can and needs to happen in our lives.

By way of context, it's interesting to note the surprises connected with the resurrection account of Jesus Christ. John 20, for instance, is full of surprised people:

Mary Magdalene was surprised that the stone was moved (20:1).

Peter and John ran to the tomb and were surprised at what they saw, an empty sepulcher, empty that is except for the neatly arranged linens that had previously wrapped the body of Jesus (20:5-8).

Mary Magdalene was surprised again, twice in fact. First, she was surprised when she herself looked in the tomb and saw two angels where Jesus' body had previously lay (20:12). Then she was surprised when she left the gravesite and ran into a person she thought was the gardener, but quickly learned was none other than her resurrected Lord! (20:16)

Then the **Twelve disciples**, minus Judas and Thomas, received the shock of their lives. Fearing for their safety, they were meeting behind locked doors, wondering if they were next on the hit list of the antagonistic Jewish leaders. Then all of the sudden Jesus surprised them by entering the room, and He didn't even use the door! (20:19)

A week later, the risen Lord surprised the doubting disciple, **Thomas**. Remember what the Lord told him? John 20:27 records, "Then He said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'"

So there were many people surprised by the appearances of risen Christ. And in our text, John 21:1-14, we meet yet another.

What difference does it make to know that Christ appeared? We're about to see. There are three scenes in this passage, and in them we see three phases in the restoration of Peter.

I. We see regret (1-3).

Verse 1 begins (NIV), “Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way.” The first word “afterward” gives the setting. The KJV says, “After these things Jesus showed Himself...” The ESV says, “After this Jesus revealed himself.”

What we’re about to see happened *after these things*. What things? You remember the events well. In chapter 18, Jesus was betrayed by one of His own, and then arrested by a hateful mob of Jewish authorities. In chapter 19, the Lord endured the mockery of a rigged trial and the horror of a criminal's execution by crucifixion. In chapter 20, the gospel records the tremendous account of our Savior's resurrection and several of His post-resurrection surprise encounters. *After these things*.

What happened next, *after* these things? John says that “Jesus appeared again.” There’s actually a key, twice-repeated phrase in verse 1, as indicated by the KJV translation, “After these things Jesus showed Himself...on this wise showed he himself.”

The verb is active. It means “to shine forth.” Jesus manifested Himself. With great purpose, with great intention, the resurrected Christ revealed Himself.

Don't miss that. It's the key to everything that happens in chapter 21. Peter's not the main character. Jesus is. In chapter 21 the resurrected Lord unveils Himself, His person, His heart, and His ambition. We see the same word in verse 14, “This was the third time Jesus *appeared* to His disciples.”

To whom did Jesus unveil Himself on this occasion? Verse 1 says He appeared *to his disciples*. Verse 2 provides more specifics: “Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.”

Jesus showed himself to seven disciples. Where were the other four? We're not told. Simon Peter, Thomas, and Nathanael were there. So were the sons of Zebedee (James and John). So were two other unnamed disciples.

Why are the names of the latter two men not mentioned? I don't know. Perhaps these unnamed disciples serve as representative for all followers of Christ. The writer has us in mind, so let's plug ourselves into this story.

The plot of the story begins to develop in verse 3. “Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will go with you.’ They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.”

Interesting conversation. Very manly. Short, to the point. Peter says, “I’m going fishing.” And his friends return, “We’re going with you.”

What's going on here? Why did Peter decide to go fishing? Remember, fishing was no hobby for Peter. Fishing was his occupation, his trade, his livelihood. At least it was, before he met Jesus. In fact, more than half of the Twelve were fishermen.

So why did Peter go fishing? I don't know. Maybe they needed food, or some income. Or maybe this return to work was an attempt to silence the soul. I think Peter was struggling with something, a nagging question. True, he'd seen the risen Christ and knew He was alive. But things weren't the same as before. How could they be?

I think we see regret here.

A. We see it in Peter. And the others. Peter had blown it, at least three times. And he couldn't shake the painful memories.

1. *He fell asleep in the garden.* Mark 14:37-38 records the event, “Then he [Jesus] returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ he said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.’”

2. *He abandoned his Savior.* It happened when the soldiers came. First, Peter grappled a sword and tried to sever a man's head from his body. Fortunately, for the man and for Peter, he missed. Jesus told him to put the sword away. At that point Peter lost it. Do you remember what he and the others did? Mark 14:50 states, "And they all forsook Him, and fled."

But nothing intensified Peter's regret any more than what he did just hours later.

3. *He denied knowing Christ three times.* "You were with that Nazarene, Jesus!" a servant girl of the high priest accused Peter. But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said. A few minutes later he denied the Lord a second time. And finally, when those standing near him said, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean," Mark's account says, "He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, 'I don't know this man you're talking about (Mark 14:71).'"

I could be wrong, but when Peter said, "I'm going fishing," I don't think it was because he had a craving for some Galilee perch. I think he was feeling the heavy load of regret, mixed with confusion, too. Yes, he knew Jesus was alive, but the Lord kept appearing and disappearing. Peter didn't know where he stood with Jesus. Was He finished with him?

Could he ever be a fisher of men, as he once heard the Master say? He sure didn't feel like it. So he went back to what he knew best, his old life, *fishing*.

Peter is not alone, my friend.

B. We see it in many people today. The world is full of people who are overwhelmed with feelings of regret. Perhaps you are one of them. Maybe you've blown it. Maybe your dreams have been shattered and you can't seem to put the pieces of your life back together. Maybe you've let the Lord down, and you're wrestling with doubts. Every time you think about a new start, your hopes are dashed with the painful memory of how you let the Lord down in the past.

"What's the use?" you conclude. "God can't use me. I might as well go fishing."

If that's the video that keeps replaying in your mind, my friend, you'll want to pay special attention to what is about to happen.

By the way, how did the fishing trip go? Not too well. Verse 3 says, "But that night they caught nothing." Now Peter has regret upon regret. He'd blown it as an apostle. Now he's blowing it as a fisherman!

Now scene two. First, we see regret. Second, we see recognition.

II. We see recognition (4-8).

"Oh, you mean Peter looked within himself and recognized the truth about his innate potential he'd been downplaying? That's what brought him out of his despair, right?"

No, not at all, contrary to the plethora of self-help books that keep churning out that deceptive, self-exalting, joy-destroying notion. When I say, *recognition*, I'm not talking about recognizing the truth about ourselves. I'm talking about coming to grips with the truth about *Jesus*.

My friend, here's what changed Peter, and it will do the same for you and me.

A. Seeing Jesus as He is changed Peter. Back to our story. Verse 4 says, "Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus."

Verse 8 indicates that the boat was about 100 yards from shore (200 cubits). It was early morning, probably semi-dark and misty. The frustrated band of fishermen turned their gaze to the shoreline and saw a lone individual, whom they did not recognize.

Finally the man's voice broke the early morning silence. In verse 5 (NIV), "He called out to them, 'Friends [ESV 'children'], haven't you any fish?'"

That's not exactly the kind of question seven empty-handed fishermen want to hear! Notice their abrupt response. "They answered, 'No.'"

I wonder how they said it. Was it a mumbled, "Uh, no." Or did they shout, "NO!" We're not told. But however they said it, surely the "no" betrayed their frustration.

Then this mysterious person spoke again. In verse 6, "He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.'"

By the way, in English the word "right" can be used in a couple different ways. One refers to that which is "correct." This particular Greek word, however, appears elsewhere in the Scriptures to refer to the "right hand" or the "right eye," hence referring to a location (as opposed to the "left").

I don't know what went through Peter's mind at this point. Remember, he's not typically a man who is at a loss for words. "Cast your net on the *right side*? Is that what the man just said? Who does he think he is? I've been fishing this lake all my life!"

No doubt these men had cast their net on ever possible side of the boat, right hand, left hand, front, back, wherever, and more than once probably.

Yet something about that voice sounded so authoritative, so confident, so *familiar*. Consequently, Peter and the others hauled in their nets and did as told, casting them on the right side.

We see the result at the end of verse 6, "So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish." Wow! From no fish, to a superabundance of fish, in a matter of moments.

At this point, things began to click, at least for one of the men. Notice verse 7, "That disciple whom Jesus loved [that's John] therefore said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'"

And then, as he saw those fish flopping in the nets, Peter remembered. He recalled a scene from his life three years earlier. Let's relive it with Peter by turning to Luke 5.

In Luke 5, Peter met Jesus, but it actually wasn't the first time. The first time Peter met Jesus is recorded in John 1, when his brother, Andrew, brought him to Jesus. According to John 1:42, "Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)."

But apparently, after his initial meeting with Jesus, Peter went back to fishing. And then one day along came Jesus. Luke 5 tells us what happened that day.

v 2 Peter was washing up his nets, after an unsuccessful night of fishing.

v 3 Jesus borrowed Peter's boat to teach from, a kind of floating pulpit.

v 4 Then Jesus told Peter, "Launch out...let down your nets for a catch."

v 5 Remember Peter's reply? I'll paraphrase, "Are you serious?!" But he obeyed.

v 6 Here's what happened, "When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break." How did Peter respond?

v 8 "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'" But what did Jesus say to Peter?

v 10 "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." Jesus gave Peter a new calling in life. No longer would he catch fish, but men.

Please don't miss the connection between Luke 5 and John 21. In John 21, it's three years later, and Peter has once again gone back to fishing. He has blown it, and his heart is filled with regret, and he wonders whether he will ever again be of any use to Jesus. Then along comes Jesus, and what does He do? He performs the same miracle He used when He commissioned Peter the first time.

What did Peter do when he recognized his Master? Notice the end of verse 7, “When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.”

As was the practice of hardworking fishermen, Peter had stripped down to his undergarment for mobility. But when he recognized Jesus, he grabbed his outer coat and hit the water. Why?

I think I know why. There’s only one thing that matters to Peter now, and it’s not fish. It’s being restored to Jesus, and he wants to get near Him *now*! “You guys take care of the fish. You can keep the fish for all I care. I’m going to Jesus!”

I saw something similar happen to a young man many years ago. His father was a successful business owner and was grooming his oldest son to take over the business. The son already had a nice home and healthy salary, but he realized that God was calling him to the ministry of the gospel. In time he sold his home, gave up the business, and went off to Bible college, with his wife and children, to prepare to fish for men. Which he has been doing for the past forty years, as a pastor.

Why would somebody give up a comfortable lifestyle, a lucrative salary, security, and all the world can offer? I think it’s the same reason Peter swam away from the catch of a lifetime. Seeing Jesus as He is changed Peter.

But not just Peter.

B. Seeing Jesus as He is will change us. When the Risen Christ appears to us through the pages of His Word, He changes us. He takes our eyes off of our past, with all its blunders, and shows us that He paid the penalty for those blunders. Then He opens our eyes to the future and how He intends to use us, unworthy as we are, for His glorious purposes.

Friends, look at Peter. He’s so much like us. He is a sinful man, but Jesus called him. And then, after a season of fruitful ministry, he sinned again, and was filled with shame and regret. He looked within himself and saw no hope, for there was no hope to be found there.

But then Jesus appeared. Again. As He had done the first time, for Jesus never gives up on His own. And He makes it clear to Peter (and the others, and us), “I’m here, and I’m here for you, no matter what you’ve done. I already paid the penalty for your blunders, and My Father showed His satisfaction by raising Me up from the dead. Now come to me.”

And Peter did. And so can we.

Dear friends, let’s set the record straight about something.

1. *The church isn’t a place for perfect people.* Folks in our community have all kinds of crazy notions about the church, most of which aren’t true. For starters, the church is not fundamentally an organization. The church is not a business. The church certainly is not a country club. And the church isn’t a place for perfect people, or for those who give the impression they are. Rather...

2. *The church is a place for people who have come to grips with their regrets and looked to Jesus.* This is who we are, beloved. We are rebels, hell-bound rebels, who have been reached and rescued by the risen Christ. And so now, our greatest joy in this life and the next is to be near Him, to be used by Him, however He so chooses.

My non-Christian friend, I have a question for you. Do you see Him this morning, there on the shore line? He appeared to Peter and the others, yes, but He’s not there just for them. He is there for you too, and that’s why John recorded this story, “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31).”

Now we come to the final scene. The regret, the recognition, and finally...

III. We see restoration (9-14).

Here's how it happened. Notice verse 8, "The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off."

Notice what they found. According to verse 9, "When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread."

John, who wrote this narrative, says they observed three things on the shore that day. One, a campfire. Two, fish and chips (actually, "bread"). And three, Jesus.

So, what did Jesus say when he saw the disciples, with their haul of fish? Did He chastene them and say, "What in the world are you guys doing? I told you three years ago I called you to fish for men, not sea creatures!"

No. What did He say? In verse 10, "Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.'"

Our Savior is so patient with His followers. Yes, our sin displeases Him, but notice how He invites the sinner to come to Him.

Guess who moved first? Peter did. Verse 11 says, "So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn."

I thought about entitling this message, 153. Why does John tell us there were 153 fish in that net? Are we supposed to see some spiritual significance in that number? I don't think so. He said there were 153 fish because there was one more than 152 and one less than 154. In other words, once again, the details matter. This event really happened, and somebody took the time to count the fish.

And something else happened too. Jesus requested some of those fish.

You say, "Why? He already had fish on the fire, didn't He?" Yes, as we'll see, He did. Why then does He want some of *their* fish?

It's not about the fish. He doesn't need their fish. It's about them. What He wants is their restoration.

How do we know? Notice what He does next in verse 12. "Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.'" Breakfast? Who's thinking about food at a time like this?

Apparently, Jesus is. He knows that seven hard-working men might appreciate a good meal after a long night of work, and so He gives them what they need. But of course, Jesus knows these men need something more more than food. And He gives that to them, too, at this meal.

Himself. They need Him. He knows it, and they know it. I think that's why verse 12 ends the way it does, focusing not on the food, but on Him. "Now none of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord."

Do you see what Jesus is doing, my friend? He is *restoring His disciples*, step by step. First, they have regrets, which He helped them face. Then came the recognition, for they needed to see Him as He is in all His sufficiency. Now it's time for restoration, full and complete restoration.

These men, especially Peter, were full of regret. So Jesus restored them, first to Himself (which He accomplishes through this breakfast), and then to His service (which He accomplishes in the conversation He has after breakfast, in verses 15-25).

Oh beloved, do you not see the amazing love of Jesus here? He doesn't discard His wayward followers. He doesn't browbeat them, nor give them the silent treatment. He *restores* them, and He does with us.

Indeed, He restored Peter in two specific areas of his life.

A. Jesus restored Peter to fellowship. Watch how the Master did it. Verse 13 says (NIV), “Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.”

Did you catch that? Jesus made the disciples sit down, and then He took the place of a waiter.² A waiter? Yes. We go to a restaurant and someone waits on us. That’s what Jesus did here for His followers.

This is staggering, isn’t it? The King of Kings, the Matchless Lord of the Universe, the Risen, Glorified Christ is actually serving His followers! He carries the bread to them. He places the fish before them. He waits on them until they are satisfied.

Why does He do that? In short, it’s because He doesn’t want distant followers. When He saves us He wants us to be close to Him. When He served Peter and the rest, He did it to *restore them to fellowship*.

Then John adds this commentary in verse 14 (NIV). “This was now the third time Jesus appeared [ESV ‘was revealed] to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.” The KJV says, “This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples.”

There it is again. He appeared. He revealed Himself. For the third time, says John, meaning, for the third time in his gospel.

This action reveals such a basic reality about Christianity, my friends. And if you are considering becoming a Christian, you need to grasp this reality.

1. *Christianity is not a religion.* It is not a list of rules, nor a way of life, although it certainly involves obedience to God’s commands. Fundamentally...

2. *It’s a person to person relationship.* Christianity is a relationship that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself establishes with His followers. It’s why He went to the cross, to reconcile us to Himself and to His Father.

And to take it a step further (which we must for His Word certainly does), this new relationship with Him leads to other new relationships. With whom? With His people. When He saves us, He makes us a part of His body. Yes, a *part* of His body, meaning we are henceforth to live life in vital connection with the other parts of His body, which of course is the church.

It’s all about relationships, first with Him, then with one other, and then with others who presently aren’t connected with Him, or us, but whom we hope will be, by His grace, through our loving witness.

This is so essential to see. Christ desires our fellowship, which He graciously makes possible, as He did with these men on Galilee’s shore.

And He’s still doing it. It’s significant that Jesus Himself makes another appearance, this one sixty years later. It’s to John who is exiled on the island of Patmos, and he receives this invitation from Jesus, to pass along to a church whose members were lukewarm. And what does He extend to them? An invitation to a meal.

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20).”

Dear friend, are you in close fellowship with the Lord Jesus, and His people? If not, receive His offer. Open the door.

But He’s not done yet, not with Peter, nor us. The breakfast, the fellowship, is a means to something. And it comes next in the story. Service.

B. Jesus restored Peter to service. We don’t have time to develop this, but we must see it. When Jesus restores us to Himself, it’s because He intends to do something with us and through us.

² Morgan, p. 328

Notice verse 15, “When they had finished breakfast.” The breakfast isn’t the end. Jesus uses the breakfast to prepare His servant for a vital conversation.

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Jesus asks Peter. In fact, He will ask it a second time, and then a third time. Why three times? Because Peter denied Him three times.

This too is an expression of Jesus’ unfailing love. He’s not being harsh. He is restoring Peter. I know what you have done, Peter. I know you denied Me. But I am not giving up on you. I am restoring you to the mission for which I chose you.

Feed my lambs, He says. Then a second time, *Feed my sheep*. Then a third time, *Feed my sheep*.

Which he did. Peter never got over what happened in John 21. In fact, years later he preached a message in which he looked back to this turning point, and said this about Jesus (in Acts 10:40-42): “But God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—*by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead*. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.”

I wonder how many people here today can identify with Peter. You came into this room today filled with regret, because of foolish, sinful choices you have made. And now you’re wondering if things can ever be right between you and God again.

I have good news for you. Here’s the answer. *Christ appeared*.

Make It Personal: If we feel like Peter, let’s do what Peter did.

1. *Let’s face the facts about the risen Jesus*. The facts are clear. He came, lived, died, conquered death, *appeared*, and then returned to heaven. He offers life that is abundant and eternal to all who will come to Him. These are the facts. I urge you to face them, believe them, affirm them. And then...

2. *Instead of running from Jesus, let’s run to Him*. Let’s do what Peter did. Get out of the boat and come to the resurrected Christ as fast as you can.

Closing Song: #234 “*Crown Him with Many Crowns*” (all four verses)

April Benediction: 2 Peter 1:2

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning was part four in our series, “*The Gospel Panorama: Seeing and Savoring the Good News*.” We pondered the significant announcement that’s repeated four times in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, “*Christ appeared*.” To whom did Christ appear, according to this passage. Why is it important that Christ not only died, was buried, and raised from the dead, but also that He *appeared*?

2. We looked at the Lord’s appearance in John 21:1-14. Take time to read again this fascinating account. What stands out most to you from this passage?

3. Why do you think Peter proposed a fishing trip in verse 3, and why did the others go with him? What do we learn about these men from this scene?

4. In verse 5 Jesus asked the men a question, and then gave them an interesting assignment in verse 6. What did He ask, and then tell them to do, and why? What was He seeking to teach them, and us?

5. What do we learn about Jesus from His post-resurrection appearance in verses 9-14? What did He communicate by preparing a meal and then eating it with them? What difference should this make in our lives this week?