

Our Mission, His Provision

Two Truths Revealed by the
Resurrected Son of God

John 21:1-14

Aaron Lee | Youth Worship | April 23, 2023



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Introduction

Have you ever felt anxious?

I remember being very anxious around my junior year of high school. Freshman year was filled with new experiences, sophomore year was fun, but things started to get serious during my junior year. I started to care about college, I began thinking about a career, and I was worried about the future.

The world tells us to go to school, to get a job, and to provide. This puts a lot of pressure on us. It's stressful. It might make you anxious. How does being a Christian help us when we feel anxious?

Context

In our passage today, we find our disciples in a state of acute anxiety. Put yourself in their shoes: News is starting to spread that Jesus has resurrected. What does this mean for the disciples, and what does the future hold for them moving forward? Is Jesus finally going to overthrow the Roman government? Are the disciples going to rule and reign with him now? These disciples left everything to follow Jesus. They were on a roller coaster for the past 3 years. What happens next?

This section of Scripture is actually an epilogue – a place in the narrative for comments and conclusions. Significant themes from the book are going to be repeated, and I'll show you how they make sense by referring to several cross-references as flashbacks. We'll tie up some loose ends to the stories of Peter and John, and also get a glimpse into their future.

Reading John 21:1-14 at face value simply focuses on the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is revealed as the Son of God because of the reality of his resurrection. We see this clearly at the beginning of our passage:

*After this Jesus **revealed** himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he **revealed** himself in this way. (John 21:1)*

And again at the end of our passage:

*This was now the third time that Jesus was **revealed** to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. (John 21:14)*

The apostles did not “find out” or “discover” Jesus. You don't just “stumble upon” Jesus in your life. Jesus is always the one who does the saving. We're all sheep who have gone astray and Jesus is the Good Shepherd. The Son of God came to seek and to save the lost. This is what Jesus does. And he does it in a certain way. He is purposeful and planned in his saving.

Sermon Preview

In our text today, Jesus reveals himself to a group of seven disciples. They're listed by name here, Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee are James and John. The text says two others of his disciples as well. One is probably John, the author of this gospel who refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and that leaves us one who is unnamed. Nevertheless, we have eyewitnesses who are putting their names and reputations and lives on the line for vouching that this is true.

So a part of our big idea is going to be that Jesus is revealed as the resurrected Son of God. Jesus appeared to the disciples and he ate with them. But John is the most theological gospel author, so we're going to examine what happened a little bit more in depth. There is deep symbolic meaning behind this section of Scripture. And we're going to see how Jesus gives an answer to anxiety.

The answer to our anxiety comes in the form of two truths. These are two truths revealed by the resurrected Son of God: Our Mission and His Provision. These truths are spiritual realities, and they will help ease the anxiety of the disciples. I'm going to show you that these truths still speak and can change our lives today. Let's get started.



1. Our Mission

The first truth revealed by the resurrected Son of God is our mission. Jesus reminds his followers of their mission.

*Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. 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.** Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. (John 21:2-4)*

Simon Peter is listed first. He’s a leader, so when he says he’s going fishing the others are soon to follow. There’s a lot of debate about why the disciples decide to go fishing. One clue has to do with the disciples getting into Simon Peter’s boat. A closer look at John’s text shows that they got into the boat. John had mentioned this boat before. It was here in Simon Peter’s boat where Jesus first called them to follow him. This is the same exact boat. So we get the sense that the disciples are returning to something in the past, a past life, a past before Christ had called them. Next, John says they go fishing at night, and we know that whenever John speaks of the night — it symbolizes spiritual darkness. The night is contrasted with Jesus’ appearance just as day was breaking. These were Jesus’ disciples, so they have not totally abandoned Jesus and the faith, but you get the sense that something isn’t right during the night. Finally, Matthew 28:16 says that Jesus had actually directed them to meet together on a mountain, but our passage puts our disciples in the sea. They were not where they were supposed to be. With these clues in mind, it appears that the disciples were aimless. Another way to say this is that they were not living *on mission*. Think about this: The disciples were anxious about what’s going to happen next, and they don’t really know what to do with themselves. They want to pass the time. Jesus is resurrected out there somewhere, but he’s not here with them yet. They have to eat, so they go back to doing something that they did before Jesus was around. Maybe they’re thinking “we’ll at least be productive” while they wait. But going back to this way of living is not what Jesus wants for his disciples.

Jesus is going to teach them a simple and symbolic lesson. He’s going to help refocus them on their mission. He’s going to call them children, and then he’s going to help them catch some fish.

*Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” **So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.** That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:5-7)*

At this point in our story, the disciples don't know that it's Jesus on the shore. But they hear him call them “children.” Jesus chose to call them children. It's almost as if he's reminding them about who they are. And it's about how they are in relation to him. He called them children before, during their Last Supper together, before he predicted Peter's denial and his own death on the cross: “Little children, I am still with you a little longer. You will look for Me ... where I am going, you cannot come.” (John 13:33) He reminds them about their identity. He reminds them that they are dear to him, they are family to him. His calling them children is repeated after the resurrection, confirming and assuring that the disciples still belong to Jesus. And this helps them remember who Jesus is, and what he called them to do.

Jesus is now going to help them catch some fish. Notice that they caught nothing without Jesus. He tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. And when they do, they've caught so many fish that they can't even haul it in. The contrast is unmistakable. Apart from Jesus, the disciples can't do anything. They can't accomplish anything. Christ has called them to a specific task. God has a goal for their life, and if the disciples set out on their own path, they will produce nothing. They need to stay *on mission*.

Jesus performed the same incredible feat of catching fish, when he first called Simon Peter and the others to follow him. Let's cut to a flashback and see what happened between Simon Peter and Jesus the first time this happened:

*But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. **And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.** (Luke 5:8-11)*

The similarities in today's text with the flashback from the past reinforce what Jesus taught them before. Through this interaction, Christ gently reminds them of their identity, and that they are to be fishers of men. They

were right to leave everything and follow Christ. They were not to return to their old way of life. They are not to meander, without purpose, without aim. They have a mission to accomplish.

Application

Are you living *on mission*? To be clear, this is not the same as being a missionary in a foreign land. I believe God has a specific calling for those who are to serve overseas with unreached people groups. But I also believe that God calls us all to live *on mission*. To be everyday missionaries. To have a missional lifestyle. Living *on mission* means to live on purpose for the glory of God and making intentional efforts at evangelism. We saw that the disciples in our passage were aimless. They did not have any direction. They were simply drifting on in their lives. They were failing to aim at being fishers of men. Some of us live the same way. We wake up and do whatever we feel like doing. Or we just let events and emotions dictate our days. The Bible gives us a better goal: to aim for the glory of God. What if you woke up and you asked yourself, “How can I give God glory today?”

One way we can give glory to God while making intentional efforts at evangelism is to talk about what God is doing in our lives. We just had our Speakers’ Tournament, and that was encouraging, but the point was not the competition. The goal of Speakers’ Tournament was to encourage you to continually pursue and boldly share biblical truth. The goal was not speaking on stage, but speaking in your everyday life. You can share your spiritual life with family and friends. Talk about what you’re learning, speak about how you’re growing, share how God is changing you as a person. This will take some courage if you were a child who grew up as a Christian. It’s going to be awkward, especially if you do not have many Christian friends or family members. But once people know that you even have a spiritual life, or that there is a spiritual side to you, the initial shock and surprise goes away. It will be nothing new to hear you talk about spiritual things. Others will know that you’re a Christian and that you have an actual relationship with God. And then you pray for more opportunities. You pray that God would place you in classes, in groups, in teams, and in seats for his strategic purposes. So that you can speak of God and share what he has done.

Scripture makes clear the connection between God’s glory and what he has done:

*Declare his **glory** among the nations, his **marvelous deeds** among all peoples (Psalm 96:3)*



This is going to look differently for all of us. We all have different situations and circumstances, gifts and abilities, strengths and weaknesses. But we all can take aim at the glory of God by sharing our spiritual life with others. God has filled your life with purposes and goals. You will find that this job is not burdensome, but will bring you joy.

The first truth revealed by the resurrected Son of God is our mission. Jesus is revealed as the resurrected Son of God, who reminds his followers of their mission.

2. His Provision

The second truth revealed by the resurrected Son of God is his provision. Jesus invites his followers into his provision. At this point, the disciples realize that it is the Lord who is on the shore. Simon Peter, always so impulsive, decides to swim to him. Let's read what happens next:

*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. 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. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." **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.***
(John 21:7-11)

Jesus provides his disciples a couple of things. Most pointedly, he provides them with an incredible catch of fish. John is precise with his numbers and descriptive with his words, accounting for exactly 153 large fish. There's a lot of debate about why Jesus furnishes 153 fish. Related to our previous point of living *on mission* and being fishers of men, one theory says it represents the fullness of the Gentiles and the remnant of Israel. They highlight the fact that the net was not torn – meaning that the gospel message will prevail and that there is room for all in the church. But a more straightforward reading showcases the simple truth that Jesus provides amazingly and abundantly for his followers. This goes both ways, physically and spiritually. God will provide you the physical strength that you need to carry out the mission, and he'll also provide you with the outcome of the mission. He provides the resources, and he provides the results.

This point gets reiterated again in our passage. Jesus provides something that you might have missed. The disciples have caught fish, but they don't eat the fish they caught for breakfast. If you read the text carefully, you'll see that Jesus already had breakfast ready for them at the shore – a common breakfast of fish and bread. It's not fancy food, but it's a happy meal for these hungry men.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." 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. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. (John 21:9-14)

Let's cut to a flashback and see another instance when Jesus provided not only for his closest followers, but for a crowd of 5,000:

*Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. **Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted.** (John 6:5-11)*

The similarities in today's text with the flashback from the past reinforce what Jesus taught them before. Through this interaction, Jesus gently reminds us that he will take care of us when we come to him. He calls us his children, and he will take care of us. He will provide for us. He will meet our physical needs. He reassures his followers of his presence and his provision. And this makes sense when we've learned to live life *on mission*. Christ will help us to carry it out. We are not left on our own. He makes it happen. Christ invites you to come to him, to come and trust in his provision.

Application

As you live *on mission*, are you trusting in God's provision? Do you trust that God will provide the resources and the results?

It's good for us to dream big dreams for God. It's good for us to want God to use us to do great things for his kingdom. When you look at the story of the fish and the loaves, you see that Jesus uses something small and turns it into something big. It's good for us to see our lives as small and pray that God would make them big for him. But this does not happen overnight. This happens slowly over time, as your faith is strengthened and as you grow in faithfulness. God is working in you and through you — even while you're in school. You control what you can and by taking the small steps to grow in your faith. Put in the work today for tomorrow's gains. Prioritize your daily devotions. Pursue God in prayer. Take the opportunities that come your way to serve him. Sign up to serve at VBS. Step up and serve in youth worship next year. And you do this while still doing your best and trusting God with your school, with your college, with your career, with your entire future. God does have a purpose and plan for your life. I challenge you to trust in him today as he provides the resources and results for tomorrow.

To be clear, God's purposes and plans do include what you do today. You can't just sit and do nothing and expect God to use you. Instead, it means that you trust and obey while depending on God's daily grace. If you are living on God's mission, you can trust in God's provision. The strength to serve God is supplied by God. There is power in his provision. And the outcome is that God will be glorified through Jesus Christ:

*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; **whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.***
(1 Peter 4:10–11)

The second truth revealed by the resurrected Son of God is his provision. Jesus is revealed as the resurrected Son of God, who invites his followers into his provision.



The Gospel

So far in our message I've only been making applications to believers. I want to talk directly to unbelievers right now, and this is going to be a serious conversation. I started by saying that Jesus is revealed in our text today. Please allow me to show how Jesus reveals himself to you as well, and the only application I have for you is that you would believe.

Jesus reminds his followers of their mission — that we are to live for the glory of God. You might be thinking that the only person worth living for is yourself. But this is an empty pursuit. You will find that there is a longing for eternity inside of your soul, and nothing will be able to fill that void. Your life will eventually come to an end, and your achievements will not give you admittance into Heaven. Only Jesus, the Son of God, can offer you abundant and eternal life. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:12).

Jesus also invites his followers into his provision — to come to him as he provides his presence and power in our lives. You might be thinking that you don't need Christianity. That you don't need Jesus. That you don't need God. Maybe you're confident in your academic abilities, or in the wealth of your family, or in the health of your youth. I'm begging you not to boast. Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth (Proverbs 27:1).

Let's cut to a flashback and see what Jesus did when he taught Simon Peter to come and trust him. It was another scene on this same boat, Simon Peter's boat:

*And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" **And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."** (Matthew 14:22-33)*

Peter doubted the truth of Jesus' words, that Christ would take care of him. That's why Peter is described as being afraid. He was scared that Jesus would not keep him safe. So he started to sink. And to teach him a lesson, Jesus allowed him to sink slowly, so he could again call out and be rescued.



I want to say again that Jesus invites his disciples to come to him. God does not drag you kicking and screaming. He doesn't force or coerce you if you're a prisoner. The reality is that you are a prisoner to yourself and your sin. Christ can you set free. God softens your heart of stone and allows you to love him. Christians have the Holy Spirit, who helps and compels us to Christ. We live and serve with the strength that God supplies. But you must come and trust him. My prayer is that Jesus would meet you even in your doubt, and that you would come to trust him and worship him as the Son of God.

I'm asking you to seriously consider the reality of the resurrection and becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. The good news is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he died on the cross for your sins, and that he rose again. If you believe this, you will be saved from your sins, and you can find a full life now and have a home forever in Heaven. If you have been moved by anything I've said today, please get in touch with me so I can follow up with you.

Big Idea

Let's recap what we've learned. Jesus reveals himself to his disciples as the resurrected Son of God. He appeared to them and he ate with them. He reminds you of your mission, and we learned that living *on mission* means to live on purpose for the glory of God and making intentional efforts at evangelism. This job is not burdensome, but will bring you joy. He also invites you into his provision, and we learned that God provides both the resources for and the results of carrying out the mission. You will find power in his provision.

Here is our big idea for today: Jesus is revealed as the resurrected Son of God. He reminds us of our mission, and invites us into his provision.

Application Questions

In case you missed them, here are questions for application. I've tried to give you specific examples in our sermon, and I encourage you to make them relate to your own life:

1. Will you live *on mission*? Will you live on purpose for the glory of God and make intentional efforts at evangelism?
2. Will you trust in God's provision? Will you trust God to provide both the resources for and the results of carrying out the mission?



Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: Have you ever felt anxious? How does being a Christian help us when we feel anxious?

Although the disciples might have been a bit anxious after the resurrection, Christ calmly met them where they were. The resurrected Son of God revealed two truths to his disciples that day: They were to remember their mission, and trust in God's provision.

The world tells us to go to school, to get a job, and to provide. God tells us that yes, you must go to school — but you already have a job. You already have a mission. You are to live *on mission*. Yes, go to school — but God is the one who will provide for you. God will take care of his children. You are to trust in his provision as you carry out the mission. He will provide the resources and the results. As you go through school, from junior high to high school to college, don't forget about your mission, and trust in God's provision.

Let's cut one last time to a flashback from the past, when Jesus was speaking to his disciples:

*And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, **do not be anxious about your life**, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. (Luke 12:22-23)*

*And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. **Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.** (Luke 12:29-31)*

Seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Seek his kingdom, and the things that you need will be given to you. Brought to you. Provided for you. It's a theme that's worth repeating, with relevance to us today: Seek God's kingdom first, and you'll find that he will take care of you. Jesus is revealed as the resurrected Son of God. He reminds us of our mission, and invites us into his provision.



Closing Prayer

You've given us a mission
Til everyone has heard
That Jesus is the Son of God
For God so loved the world

We trust that you'll provide us
The resources to go
We know that you'll supply us
With powerful results

You've given us a mission
Til everyone has heard
That Jesus is the Son of God
For God so loved the world

Appendix: Singing in the Strength that God Supplies

Do you trust in your own works and strength as you live the Christian life? Here is an example in singing.

You've been encouraged to sing in our worship service here. We hope to have vibrant, joyous, passionate, enthusiastic singing here. Christ does command us to sing. It's not optional. Singing has a place in every Christian worship service because it is a special way we worship God. It is the right response that God desires.

And for those of you who are Christian, you know this to be true, and you know you want it for yourself as well. A true Christian does not want a feeble faith. We want a faith that is full. A strong Christians wants to sing.

But that doesn't mean that singing is easy. We have hard weeks. We get tired. We feel self-conscious. So we try to muster up the strength to sing. We try to hype ourselves up, or we try to get excited about the songs, or we try our best to have a "worship experience."

This is not the type of worship that God wants. God wants our hearts before he wants our hymns. God has given you everything you need as you encounter him in worship. He has provided you with the resources of his word, prayer, and the church. You need these resources in order to have the result of true worship.

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