

UNEDITED DRAFT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever struggled in your faith, wondering if it was really worth it to follow Jesus, serve him and obey him? Has it ever seemed that following, trusting and obeying the Word of God results in... nothing. As a follower of Jesus, did you ever expected a certain outcome, but didn't get it. Or have you ever felt that God just isn't showing up in your life, or in response to a particular prayer. How do you react when all your labor in the Lord seems in vain? What you do when it all seems to be amounting to a big bunch of nothing?

I think all Christians go through struggle like that at times. Jesus' own disciples seemed to go through just such a time. And it's the story we want to look at today. When? This might surprise you... AFTER the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus appeared to them in Jerusalem – twice as a group. Then they headed back to their homes in Galilee in the north part of Israel. After all the excitement, they arrive. They wait. And Jesus doesn't show up. There's a big nothing. Now what? Let's listen to the story:

21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ “I'm going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We'll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Now at first glance, this seems innocent enough. After some time in Jerusalem, these men head back home to Galilee. They had grown up fishermen. Back on their home turf with all the family equipment available... let's head out and do some fishing!

But there may be more to this than simply that. The angels and the resurrected Lord himself had told the disciples that he would meet them on a mountain in Galilee. Here they were back in Galilee, but are they waiting on the mountain where Jesus said he would appear to them? No. They are on the Sea of Galilee fishing. Now, did Jesus actually want them to camp out on a mountain and wait? That's what many think and that could indeed be the case. Some speculate that they did indeed go to the mountain and wait for a while... perhaps for a few days. But Jesus didn't appear. Now what? Peter wasn't one to be patient, was always a man of action and was also a natural leader, so said, “I'm off to fish.” The others followed his lead.

But this was not the kind of fishing you are thinking of, where they sat in a boat with their fishing lines in the water, passing the time contemplating spiritual truths, and anticipating the next appearance of Jesus. You know, the kind of fishing where if you catch a fish fine, and if not that's just as good because the purpose is not to fish, but to get away from it all and think.

No, that wasn't this. This was a fishing crew. This was a fishing business. This was fishing work. There were nets to tend and mend and clean. Throw out the net, draw it in, empty it out. Repeat. All night long. Hard work. It was the hard work you did in order to earn a living and support your family.

So is this what was happening: Jesus isn't here. We're not sure Jesus will every show up again. Jesus provided for us while he was with us, but now he's not. I guess we better take care of ourselves. I guess we better take reasonable action and do what seems best to us. We better fall back on what we always do, what we know how to do. It's time to go back to our old profession. It was a nice 3 ½ years with Jesus, but now it's time to go back to our old way of

life... the Jesus phase is obviously done. Couple this with Peter's struggles and doubts. He had denied even knowing Jesus... three time! The last time calling down curses on himself! It's really not surprising at all that Jesus didn't show up in Galilee, Peter thinks, considering what he had done.

So this does to some degree seem to be a faltering of faith, a crack in their commitment. Jesus was a no-show, so now what? Back to our former profession. We'll do what we're best at. We'll do what's most familiar. Jesus is absent so we'll rely on ourselves.

APPL: Has something like that ever happened to you? You expect God to show up and he doesn't. You expect God to do something, but he doesn't. Let me give you some examples. You have a problem of some sort in your life... maybe health, maybe financial, maybe relational... whatever the problem... you pray that God would fix it. And you pray and you pray. It's obvious to you that fixing it and fixing it now is clearly best. But God doesn't. What do you do?

Or how about this one: You desperately want someone you love to repent of a sin. Or come to faith in God. And you've talked to them and you've prayed for them. But nothing. What do you do?

Or you have a big life decision. You want God to show you which way to go. You look for signs. But nothing. What do you do?

You are being pressured to do what is wrong, but you stand your ground and you are obedient to God. But instead of seeing blessing from your obedience, you see persecution... or more trouble.

What should you do when what you expect from God doesn't happen?

First let's talk about what you usually do... then we'll talk about what God wants us to do. What do you do when God doesn't meet your expectations? I bet you often do what Peter did. You feel God is letting you down, so you decide you'll handle things your way. You fall back to the default position, on what is intuitive... the things that come most naturally – doubt. Disbelief. Self-reliance. Self-medication. Self-justification. Selfishness. Bad habits. Blaming others. Bitterness. You know, those familiar things you've been doing your whole life long. When God fails to meet your expectations, you "Go fish."

Just like in the card game. A person asks you for a card they hope is in your hand, but it's not so they have to "go fish." You're looking for a certain card in God's deck that you are convinced you need. But you don't get it. So you go fish. You start looking for answers elsewhere. You find your own way.

The result? The same result the disciples experienced: they got nothing. These were life-long fishermen fishing at the best time on a lake they had fished on their whole life long. They were casting out a large net, again and again and again. Some fish should have wandered in there at some point! But not a thing. Forgetting Jesus and going their own way, they came up empty.

When we stop trusting Jesus and go our own way apart from him, what is the result? What good comes of it? Nothing. You come up empty.

But listen to what happens next:

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. [Why not? We're not told. They were only about 100 yards away. Was it still pretty dark? Was there a morning haze over the water? All possible. But also remember that in most of Jesus' appearances after the resurrection, he was not immediately recognized. It could be that his glorified body differed in appearance. Someone has suggested that the resurrected,

glorified Lord is not recognizable to anyone unless he first reveals himself first. We do not seek him, he seeks us and reveals himself to us by his Word. I like that explanation too.

⁵ He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered.

The term he used to address them is literally: “Children.” It is a term of endearment and affection.

Also, the question Jesus asks is worded such as to expect a negative answer. He’s drawing attention to the fact that their return to their former profession was a complete failure. They had come up empty.

Their one-word, non-communicate response reflects their frustration. “NO”.

⁶ He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”

Why did they obey the command of this stranger? Did John find this command familiar? (Luke 5:4) Was it the calm authority of his voice?

When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

A miracle. This school of fish commanded by Jesus himself to be there at that place and time to reaffirm the very important truth that he was teaching these wavering disciples: “apart from me you can do nothing.” Jesus was inviting them to renew their trust in him.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

There is a pattern in the gospels. John typically understands first. Peter typically acts first. True to their personalities, John understands that this Jesus, and Peter acts by putting on his outer garment, for he had stripped down to the hard work of fishing. He wanted to be presentable to Jesus. He jumped in the water and swam to shore... about 100 yards.

⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus is ready for them. Note his kindness and care. They’ve been fishing all night and are hungry. They have nothing. Jesus provides. He has ready and waiting exactly what they need.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” [Not because he needed more fish to fry, but because he wanted them to sort the fish and recognize the full scope of this miracle.) **¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.** [Another miracle!] **¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.** [Note: another miracle? One bread and one fish (singular) fed this group 7 hungry fishermen.] **¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.** [Note: this was the 7th appearance overall, but the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples as a group. When it says “Jesus appeared” it means he manifested himself. He made evident who he was and his glory to them.]

Did any of this story sound familiar to you? This was a repeat of the experience recorded in Luke 5 when Jesus first called the disciples. Jesus called them to stop being fishermen and instead become fishers of men. This was in essence a re-calling – it was needed because they thought they seemed to think that perhaps they were done being followers of Jesus. Jesus was dead. Now he was risen. They may have concluded that things were finished. Jesus did what he came to do. This show is over time to move on with life. Jesus called them again so they would

understand that the show was just beginning. The stage was now set for the launch of the worldwide Christian church. And the disciples had the lead roles in this production.

I wonder if our lives as Christians sometimes looks like that of the disciples. Do we sometimes stop seeing Jesus in our life? Do we think that Jesus isn't really showing up? Do you sometime get discouraged and feel it isn't worth it? Do you sometimes get distracted from the calling Jesus has given? Do you sometimes lose focus and forget who you are and what God has called you to do? When you feel this way, do you "Go fish"?

If you revert to a life without Jesus, your life will be empty. You'll catch nothing. It will be fruitless. It will ultimately be purposeless. A life without Jesus in the picture is a life that will be lived for self – for your own financial gain, for your own glory, for your own advantage, for your own acclamation. There sure are a lot of people in this world who have gone down the road that does not include Jesus. And some have achieved what they were looking for: fame, fortune, power. Yet add up all of these things, and you get ZERO. This is why so many of the rich and famous end up sad, depressed, addicted, and even suicidal. It's an empty way of life. The disciples could tell you the same thing.

But everything changed when Jesus showed up. His appearance was unexpected! But Jesus sought them, spoke to them, connected with them... When the disciples listened to Jesus, trusted Jesus, obeyed Jesus and enjoyed fellowship with Jesus, everything fell into place. They were richly blessed. Their life had meaning and purpose.

Friends, the good news for you today is this: Jesus has shown up in your life too. He appears in such an unexpected place: in his Word, the Bible (both spoken and read) in water connected with his promise of forgiveness (Baptism); in bread and wine connected with his promise of forgiveness (the Lord's Supper.) Jesus appears. Jesus calls to you. And just as with the disciples, his Word brings incredible blessings with it!

Instead of a net-full of fish, God provides for you a life full of God's love. And that love moved him to provide a full measure of his forgiveness – at great personal cost! Jesus love lead him to suffer and die on the cross as the payment that would set you free. Your net is full of forgiveness, life and salvation – such that you can barely even haul it in! And if that weren't enough, he gives you loads of earthly blessings too! Family, friends, food, a home, cars to drive in, TV's to watch, cell phones. God provides. He does so generously, abundantly. He does so now, and the best is yet to come!

Just like those early disciples, Jesus is calling you today. He's calling you to listen to him. To trust him. To obey him. And to have a close relationship with him. He wants you to be closely connected to him by faith. And when you are, expect that the blessings of Jesus will fill your life! I'm not talking about temporary, small things like lots of money. I'm talking about huge, endless things like peace. Joy. Love. Faith. Confidence. Hope.

Don't "go fish." Come to Jesus. Listen him. Hear his promises of forgiveness, life and salvation. Trust him fully. Obey him. Live for him. Enjoy close fellowship with him. And when Jesus tells you to "go fish" you can be confident in the catch he will give! When Jesus is present in your life, that makes all the difference. Amen.

Waiting for God

Introduction:

Share a time in your life when you had to wait for something or someone. How did that make you feel? God often makes us wait. We often may feel like God has not, does not and will not show up. Why does he do this?

Psalm 6:1-4 ¹ O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.

² Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony.

³ My soul is in anguish. **How long, O LORD, how long?**

⁴ Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.

Bible examples of waiting. Why?

1. Abraham and Sarah: God promised a son, the Promised Land, countless offspring and that all nations would be blessed through Abraham. How long did it take for each promise to be fulfilled? How good were they at waiting for the Lord?
2. David was anointed king in place of Saul, but then had to wait more than 21 chapters (that translates to nearly 15 human years) before he became king. Recall some of the events of those 15 years. (*Homework: Read 1 Samuel 15 through 2 Samuel 5:5*)
3. Joseph – From Pit to Prison to Palace
4. Simeon. Luke 2:25-27
5. Waiting for judgment day
Revelation 6:9-11; 2 Peter 3:3-15
6. Romans 5:2-4 And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Why does God make us wait? What's God up to?

1. Waiting can lead to repentance.
2. Waiting may be necessary for God to accomplish his bigger plan (one that affects more lives than just your own.)
3. Waiting reveals true motives.
4. Waiting builds patience.
5. Waiting builds anticipation
6. Waiting transforms character.
A Russian friend liked to say, "One woman can give birth in nine months but nine women can't give birth in one month." Point: Some things take time!
7. Waiting builds faith and dependency on God.

- When was a time you felt God didn't show up? Or...
When your life have you expected something from God, but it didn't happen?

How did you feel while you waited?

- Recall a time when you waited a long time, but then the matter did come to a conclusion. Did the matter conclude as you hoped? Was God faithful? What did you learn?