

Cast Your Nets On The Other Side

The gospel of John is unique among the four gospels. Matthew starts with a genealogy, Mark and Luke with the ministry of John the Baptist. But John, who writes some 60 years after the birth of the New Testament church, starts with “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” From his opening sentence, he is on a mission to prove that Jesus Christ is exactly who He said He was – the True and Only God in a body of flesh.

That’s why John is the only gospel writer who intentionally records the “I Am” statements of Jesus: **I am** the bread of life, **I am** the light of the world, **I am** the door, **I am** the good shepherd, **I am** the resurrection and the life, **I am** the way, the truth and the life. It’s invisible in English versions of the Scriptures, but obvious in the ancient languages – “Ego Eimi.” A carpenter from Nazareth was using the ancient name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush – “I AM THAT I AM” – and he was using it casually to refer to himself!

Theologians and denominations today may have missed it, but the Pharisees caught the meaning all too well – that’s why they took up stones to stone Jesus, and finally orchestrated His crucifixion!

- Before Abraham was, **I AM**
- If ye believe not that **I AM**, ye shall die in your sins
- When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that **I AM**

He spoke His name – His rightful name – at a well, and a nameless woman’s life was changed forever; He spoke His name during a storm, and a disciple named Peter was empowered to walk on the raging waves; He spoke His name in a garden at midnight, and an entire battalion of soldiers fell to the ground like so much cordwood.

From the opening lines of His gospel, John is definitely on a mission:

His gospel culminates with the inspired revelation of doubting Thomas in chapter 20 – when Thomas realized the significance of a mortal wound in the body of a living man, he exclaimed “My Lord and my God!” John then concludes his gospel with this statement:

John 20:30-31 [30] And many other **signs** truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: [31] But these are written, that ye might **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have **life** through his name.

Chapter 21 is really a mere postscript, adding the account of just one event. What could be so crucial to add after such a powerful conclusion?

John 21:1-6 [1] After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. [2] There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. [3] Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. [4] But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. [5] Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. [6] And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

When Peter says, “I go a fishing,” he is not saying he wants to enjoy a day off – he is saying, “I quit!” After the resurrection, things have changed so much that he doesn’t want to do this “discipleship thing” any more. Jesus is no longer walking and talking with them like he did in the good old days; it’s so different now that Jesus is glorified – you never know where or when He’s going to show up! And there are too many disciples – Jesus has been appearing to 500 at a time, but Peter liked it better when it was just twelve. It’s just too much change in too short a time for an old-fashioned fisherman to handle!

Churches for the most part are known for being rigid, not innovative – and that’s a tragedy when we having the most innovative message on earth. Talk about “Trading Spaces”! With the gospel, you can trade your sorrows, your shame, your sickness, and your sin for a brand new life!

You’ve heard all the light bulb jokes. Here’s the one that stings a little bit: **Q.** How many Christians does it take to change a light bulb? **A.** Who said anything about change?

Leadership expert John C. Maxwell teaches – only partly in jest – that if a pastor wants to move the church piano, he needs to do it “one inch at a time.” We laugh, but there’s a tragedy behind the joke. The world around us is changing so fast that it’s hard to keep up – even the pace of change is accelerating. But what happens if most life-changing message to ever intersect human history gets locked behind doors of tradition?

It almost happened to the disciples ... but a resurrected Jesus forced them out of their comfort zone. They had been fishing all night, but they had caught absolutely nothing. They had quit hoping, and had settled down to accept the status quo. But the methods that had always seemed adequate in the good old days were now coming up empty. No fish!

And now, Jesus calls to them from the shore, asking the question that irritates: Are you catching anything? Is it working? Reluctantly, they admit failure: No, it's not working. Then comes the even-more-irritating command: Change your method; cast your nets on the other side.

You know they must have protested! You know exactly what they said:

- We've never done it that way before
- No respectable fisherman casts nets that way
- We tried that before and it didn't work
- It's too radical
- If only it were that easy
- Let me tell you why it can't be done that way
- We were running this boat long before you got here
- What you're suggesting is against our policy
- We're uncomfortable with that
- We were doing this before you ever got here
- How dare you criticize the way we've always done it?
- Why should we have to change?
- You're a carpenter – we're the fishermen!

But Jesus insisted that they change their method and their expectations, and it was so important that John tacks the story on to the end of his gospel. **Cast your nets from the other side!**

Ted Koppel conducted an interview with a man who had been trapped on an oil rig during a fire. Koppel asked the man how he had the courage to jump from a platform fifteen stories high into water engulfed in flames. The man replied, "Because I was going to fry if I stayed on the platform!"

Because they were **desperate** for things to be different, the disciples reluctantly took Jesus' advice – and the outcome was beyond anyone's imagination! Two miracles happened that day. First, they caught more fish than ever before. Second, their nets didn't break.

The greatest danger is always at the edge (where the church meets the culture). But so is the greatest opportunity for rescue and redemption.

The New Testament church lived "on the edge" – never safe, always one step from disaster if God didn't intervene! Jude felt the tension:

Jude 1:22-24 [22] And of some have compassion, making a difference: [23] **And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire**; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. [24] **Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling**, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

The problem with living on the edge is that some people try to push you over and other people try to pull you back. It's dangerous on the edge – people actually fall off the edge from time to time! But there is absolutely no chance for the church to impact our culture unless we get on the edge! Almost all of the growth in any church comes from the edge, because the trend is for Christians to disconnect from unsaved people the longer they are around church. That's not the way Jesus – the friend of sinners – did it. That's not the way Paul – all things to all men – did it. They were not isolationists! They engaged their culture!

Missionary C.T. Studd said, "Some want to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.

That's the spirit of Jude, of Paul, of Jesus, of the New Testament church!

Some errantly believe that it is God's plan for us to build a building, put up a church sign, open the doors and wait for sinners to show up. It's not that people are uninterested in spirituality, but they are more apt to go see a movie than go to church when they are looking for spiritual direction. Over 70% of North Americans do not attend a Christian church of any kind! The fortress mindset, the bunker mentality will not work. When we do that, we are using an old method that won't catch any fish!

We love our buildings because they are safe – but God never called His church to be safe! Jesus loved crowds; He rarely ministered where He and His disciples were not in the minority. Jesus was in the crowd business! That's where Apostolic power and compassion for people get fused together! The moment the messenger becomes the minority and is placed in a position where he is not in control, it is here that the stage is set for the supernatural power of God to be manifested. The church was only 120 on the day of Pentecost, but 3000 were saved. Why? Because when the church moves into the highways and byways of evangelism and they are outnumbered, NEED overwhelms RESOURCE and God's manifestation is required. That's what happens on the mission field!

Many Apostolic people have gotten too comfortable with the status quo, and I would have to include some of my ministry colleagues among them. Church has become a comfortable place, a place that is always the same. The same friends, the same events, the same songs, the same sermons, the same faces, the same size, the same methods, and the same results! That mentality is an affront to God, who called us to impact our culture with the life-changing gospel.

We sometimes have the "Elijah Syndrome" (1 Kings 19) – "I am the only one left." Give God some credit! He's working right now in many places and many lives in our city to bring people to truth! Don't hide – engage!

Any time a church begins to reach out beyond its four walls, there will be a flood of criticism. One minister said, "You know you are in the middle of the road when you get criticized from both sides." I even had one pastor in this city tell me, "You're United Pentecostal – you can't do what you're doing!" He was saying in essence, "Get back in your box, go back to your four walls, and hide like you've always done. It makes us uncomfortable when Apostolics engage with the denominational world." Another person told me, "I don't like you calling yourself 'First Church' – I know exactly what you're trying to imply!" There are critics everywhere, but the ones that sting the most are the ones who call themselves your brothers!

In ancient Israel, during a time of civil war, the Gileadites set up a blockade to catch the Ephraimites, who were fleeing after a defeat. The sentries simply asked each person who wanted to pass to say the word "shibboleth." The Ephraimites, who had no "sh" sound in their language, pronounced the word "shibboleth" and were caught and slaughtered. It's interesting to me that the word "shibboleth" means "harvest." Did you know that everyone doesn't say "harvest" the same way? Different churches and different pastors have different ideas about how to get the job done. That's okay, as long as the church doesn't have a civil war over it. We are not called to reach Toronto, New York, Vancouver, Los Angeles, Montreal or Washington. We are not called to reach Doaktown, Saint John, Perth-Andover, Bathurst, McNamee, or Moncton. We are called to reach the city of Fredericton! And what we need to do to accomplish that monumental task may be different!

The greater Fredericton area has a total population of 124,000. Our city's population is younger than both the provincial and the national averages, with a high spike in the twenty and thirty year olds. We have a highly skilled workforce, and we're on the cutting edge of information technology. Our per capita income is above the national average, and we have more businesses per capita than any place in Canada – one business for every fourteen people! We have the highest percentage of university-educated people in the entire nation, and the lowest percentage of high school dropouts. That's the Fredericton we live in – it's not like it was 50 years ago, and not even like the rest of NB!

Church, the target we are trying to reach is a moving target – and we have to aim for them because their eternity depends on it!

Acts 13:36 (NLT) After David had served his generation (TIMELY) according to the will of God (TIMELESS), he died and was buried.

This generation has to have a life-altering experience with God! It doesn't matter so much whether we are successful today – what matters is whether we will reach our youth and be successful ten years from now!

Jonah 3:10-4:3 (KJV) [10] And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. [4:1] But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. [2] And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. [3] Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.

Jonah was a reluctant participant in revival! He said, "God, if you're going to save all those people, I'd rather die than be inconvenienced!"

What side of the boat are YOU fishing on? Security or service? Temporal values or eternal values? Personal comfort or personal sacrifice?

People say, "I want to have an Acts 2 church, where we preach the message of the Apostles!" That's great, but I also want to have ...

- An Acts 3 church where miracles happen at prayer meeting
- An Acts 4 church where our services are literally shaken by God's power
- An Acts 5 church where we have church from house to house
- An Acts 6 church where saints take on ministry so pastors can seek God
- An Acts 7 church where ordinary Christians are used powerfully by God
- An Acts 8 church where we reach people of influence for God's kingdom
- An Acts 9 church where we see religious people powerfully converted
- An Acts 10 church where we are willing to reach people who not like us
- An Acts 11 church where even persecution spreads the gospel
- An Acts 12 church where God gives miraculous answers to prayer
- An Acts 13 church where we send out people to do missionary work

Get the idea? God wants to give us a two-fold miracle. He wants us to get ready for new methods, new outreaches, new approaches, and new people. Cast your nets on the other side!

The first miracle is going to be that the nets will be overflowing with fish! The second miracle is equally important – God is going to supernaturally strengthen the same nets we've always used so they won't break!

It may take a new method to reach this generation, but it will be the same message supernaturally empowered. Cast your nets on the other side!