

## John 21: The 153 Fish and the Net

During March I attempted to try to bring the South Australian Moderator of the Uniting Church to realise that the Bible is an inspired book, that Genesis and everything else in it is true, and that the genealogies provided in the Gospels (Matthew and Luke) are accurate. I did this by writing him a letter that suggested that it is science that needs to be correlated with the Bible, not the other way around, and also by providing him with a number of web sites where he could find work by gifted Christians that would help him to realise that there were two sides to the coin. As a result of my efforts I received back a letter that evidenced he would never countenance such an opinion, and two photocopies of standing letters that he sends out to fundamentalists. A fundamentalist being a person who believes that the bible is true and written by God using people, rather than a group of writings that speak about God written by men and therefore bound to contain errors.

Amongst these (blasphemous) writings, was a castigation of the Gospel genealogies, claiming that they were proven by theologians to be wrong. I knew that not all theologians thought this, so I printed out the work on this by the late Arthur Custance (<http://www.custance.org/adamjesus.html>), intending to send it to him. After a few days I decided that I would be wasting my time. This man didn't want to change his mind, and although I felt (and feel) sorry for him, there would be people more worthy of this gem than he. This particular work is the genealogy of Christ from Adam. Arthur Custance is a very wise and intelligent man, with a list of degrees as long as my arm, covering fields such as languages and psychology. He shows, as others have also shown and said, that Jesus was the 77th generation from Adam. This number of generations remained in my mind, and it was while contemplating the meaning of the 153 fish in John 21:11, that the Holy Spirit enlightened me as to the meaning, not only of the 153 fish, but also the chapter itself. I have the Moderator of the Uniting Church to thank for this!

It is dawn, the sky painted with the colours of the sunrise. A new day. On the Sea of Galilee seven fishermen, disciples of Jesus Christ, are returning to shore after having fished the night through. They are despondent because they caught nothing. On the beach stands a man. Behind him is a small fire, the smoke rising upwards in the still morning air.

John 21: 4-12a: Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you 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, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved [John] said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. But 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 there, with fish lying 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, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Wouldn't you love to have been there? Our Lord cooking us a breakfast of freshly caught fish and bread. What an honour! What an occasion!

I want to show you the symbolism evident to me and necessary for you to understand the meaning of the 153 fish and the net.

Symbol	Inference
This is Jesus' third appearance to His disciples since His resurrection.	He will visit mankind on earth three times: two are past, His birth and role as a Servant; In His Resurrected state having become our Savior; and as a King.
There are seven disciples present.	Seven is the number of completion.
The disciples still didn't recognize him immediately.	If His disciples don't recognize Him after three appearances, how easily will it be to fool people in the future when someone performing miracles claims to be Christ?
The disciples are told to cast their net on the RIGHT side of the boat.	Jesus Christ, the church, sits at right side of God.
Simon Peter sprang into the sea.	Simon Peter represents the Church. The Church keenly awaits the Lord and races to be with him. In the rapture, the Church will be taken from the sea of humanity, and brought to Him as His bride.
Simon Peter put on his clothes.	The Bride will be dressed in white robes for the wedding feast.
John, although recognizing Jesus, remained in the boat.	Israel, represented by the casual and laid-back and favorite son, John, does not clamor to be with Jesus, although Jesus loves Israel above all other nations. This is as Israel still, essentially, is.
The other disciples stayed with the boat.	As occurs now and will happen in the future, people outside of the Church (Peter) will tarry in their journey to Christ.

Now a lot of commentators have pondered over the meaning of the 153 fish. Some suggestions to be found in study bibles and other commentaries are:

The numbering of the fish proves that John was an eyewitness  
There were 153 species of fish in the sea (since shown to be wrong)  
One refers to Shem's race, three refers to Ham's race, and five refers to Japheth's race (Noah's sons)  
153 is the number of people Jesus ministers to in the Gospel of John  
Jesus lived for 12,240 days which equals  $80 \times 153$ ; and  
Jesus ministered for 918 days which equals  $6 \times 153$ .

The use of fish in the Bible to represent mankind is common. In Mark 1:17 we read, And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." In Matthew 13:47-50 we read of Jesus talking to His disciples in a house after having addressed thousands by the Sea of Galilee: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind; when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into vessels but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." We read in Luke 5:6-7: And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. . In the case of John 21, the net does not break, and John, the author, expresses his surprise. Not only is the large catch of 153 fish significant, so is the matter that the net does not break.

Further examples of fish are that a fish was a symbol for Christianity used by the early church, it is to be seen today as a bumper-sticker, we have the Sea of humanity, and the church is thought to be represented by the constellation Pisces.

If the 153 fish is to mean anything at all, it must be to do with mankind. It is here that I will tie in my opening discussion about Jesus being the 77th generation from Adam. We can rewrite these 77 generations as  $76 + 1$ , meaning 76 generations, then 1 generation of which Jesus was a member. If we subtract 77 from 153 (fish) we find:  $153 - 77 = 76$ . Interesting? Can you see where this leads? This number (153) can thus be interpreted to symbolise this: Jesus came following the first 76 generations of man and will return following the next 76 generations of man: at the 77th and 154th.

Do you put it down to something quaint or coincidental, even in view of the symbolism already discussed, or do you accept that this is the case? Even the number of Jesus two generations is perfect considering the way that God the Father does good things in sevens: every 77th generation! It has already been pointed out that the net that lifted these 153 fish out of the water did not break and it has been shown that this was not always the case. If the 153 fish represent 153 generations of man and that Jesus was the one who directed that net to be put in the water, what must the unbroken net holding the fish, be a symbol of? The church; the body of Christ! If a painting were to be done of a net containing 153 fish, with water dripping of their skins and everything, it could be called the body of Christ and I m sure that Jesus would approve. The picture could also be called, the removal of the body of Christ from the sea of humanity , or, to put it into eschatological terminology, the rapture of the body of Christ from the earth .

There is a little more that can be said about these 153 fish: they are all described as large. This we can take to mean that they are fully-grown and that this implies that the rapture will not occur until the 153rd generation of the church is fully-grown or has reached adult-hood. This is why Jesus didn't know when He would return. This is why nobody will know. Perhaps it means waiting until person number 106,241,205 has her 21st birthday. Jesus knew the generation he would follow, but because of humanity s variability in its generation rates, the when of His return is literally in the Father s hands. If you read John 21 further, you will find Peter receiving instruction about nurturing the church as it matures: love me: feed my lambs, love me: tend my sheep, love me: feed my sheep; and is told that when the church is old, others will carry it where it does not want to go. (I realise that Jesus questioning of Peter's love for Him can also be related to Peter's disobedience, where he three times denied Jesus, and that Jesus is offering Peter an antidote for those denials (pardon the brevity of that explanation), but Jesus is also stressing the need for love for Him to be a prerequisite to being a shepherd of His sheep; the church. After each "Do you love me?", Jesus responds to Peter's responses with instructions about His flock.)

The church today is tottering under the weight of a multi-religious doctrine. The World Council of Churches uses and embraces religions that do not embrace Christ. The WCC is not about Christ. They embrace the Aboriginal Dreamtime, Smoke rituals, Spirits of the dead, and it has been suggested that the Bible should be interpreted also from the perspective of birds, water, air, trees, and mountains.

We see, as the article opened, that churches are questioning the inerrancy of the Bible. Other examples are (of many): in some churches homosexuality is not considered a sin; some British ministers openly doubt that Christ rose again; and the Bible is being rewritten replacing Father with Mother. Indeed Peter is old and being taken where he does not want to go.

As a warning to those who think that this article will enable the determining of the Lord's return, note this: for the three generations still living in our family, the ages of people when first becoming parents ranges from 19 to 34, the Biblical generation is 40 years, and current dictionary definitions for a generation vary from 25 years to 1/3rd of a life span. Attempting to determine a date from this information without reference to other scripture, will be without basis. Jesus will return one day, and whether we are dead or not, the best thing you can do is to make sure that you haven't wasted the gifts that God has given you.

God bless, David Elphick