

HIGHLIGHTS (text not audio)

HIGHLIGHTS John 21:1-11 - Why Count the Catch?

In John 21, we read about a catch of fish that is numbered at 153 (this is the only time a catch of fish is numbered in scripture, to my knowledge) There have been many interpretations of this, most of them trying to find out if the number has a symbolic meaning.

However, we do know the Jews thought that there were 153 types of fish in the world and so for them, it was an important number as it would have been a reminder of their calling to preach the gospel to all nations. In addition, in the Old Testament, the sea and what is in it often represents the gentile nations. So many have seen this 153 as the gentile nations, and of course (reflecting what I just said above) it comes after Jesus had given them the commission in John that “as the Father sent me, so send I you.” (John20:21)

It is interesting that in John 17, the great high priestly prayer of Jesus, the word “world” is mentioned 17 times. The church father, St. Jerome gave a mathematical pyramid with 17 at its base (although the chapter headings were added later, it is interesting that Jerome’s 17 comes in chapter 17 of John’s gospel).

To grasp Jerome’s pyramid just draw a triangle and bisect it with horizontal lines (as on lined paper). Then imagine the base as number 17 and then go up, line by line (16, 15, 14, 13 etc.) all the way to number one at the top. Then add all the numbers and it comes to 153. This may be all speculation, but since Jesus himself speaks of the “world” seventeen times, we then have a catch of fish representing the nations of the world (153). Although this is conjecture, there may just be a link between the two.

It is also interesting that in Hebrew (that uses letters of the alphabet to represent numbers) that the numerical value of 17 spells out “I am Yahweh”.

There are lots of other interpretations; however, I suspect that it was such a huge catch of fish that out of simple curiosity they just counted them!