

John 21:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

Analysis

But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. The transition from νυκτός (nyktos, night—verse 3) to πρωΐας (prōias, morning) is symbolic. Darkness yields to light; fruitless labor gives way to divine intervention. Jesus appears precisely when the disciples' independent effort has utterly failed.

The phrase ἔσθη Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὸν αἰγιαλόν (estē Iēsous eis ton aigialon, 'Jesus stood on the shore') echoes earlier resurrection appearances where Jesus suddenly appears (20:19, 26). His resurrection body possesses both physical reality and supernatural properties—He can be touched yet appears without opening doors; He eats food yet isn't immediately recognized.

Οὐ μέντοι ᾔδεισαν οἱ μαθηταὶ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν (ou mentoi ēdeisan hoi mathētai hoti Iēsous estin, 'the disciples did not know that it was Jesus'). This recalls Mary Magdalene's failure to recognize Jesus at the tomb (20:14-15) and the Emmaus disciples' eyes being restrained (Luke 24:16). The resurrection body, though physical and continuous with Jesus's pre-resurrection body (bearing crucifixion scars—20:20, 27), differs sufficiently that immediate recognition doesn't occur. Jesus must reveal His identity through words or actions.

Historical Context

Dawn on the Sea of Galilee would have meant visibility increasing but perhaps still dim light. The distance from shore to boat (about 200 cubits—verse 8, roughly 100 yards) would make facial recognition difficult. Additionally, fishermen exhausted from a fruitless night would not expect to encounter their crucified-and-risen Master standing on the beach.

The resurrection accounts consistently show that Jesus's post-resurrection body was both recognizable and different. The disciples touched Him, He ate food, scars remained—yet doors didn't restrict Him, He appeared and vanished, recognition sometimes failed initially. This 'spiritual body' (1 Corinthians 15:44) foreshadows believers' future resurrection bodies—physical yet transformed, continuous yet glorified.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What is the significance of Jesus appearing at dawn after the disciples' fruitless night?
2. Why might the disciples not have immediately recognized Jesus, and what does this teach about resurrection bodies?
3. How does Jesus's strategic timing (appearing after complete failure) demonstrate His grace and pedagogical wisdom?

Interlinear Text

πρωΐας	δὲ	ἤδη	γενομένης	ἔστη	ὁ	Ἰησοῦς	εἰς
when the morning	But	now	come	stood	G3588	Jesus	on
G4405	G1161	G2235	G1096	G2476		G2424	G1519
τὸν	αἰγιαλόν	οὐ	μέντοι	ᾔδειςαν	οἱ	μαθηταὶ	ὅτι
G3588	the shore	not	but	knew	G3588	the disciples	that
	G123	G3756	G3305	G1492		G3101	G3754
Ἰησοῦς	ἔστιν						
Jesus	it was						
G2424	G2076						

Additional Cross-References

John 20:14 (References Jesus): And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

Mark 16:12 (Parallel theme): After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.

Luke 24:31 (Parallel theme): And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.