

John 21:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.

Analysis

Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. Jesus addresses them as παιδία (paidia, children/little children), a term of endearment showing affection despite their regression to fishing. This same word appears in 1 John 2:14, 18 where the apostle tenderly addresses believers. Jesus doesn't rebuke but lovingly engages.

The question μή τι προσφάγιον ἔχετε (mē ti prosphagion echete, 'Have you any fish/food?') expects a negative answer (μή, mē). Jesus knows they've caught nothing but asks to surface their need and failure. This parallels His question to Philip before feeding the 5,000: 'Whence shall we buy bread?' (John 6:5)—He knew what He would do but tested Philip. Here Jesus establishes their utter dependence before demonstrating His provision.

Their simple response Οὐ (ou, 'No') admits failure. Professional fishermen on their home waters, working all night with expert technique—nothing. This stark confession prepares for the miracle. They must acknowledge emptiness before experiencing Christ's abundance. Ministry apart from Christ, however skillful or sincere, produces no fruit. 'Without me ye can do nothing' (John 15:5) is here dramatically illustrated.

Historical Context

The word προσφάγιον (prosphagion) specifically means 'fish' or 'relish eaten with bread'—something to accompany the staple food. A stranger asking fishermen if they'd caught anything was natural—fishing boats returning at dawn would be expected to have catches for sale. Jesus's question thus seemed ordinary, not immediately revealing His identity.

Night fishing expeditions that produced nothing represented economic disaster for professional fishermen. Nets needed repair, boats required maintenance, and families needed provision. The disciples' simple 'No' carries economic anxiety, physical exhaustion, and perhaps spiritual discouragement. They had left these nets to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11), but now He was... what? Risen, yes—but what came next?

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does Jesus's tender address 'children' reveal about His attitude toward disciples who had failed and regressed?
2. Why does Jesus ask a question to which He already knows the answer, and how does this apply to His dealings with us?
3. How does the disciples' fruitless night prepare them for the miracle and recommissioning that follows?

Interlinear Text

λέγει οὖν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Παιδιά μή τι προσφάγιον
saith **Then** **him** ^{G3588} **Jesus** **Children** ^{G3361} ^{G5100} **meat**
G3004 G3767 G846 G2424 G3813 G4371

ἔχετε ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ Οὐ
have ye **They answered** **him** **No**
G2192 G611 G846 G3756

Additional Cross-References

Philippians 4:19 (References Jesus): But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Psalms 37:3 (Parallel theme): Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

1 John 2:13 (Parallel theme): I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.