

Fishermen And Fishers Of Men

Luke 5:1-11

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I'm not a fisherman, but if you are a fisherman, you're going to like our story today in the Bible. It's a story of Jesus calling four fishermen to be fishers of men. They were actually fishing for fish, but they would go on to fish for men. Jesus is going to call Peter, James, John and Andrew to follow Him and become fishers of men.

There is a miracle involved here. It's called the miracle of "the drought of fishes" or "the catch of fish." The purpose of this miracle was not to meet a human need. It's not like other miracles in which someone was blind and they needed eyesight, or someone was lame and they needed to be able to walk, or someone had leprosy and they needed to be healed. This is just Jesus doing a miracle of the men throwing their nets out when there was no fish, but they caught two boatloads of fish.

And this miracle was not done in answer to any cry for help. There was no blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" to have his eyes healed (Mark 10:46-47). There was no petition to have a daughter healed (Matthew 9:18-26) or to have a servant healed (Matthew 8:5-13). It was just Jesus performing a miracle.

The purpose and the value of this miracle is what we call "didactic." What it means is that it was a teaching miracle. There are lessons for us to learn here. And it also demonstrated Christ's divine power and glory. The big lesson here is that when Jesus commands us, we should obey and trust Him. Whatever Jesus asks us to do—even when it may not make sense or be something we understand—we should be obedient because of His wisdom and His divine nature. God will bless us if we walk in obedience to Him and to His Word.

We've already seen in Luke that Jesus commands demons (Luke 4:34-37), that Jesus cures the sick (Luke 4:38-44), and in our text, we'll see that Jesus controls the fish in the Sea of Galilee, and in that miracle, we will see five aspects of Christ's divine nature and glory manifested.

Number one, we see Christ's practical wisdom; He spoke the word of God, verses 1-3. "So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him..." There was a great crowd there by the Sea of Galilee pressing on Christ. "...to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake..." or "moored by the lake" "...but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat."

Verse 1 says, "So it was" or the King James translation says, "It came to pass." That's a period of time that doesn't give us a definite day that this happened. So it just means this was after He had been in the synagogue, after He had delivered the man from the demon and after He had

cleansed the people of disease. It may now have been a day or two later, but it is morning by the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus encounters this boat on the lake, and He used it to teach from.

Where it says, “The multitude pressed about Him,” it means thousands of people were crowded around Jesus “to hear the word of God.” They were standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. What’s that? It’s also known as the Sea of Galilee and as the Sea of Tiberius. It’s a freshwater lake and not a sea. It’s the most beautiful freshwater lake I have ever seen. It’s 13 miles long and 8 miles wide, and out of the south end flows the Jordan River down to Israel. This is where, at Capernaum, Christ’s first year of ministry took place around the Sea of Galilee and where He’ll call these fishermen to ministry.

It says in our text that there were “two boats standing by the lake.” Two boats is significant. “But the fishermen...” who were Peter, Andrew, James and John who owned these two boats “...had gone from them and were washing their nets.” They had fished the whole night before. On the Sea of Galilee, you fish at night and not during the day, and we’ll see that you don’t fish in the deep but in the shallows. So they fished all night and caught nothing—that’s also significant—but they’re now back on land washing their nets. Then they dry their nets during the day, reload them in the boats and go back out again at night to fish.

But in verse 3, Jesus “got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s.” Simon is also known as Peter the disciple or Peter the Apostle. And Jesus “asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down...” which is the position of teaching “...and taught the multitudes from the boat.” In the Greek, it’s literally “kept on teaching,” so for some times, Jesus was preaching and teaching.

The people would sit on the shore and this would form a natural amphitheater; the shore would gradually slope up, and Jesus’ voice would carry over the water. So Jesus turned the boat into His pulpit. I thought it would be cool to take the church to the beach, sit on my surfboard on the water, preach a few verses then take a ride, come back and preach a few more verses. We’ll just hang out at the beach someday.

Notice that Jesus had to borrow a boat. It makes me feel good, because I have to borrow tools from my neighbor. I’m like that cheapskate pastor, who lives next door and doesn’t buy any of his own tools. I’m not a tool guy. So I borrow tools, and sometimes people say, “Why do you borrow tools?” Because Jesus did it. He borrowed a boat, He borrowed a donkey on Palm Sunday, He borrowed an upper room to meet there with His disciples and He borrowed a tomb to be buried in. No big deal; He only needed it for the weekend. So Jesus borrowed and I borrow; it’s Biblical. But when Jesus gave the boat back to Peter, He made sure it was full of fish. He rewarded Peter for loaning Jesus his boat.

Notice in verse 1, “The multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God.” The phrase “The word of God” or “of God” is what’s called “the subjective genitive” in the Greek, indicating source. The people were listening to Jesus speak the word that came directly from God, or when Jesus spoke, it was God speaking. This is simple but profound. When Jesus spoke the

word of God, He wasn't reading Bible or Scripture, another term for the Word of God; He was actually speaking His own teaching.

The Bible doesn't tell us what He taught. He taught in a lot of parables in Luke. He talked about His heavenly Father, about heaven, about hell and he taught about all the precepts of God. But when Jesus spoke, He was actually God in the flesh, so God was speaking. When the people heard Jesus speak, they were listening to God.

You may have a red-letter Bible, and whenever you're reading the red words, those are the words Jesus spoke. But "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16), which literally means that the whole Bible is God breathed or God breathing it out. And when you read the red letters, it was Jesus incarnate speaking.

In John 1:14, it says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." That sentence literally means that Jesus "pitched His tent among us." "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." So whenever Jesus spoke, He spoke the truth. Jesus always spoke the truth, because He is the very word of God. And then in John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus spoke the truth about how we get to God the Father through the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son. So Jesus spoke the very word of God incarnate.

The second thing about Jesus, in verses 4-5, is His perfect knowledge. So Jesus was God speaking, and He is also God who is omniscient. The word "omniscient" means "all knowledge." There is nothing beyond God's knowledge; Jesus knows all things because He is God.

The story goes, "When He had stopped speaking...." He was teaching the word of God. "...He said to Simon..." that is, "Simon Peter" "...Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.' But Simon answered and said to Him, 'Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing.'" Peter was basically saying, "We're fishermen and we worked all night and caught nothing. It's really not a good idea, Master, Lord, God in the flesh. You're just a carpenter. I'm a fisherman!" The idea of going back out on the lake and fishing during the daytime and fishing in the deep was ludicrous to a fisherman. You just don't do that. It makes no sense.

"Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." This is the lesson of the story. "Whatever You tell me to do, I will do. Even though I can't understand it; even though it doesn't make sense; even from a human standpoint, it's silly; I will obey Your command." And when Peter obeyed, there was blessing. The same is true for us. When we obey God's Word and keep His command, blessing will follow. So Jesus gave Peter a divine command.

As I just pointed out, fishing on the Sea of Galilee happens at night and not during the day. So this made no sense to Peter. And fishing on the Sea was never done in the deep but in the shallows. "We've just washed out nets, and you want us to go out again?!" This was very demanding and difficult and seemed very foolish to Peter.

Have you ever read a Bible verse and you thought, “Man, I don’t know about that. This doesn’t seem right to me”? How about “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25)?

I’ve had husbands say to me, “Well, that doesn’t pertain to my wife! That was written before she was born!”

How about, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22)?

“Oh, no! Not my husband! If my husband had been alive during Paul’s time, he never would have said that!”

Yet when you obey, you get blessed. If we would just follow God’s divine design for marriage in the Bible—“the B-i-b-l-e; yes, that’s the book for me,” for you and for us—then blessings will follow. You may not like it, it may be difficult, you may not understand it, but if we obey God, He will bring blessings into our lives.

“Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” Jesus knows what we should do, so we should be obedient and not argue with Him.

Growing up in church, I learned so many hymns as a boy. The words of one I still remember and like today is:

“Trust and obey, for there’s no other way

To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

I may not understand it. I may not think it’s good. I may kind of resist it. It may not be popular. It may not be the view of the culture around me. But I must learn to trust God and obey Him. This is what we call “walking by faith and not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

So Peter was basically saying, “I don’t understand. But since You told me to, I’ll obey.” Peter obeys, seemingly reluctantly.

And he used the word “Master,” in verse 5, which was only used by the disciples in Luke’s Gospel. It’s the equivalent of “Rabbi” or “teacher.” Later on when Peter sees the miracle, he calls Him “Lord,” using the Greek word “Kurios,” which is saying that Jesus is Lord God.

Not only is Jesus wise and have perfect knowledge, but number three, Jesus has powerful dominion, verses 6-7. “And when they had done this...” what Jesus had ordered them to do “... they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.” In the Greek, it’s “began to break.” There were so many fish, probably the biggest haul they had ever seen in their lives. “So they signaled 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.” Isn’t that cool? When God blesses, our boats overflow.

Do you know that you cannot ever outgive God? You obey God, you take a step of faith, you do what God tells you to do and your cup will overflow (Psalm 23:5).

This is a divine miracle. Jesus is not only omniscient; Jesus is omnipotent. "Omnipotent" means that He is almighty and all powerful. The lesson also is that we see an example of Christ's lavish generosity. Obedience brings great blessing.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, there were 12 basketfuls left over (Mark 6:30-44). Not only did Jesus borrow a boat, but Jesus had leftovers. I know husbands who won't eat leftovers. Shame on you. Jesus had leftovers. So He gathered the leftovers into baskets. And the Greek word for these "baskets" is the same Greek word for the one Paul got into when he was let down through a window in the wall in Damascus to escape (2 Corinthians 11:32-33). So it was a large basket that a grown man could get into. It wasn't a little basket with a few pieces of bread. And when Jesus fed the 4,000, there were seven basketfuls left over (Matthew 15:29-39).

F.B. Meyers said about our text, "If you lend Him your boat, He will return it filled with silver fish." I like that. What that means is that if you give to God, He will bless you. God will never be your debtor. If you surrender to God, if you follow the Lord and trust and obey, you will have a blessed and wonderful life. It won't necessarily be comfortable or easy, but it will be blessed and wonderful, a surefire thing. You may not be rich or wealthy or healthy, but you'll be blessed, because you've been obedient to God. He will bless you spiritually and abundantly. So we need to do God's work, as well, and in God's way for His glory.

Number four, in verses 8-10, we see Jesus' perfect holiness. When this miracle took place, Peter was blown away. "When Simon Peter..." his full name "...saw it..." that is, "the miracle" "...he fell down at Jesus' knees..." I think Peter is still in the boat, so he drops to his knees before the Lord. "...saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon." James and John's father, Zebedee, ran the fishing business. James and John were also known as "the sons of thunder." And Peter, James and John became the inner circle of Christ's disciples.

So Peter, knowing this was a miracle, knowing he was now looking at God in the flesh, falls down before Jesus in the boat, seeing who Christ was and seeing himself for who he was with a sinful heart, said to Jesus "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

whenever you see God for who He really is, you see yourself for who you really are. When you see God, you see yourself. And when you see yourself, you see yourself as a sinner, unworthy of the least of God's blessings.

Peter was feeling sinful in the holy presence of Christ. "This is the holy Son of God!" So he said, "I'm unworthy! Depart from me!" Yet this was not his first encounter with Jesus. He first followed John the Baptist, and John the Baptist pointed them to Jesus. They followed Jesus,

but they always came back to their boats and fishing. Jesus is now going to say, "Leave it all behind." "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). So Peter had this sublime awareness that fell upon his soul of who Jesus is—the holy Son of God. Then that brought an awareness of himself—a sinful man.

I believe that it is a gift of God's grace to reveal to you your true condition as a sinner, destitute and in need of the Savior. But just the opposite is being preached so often in churches today. God loves you and God is good—that's all true—but apart from being born again, being saved and regenerated, we're separated from God. We're sinners. The Bible says that "We're at enmity with God" (Romans 8:7). We're at war with God. We're enemies of God. That's not on God's part but on our part. We are fighting against God. We are all sinners. "There is none righteous, no, not one....All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:10, 23).

By God's goodness and grace, have you ever been granted a look into your own heart? It's wicked and desperately evil. And it is a gift from God when He makes you aware of your sin.

I'll never forget the day I realized that I was a sinner and in need of a Savior. I poured out my heart in repentance to God. I was 19 years old sitting on a deserted beach. I shed those tears of repentance. "God, I'm sorry. Forgive me. God, wash me. Cleanse my heart." Then I felt clean inside. I felt a weight lifted off my shoulders. And my life has never been the same since.

God grants you repentance and the knowledge that you are a sinner and need a Savior. So when you come to God, you come wretched, poor, miserable, naked and blind. You need everything coming from Him.

Isaiah 6 is an example. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up and the train of His robe filled the temple." And the angels cried, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." Then Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." When you see the Lord, you see yourself.

In Job 42:5-6, when Job had been fighting against God, he said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

When John the Apostle was on the island of Patmos, in Revelation 1, he saw a vision of Jesus, whose "head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters...out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword," what did he do? John said, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead." In seeing God, we see ourselves.

So in our text, Peter is a man feeling his own sinfulness, which is good. But Peter had to learn, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:3-4). So it is blessed when God shows you your sin that brings you to salvation.

Now Jesus did not grant Peter's petition. Peter said to Jesus, "Depart from me." What if Jesus had done that? That would have been a bummer. But as Peter grew in grace, there is an interesting contrast in John 21. After Jesus died, was buried and rose from the dead, for a period of 40 days, called "the post-Resurrection period of Christ," Jesus had told the disciples to go to Galilee, the same spot by the sea, and to wait for Him; He would meet them there. But they got tired of waiting, so Peter said, "I am going fishing." It was probably a beautiful day and the lake was glassy and the fish were jumping. The other guys said, "We are going with you also." They went fishing into the night but caught nothing.

Early the next morning, Jesus stood on the shore and hollered out to them, "Children, have you any food?" Then John the Apostle said, "It is the Lord!" He put two and two together—fished all night, caught nothing, they'd been there before, that's the Lord. And Jesus said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." They did that and pulled in the fish. Peter, knowing now it was the Lord, "put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea" and swam up to Jesus on the shore.

What a contrast with our Luke passage! In Luke 5:8, he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" In John 21:7, he now realizes his need for forgiveness and he runs/swam to Jesus. Peter had denied the Lord three times. Then Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?...Feed My lambs....Tend My sheep....Feed My sheep." And Jesus restored Peter back into ministry. So Peter now realizes that when he sins, he needs to run to Jesus and not away from Jesus.

When you sin, run to the Lord and not away from the Lord. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins..." or "agree with God that we've sinned" "...He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's the Christian "bar of soap." And I use it every day. "God, forgive me." I don't preach on Sunday before I say, "Lord, forgive my sins, cleanse my heart, fill me with Your Spirit. Enable me to preach Your Word." So I confess my sins to God, and He cleanses me "from all unrighteousness."

When you are born again, you become a child of God. But many times fellowship with God is broken because of disobedience. You don't lose sonship; you lose fellowship. And in order to restore fellowship—that's what 1 John 1 is about—I have to confess and be cleansed so I can "walk in the light as He is in the light" and fellowship with Him and He with me (1 John 1:7).

"Nothing between my soul and the Savior,

So that His blessed face may be seen;

Nothing preventing the least of His favor;

Keep the way clear! Let nothing between."

So we should be constantly asking God, "Forgive me for that thought. Forgive me; cleanse my heart. Keep me in fellowship with You. Help me to walk in dependence and obedience to Your

Word.”

There is one last picture in our text, in verses 10-11. Number five, we see Jesus’ precious mercy and grace to Peter and the other fishermen. “And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.’” In the Greek, it’s literally “catch men alive.” They caught fish for a living, for an occupation, and the fish died, but now they will catch men alive. “So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.”

So Jesus gave Peter three things. First, He gave Peter a word of comfort—“Do not be afraid.” You don’t need to be afraid; God loves and forgives. Second, He gave Peter a call and commission—“From now on you will catch men.” These men would become apostles; in this case, Peter the Apostle. In Acts 2, Peter would preach and 3,000 souls would be saved. You talk about full nets! That’s awesome! And in Acts 10, Peter preached to Cornelius, and all the Gentiles there were saved. So Peter had a new awareness of his mission.

And notice verse 11: “They forsook all and followed Him.” Does that mean that every Christian is to forsake their job and go into full-time ministry? No. But it does mean that every Christian should be willing to obey, to follow Jesus wherever He leads you.

Again, I love that old song:

“I’ll go where You want me to go, dear Lord,

O’er mountain, or plain, or sea;

I’ll say what You want me to say, dear Lord,

I’ll be what You want me to be.”

Have you ever prayed that? “No, no! I can’t do that! He might call me to Barstow! God forbid! Get behind me, devil! Now if I knew He’d call me to Tahiti, Honolulu or Maui, ‘Yes, Lord; I will follow. I’ll have to leave Menifee, but that’s okay.’”

I believe with all my heart that every Christian should say to the Lord, “I’ll go where You want me to go. I’ll do what You want me to do. I’ll be what You want me to be. I’ll say what You want me to say.” And mean it. In Romans 12:1, it says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

Are you willing to leave the comforts of your home, of the people you love, of the job you have established and say, “Lord, I’ll be a missionary” or say, “Lord, I’ll be whatever You want me to be”? Maybe He wants you to stay and be a housewife or a businessman or drive a truck—I don’t know.

But wherever we go, we should be fishing for men; we should be fishers of men. So you may

not fish for fish. I don't. But we should be fishing for men and catching men alive. It's the call of every believer: to share the Gospel with others.