

Luke 5:1-11
October 7, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Has everyone in this room gone fishing at least once in their life?

Q: If yes, what do you think it takes to be a successful at fishing? [Let people engage, e.g. Go where the fish are; need a fishing pole or net; need attractive bait]

In today's passage, we see the Lord Jesus helping some fishermen get their lives aimed in the right direction. Scholars are divided over whether this incident is identical with Jesus' call of these fishermen as recorded in Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20. We probably must leave the question somewhat undecided. But we know that John 1:35-42 records the first meeting between Jesus and Peter. The incident in our text takes place about one year later. James and John, and perhaps some others, such as Peter's brother, Andrew (although unnamed), were present, but the focus in our text is on Jesus and Peter. These men had all met Jesus and had begun to follow Him, but they were not yet completely committed to His mission. This incident redirected their lives.¹ *They discover that their primary purpose in life was not the business they ran or the job they had, but rather that God's greater purpose was to follow Jesus to catch men for Him.*

Transition: That raises an evaluation question for us to consider. Are we living our lives in a way that demonstrates that we are about the greater purpose of following Jesus to catch men for Him? This question is challenging. This means we need to take a strong interest in following Jesus for the purpose of sharing the Gospel. It is my prayer that when you leave class today that you are confident that **you CAN succeed in catching men for Christ BY following Jesus who will lead you to where the fish are.** Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.1:

- One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God,

V.2:

- he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.

V.3:

- He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

V.4:

- When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

V.5:

- Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

V.6:

- When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

V.7:

- So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

V.8:

- When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

V.9:

- For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,

V.10:

- and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."

V.11:

- So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.1: Let's picture the scene. Where are we and what's going on? [Jesus is on the shore of Lake Gennesaret ("harp"), aka Sea of Galilee. The multitudes were pressing around Jesus, listening to the word of God.]

Q V.2: What does Jesus notice? [He sees at the water's edge two boats that are empty, and there are fishermen busy washing their nets.]

Q: Why is it important to wash their nets? [If nets are not washed and stretched out to dry, they rot and break.]

Q V.3: Then what happens? [Jesus helps Himself into one of the boats belonging to Simon Peter. He asks Peter to push the boat a little away from shore. Jesus then sits down in the boat and continues teaching God's Word to the people.]

Q V.4: After Jesus concludes His teachings, what does He ask Simon Peter to do next? ["Let's move the boat into deep water and drop the nets for a catch."]

Q V.5: How does Simon respond? ["Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."]

Q: Let's process this some more. First, what part of the day were these men fishing? [All night!]

Q: If you were Simon Peter, how do you think you'd be feeling physically at this point? [Tired or wiped out.]

Q: But in spite of weariness, Simon Peter agreed to Jesus's request. Why should we applaud Simon Peter's response? [Because he was being obedient to His Master, though he was skeptical that going back to the deep water would be a successful venture.]

Observation: Consider the fact that fishermen generally have the qualities that make for success in serving the Lord. It takes courage and daring, patience and determination to work on the seas; and it also takes a great deal of faith. Fishermen must be willing to work together (they used nets, not hooks) and help one another. They must develop the skills necessary to get the job done quickly and efficiently. If I had fished all night and caught nothing, I would probably be tempting to sell my nets, not wash them to get ready to go out again!

Truth: To be successful at catching men for Christ, we must be OBEDIENT by following Jesus to where the fish are.

Q V.6-7: As soon as the nets are dropped, what happens? [There were so many fish in the net that the net starts to break! They signal their fishing partners on the shore to come out in their boat and help!]

Q: What happens when they fill both boats full of fish? [The boats started to sink!!]

Q: What do you learn about Jesus? [Let people engage]

- Jesus is Jehovah Jireh, our Provider
- Jesus will provide above and beyond what we imagined
- He sees how hard we are working with seemingly no results, and the He shows up to show us that He's got this!

Q V.8-10: After seeing this amazing catch of fish, how does Simon Peter respond? [He falls at Jesus's knees and says, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"]

Q: What do you make of this response? [Peter's sense of his own sinfulness was not due to disobedience in Luke 5:5a but to a general unworthiness (cf. 7:6; Job 42:5–6) as he confronted the Lord's might and majesty.]

Truth: To be successful at catching men for Christ, we must EXERCISE FAITH by trusting Jesus for the results.

Q V.11: What does Jesus say to Simon? ["Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."]

Q: Why do you think Jesus said, "Don't be afraid?" [Fear is a normal reaction to the experience of God's glory. These words of reassurance were frequently part of a theophany. They brought the assurance of the forgiveness of sins.]

Q: When Jesus told Simon, "From now on you will catch men," what did Simon, James and John do? [They made a full commitment to follow Him!]

Observation: Announcing that they would start catching men instead of fish, we see that Jesus is announcing that their greater purpose is not their trade of fishing, but rather catching men for Him. *That message is true for us!*

LOOK:

So let me help you work through the application. As you have studied this passage, ask yourself:

Why is this Message Important to you?

No matter what my profession is or how hard I work, the Lord is my provider. And not only does He provide, but He provides in miraculous ways. Moreover, my primary purpose in life will not be the business I run or the occupation I have, but rather to be about God's greater purpose to follow Jesus to catch men for Him.

What's at Stake if you don't internalize this passage?

I will miss the greater purpose for which I exist. It's about the Great Commission. My role on earth is to catch men for Christ, whether it be through my vocation, my family relationships, or whatever circle of influence He puts me in. If my focus becomes myopic, and it becomes mainly about my business or any temporal matters that all of us deal with, I will miss the joy of following Jesus to achieve my greater purpose here on earth.

Why did you need to hear this?

You need to hear this because life can go by so fast that we can lose sight of why we're really here. We can get so busy taking care of ourselves and/or our families that sitting down with people who need Jesus becomes an ancillary task. Instead, it should be front and center.

How are you in this story?

We are in this story as Peter, James and John. We are all working hard at what we do. And sometimes we work hard in our jobs, and the results just don't seem to be there. Yet, Jesus is our perfect Provider, and HE sees our work, and then He shows up in miraculous ways in our lives. He never fails to remind us that "He's got this!" He knows our needs. He knows our hearts. He sees our efforts.

Let's take it one more level. I think this story goes beyond Jesus being a great Provider. I think Jesus is illustrating that when we obediently follow Him to "where the fish are," the results of our evangelism come from Him, and it's enormous! We may be sharing the love of Christ that "feels" to no avail or sharing the actual Gospel message that "seems" to fall on deaf ears. But the Lord takes responsibility for the results, but it starts with our obedience to follow him to where the fish are. If we will keep doing our part to "go fishing," He will do His part to save them.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 185–186). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Jesus was concerned about individuals. He preached to great crowds, but His message was always to the individual; and He took time to help people personally. His purpose was to transform them and then send them out to share His message of forgiveness with others. Luke describes in this chapter our Lord's meetings with four individuals and the changes they experienced because they trusted Him.

From Failure to Success (Luke 5:1–11)

This event is not parallel to the one described in Matthew 4:18–22 and Mark 1:16–20. In those accounts, Peter and Andrew were busy fishing, but in this account they had fished all night and caught nothing and were washing their nets. (If nets are not washed and stretched out to dry, they rot and break.) Jesus had enlisted Peter, Andrew, James, and John earlier, and they had traveled with Him in Capernaum and Galilee (Mark 1:21–39), but then they went back to their trade. Now He would call them to a life of full-time discipleship.

It is possible that at least seven of the disciples were fishermen (John 21:1–3). Consider the fact that fishermen generally have the qualities that make for success in serving the Lord. It takes courage and daring, patience and determination to work on the seas; and it also takes a great deal of faith. Fishermen must be willing to work together (they used nets, not hooks) and help one another. They must develop the skills necessary to get the job done quickly and efficiently.

If I had fished all night and caught nothing, I would probably be *selling* my nets, not washing them to get ready to go out again! But true fishermen don't quit. Peter kept on working while Jesus used his ship as a platform from which to address the huge crowd on the shore. "Every pulpit is a fishing boat," said Dr. J. Vernon McGee, "a place to give out the Word of God and attempt to catch fish."

But there was another side to this request: Peter was a "captive audience" as he sat in the ship listening to the Word of God. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). In a short time, Peter would have to exercise faith, and Jesus was preparing him. First He said, "Thrust out a little"; and then, when Peter was ready, He commanded, "Launch out into the deep." If Peter had not obeyed the first seemingly insignificant command, he would never have participated in a miracle.

Peter must have been surprised when Jesus took command of the ship and its crew. After all, Jesus was a carpenter by trade (Mark 6:3), and what do carpenters know about fishing? It was a well-known fact that, in the Sea of Galilee, you caught fish at night in the shallow water, not in the daytime in the deep water. What Jesus asked Peter to do was contrary to all of his training and experience, but Peter obeyed. The key was his faith in the Word of God: "Nevertheless, at Thy word" (Luke 5:5).

The word translated "Master" (Luke 5:5) is used only by Luke and it has a variety of meanings, all of which speak of authority: chief commander, magistrate, governor of a city, and president of a college. Peter was willing to submit to the authority of Jesus, even though he did not understand all that the Lord was doing. And remember, a great crowd was watching from the shore.

How people respond to success is one indication of their true character. Instead of claiming the valuable catch for themselves, Peter and Andrew called their partners to share it. We are not reservoirs, but channels of blessing, to share with others what God has graciously given to us.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 216)

2. JESUS'S DEMONSTRATION OF HIS AUTHORITY BY CALLING HIS FIRST DISCIPLES (5:1–11) (Matt. 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20)

The incident recorded here is obviously not the first time Jesus had been in contact with the men whom He called to be His disciples. Luke already had stated that Jesus had healed Simon's mother-in-law which denotes previous contact with Simon and Andrew. This seems to be at least the third time Jesus had contact with these men. In John 1:41 Andrew told Peter that he had found the Messiah. Apparently, the men at first did not follow Jesus on a "full-time" basis, for in Mark 1:16–20 (also Matt. 4:18–22) Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Mark recorded that that call was before Jesus entered the synagogue in Capernaum and healed a man who was demon-possessed. It is no wonder Peter invited Jesus home after the synagogue incident.

Now, sometime later, Peter and the others were still fishermen. It was at this point, now that Jesus had established His authority (Luke 4:31–44), that He called these men to full-time discipleship.

5:1–3. The large throng **crowding around** Jesus prevented His teaching effectively as He stood **by the Lake of Gennesaret**, another name for the Sea of Galilee, by a village on the northwest shore. So He went out a short distance in the water in Simon's boat so that they could all listen **to the Word of God**.

5:4–7. On Jesus' request, **Simon** put out his **nets** and **caught ... a large amount of fish**. Though **Simon**, an experienced fisherman, was sure he would not catch anything at that time of the day when the fish were deeper in the lake, he obeyed Jesus' word. This showed a significant amount of faith. The resulting catch **began to break the nets**, so they **filled** Simon's and another **boat** with the fish till **both boats ... began to sink**.

5:8–11. The miracle of the fish brought two responses in **Peter** and the others. They **were astonished** (lit., "amazement [*thambos*] seized him and all those with him," v. 9; cf. 4:36) **at the large catch of fish**, and Peter realized his sinfulness before Jesus (5:8). The result was that Jesus made the fishermen fishers of **men**. Jesus' teaching, combined with His miraculous acts, showed that He had the authority to call the men and have them respond by leaving **everything**.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1521). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

5:1–11 This episode is similar to that in John 21:1–14, though different enough to conclude they represent distinct events. If this is the same event as in Mk 1:16–20 and Mt 4:18–22, Luke moved it to this point in his narrative in order to shift from an introduction to Jesus' ministry in 4:1–44 to an introduction of His disciples in 5:1–28. Luke 4:38–39 seems to indicate that the placement of the call narrative was thematic, not chronological.

In 1985 a boat, called "the Jesus boat," was discovered in the depths of the Sea of Galilee between the ancient harbors of Magdala and Ginnosar. Carbon-14 dating places the construction

of the boat at about 40 B.C. The boat was likely in service on the Sea of Galilee during the first half of the first century A.D.

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 168–171). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

5:1 By the Lake of Gennesaret. The term “Gennesaret” refers to a fertile, heavily populated area at the northwestern corner of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum lies at the lake’s northern tip. The district’s name was at times extended to the lake so that it could be called the Lake of Gennesaret. In light of the setting, this description serves primarily a geographical purpose rather than a theological one.

Word of God. This is the first appearance of the expression in the Gospel. It should be interpreted as a subjective genitive, i.e., as the word that comes from God. We also find this expression in 8:11, 21 (where it is not found in the Markan parallels) and in 11:28, which is unique to Luke. In contrast it appears only once in Mark (7:13) and John (10:35) and possibly once in Matthew (15:6). The “word of God” refers to the gospel message as Acts 8:12, 14 reveals.

5:2 Two boats. This prepares us for the miracle in 5:6–7.

By the fishermen. Luke did not mention Andrew (cf. Mark 1:16), but the plural leaves room for him. He may have omitted mentioning Andrew in order to focus the readers’ attention on the central figure—Simon Peter.

5:3 And asked him to put out a little from shore. Even though more disciples than Simon Peter would be involved in this (for the command to “let down [5:4]” is plural as is “the nets”—literally *your* [plural] *nets*), Jesus’ conversation was directed to Simon, who was the leader. One should not see in the expression “put out [into the deep]” any allegorical nuances.

The one belonging to Simon. Luke did not mention any of the other men, such as James and John (5:10), in order to focus the readers’ attention on the calling of the most famous and important disciple. The following references to Simon in 5:4–5, 8–10 continue to emphasize his importance.

5:5 Simon answered, “Master.” This title (Greek *epistatēs*) was a favorite of Luke and was used only by him in the NT (cf. 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13). Whereas the title “teacher” in Luke was used of Jesus only by strangers, “Master” was used only by Jesus’ followers and reveals better his authority and might. Luke also avoided completely the use of the title “Rabbi” for Jesus.

We’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. This is not to be understood as a reply of disobedience, for the use of the title “Master” and the next statement in this verse reveal Simon’s obedience. In light of his previous experience in 4:38–41, Simon agreed to do something that at face value appears foolish. This statement and the next heighten the following miracle.

5:6 Such a large number of fish ... nets began to break. These two statements stress the size of the catch. Is this “great multitude” of fish a symbol of the “great multitude” who would come to Jesus due to the preaching of Peter and the other disciples? Luke gave evidence that he might have been thinking this way.

5:7 This verse further heightens the miraculous nature of the catch by mentioning the need for another boat and the fact that both boats were about to sink. The latter statement probably is hyperbolic since the remaining verses show no concern about the possibility of sinking. Where the other boat was at the time (nearby on the lake, on shore) is not stated. It was unimportant for Luke’s purpose.

5:8 Simon Peter ... fell at Jesus’ knees. This was an appropriate posture in a theophany when one encountered the Lord. Objections have been raised that this would not have been physically possible to do in a boat, but the recent discovery in the Sea of Galilee of a boat twenty-six and a

half feet long and seven and a half feet wide dating from Jesus' day has refuted this. Luke provided at this point the full name by which Simon is known to the readers of his Gospel because this event marks the call of the great apostolic leader.

Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man. In the presence of this theophany Peter responded much like Isaiah did (cf. Isa 6:5). The request is not to be taken literally, for where would Peter have expected Jesus to go? Rather it is idiomatic for "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner" or "Forgive me" or something like, "What is a Holy One like you doing with a sinner like me?" Peter's sense of his own sinfulness was not due to disobedience in Luke 5:5a but to a general unworthiness (cf. 7:6; Job 42:5–6) as he confronted the Lord's might and majesty.

5:9–10 That Luke intended his readers to see the catch of fish as miraculous is evident by Peter's response and now by that of his companions.

5:10 And so were James and John. These two are encountered again in 9:54 and Acts 12:2. They appear together with Peter in Luke 8:51; 9:28, and Peter and John appear together in 22:8; Acts 3:1, 3–4, 11; 4:13, 19; 8:14.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid." Fear is a normal reaction to the experience of God's glory. These words of reassurance were frequently part of a theophany. They brought the assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

From now on. A Lukan expression (cf. 1:48; 12:52; 22:18, 69).

You will catch men. Some argue that the fishing metaphor is a poor one because of what fishermen do to the fish they catch, whereas a shepherd metaphor would be much more positive (cf. Mark 6:34). The fishing analogy can be used negatively as Jer 16:16; Amos 4:2; 1QH 5:7–9 indicate. However, this metaphor should not be pressed beyond the one basic point of analogy, namely, that just as fishermen catch fish, so Peter would catch people for his Lord. The shepherd metaphor is not without its own problems, for shepherds raise sheep not just for their wool but also for their meat.

Is this metaphor of fishing for disciples directed only to Peter in this passage? In Mark 1:17 it is addressed to Simon and Andrew, and the implication is that when James and John left their nets (1:19–20), they did so to follow Jesus and to be fishers of men as well (cf. Matt 4:18–22). That Luke spoke of "their" leaving everything and following Jesus in the next verse implies that James and John also were included in the call to be fishers of men. If Luke had sought to apply this metaphor to Peter alone, he would have had to make this clearer to his readers, for they would have interpreted this passage in light of their knowledge of the tradition (cf. Luke 1:4) such as found in Mark.

5:11 So they ... left everything and followed him. Whereas Mark 1:20 has "left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him" and Matt 4:22 has "immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him," Luke pointed out that they left "everything." The term "followed" is frequently used to denote Christian discipleship in Luke. For Luke everyone who is a Christian is called to "follow Jesus," both apostles and nonapostles. The particular kind of calling may vary, but all are called to the same commitment. The ability to follow Jesus assumes the forgiveness that enables one to follow. This is evident from Luke 5:27–32, where Levi followed Jesus (5:27–28), for 5:32 implies that Levi was one of the tax collectors and sinners who repented and thus received the forgiveness of sins (1:77; 3:3).

The Lukan Message

In this account Luke sought once again to demonstrate to his readers Jesus' greatness. Like God the Father, Jesus possesses omniscience. Although experienced fishermen with all their

wisdom and skill knew that there should be no fish present, Jesus without any such experience knew that there were in fact fish there. Peter recognized through this experience that he was in the presence of the divine. As a result the title of respect and authority, “Master” (5:5), now gave way to the title “Lord” (5:8) and to the acknowledgment of human frailty and sinfulness.

Along with this theophany is also a call to service much like we find in Isa 6:1–13. The Lord in his glory appeared to Peter (cf. Luke 5:5–7 with Isa 6:1–4), and this is followed by a sense of sinfulness and unworthiness (cf. Luke 5:8–9 with Isa 6:5–7) and then by a divine commissioning (cf. Luke 5:10–11 with Isa 6:8–13). Peter’s call to follow Jesus in this account serves a twofold purpose for Luke. First, it satisfies the historical interest of Luke’s readers by telling them about the experiences and calling of the greatest and most famous apostle, the apostle Peter. Even as Christians today are interested in learning about the early apostles, so Luke’s readers were as well. Second, Luke used this incident as a paradigm to show what it means to be a Christian. Being a Christian involves following Jesus and leaving everything (Luke 5:11).

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