

Lesson # 3  
**"The Miracle Catch of Fish"**  
Luke 5:1-11

Each of the Synoptic Gospels gives an account of Jesus' call of the disciples. Each writer portrays that a call of few fishermen on the shore of the Sea of Galilee to be his disciples a little differently. Some were mending nets while others still trying to catch a few fish by casting their nets from the shore (Matt 5:18-21). Only Luke's gospel went into detail about what happened that day and only Luke's Gospel records the miracle catch of fish.

**The Background of the Miracle** (vv. 1-4)

*"So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, (2) and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. (3) 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. (4) When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."*

According to Matthew and Mark the call of the disciples came after the miracles that Jesus performed at Peter's house in Capernaum. This is important to realize or we might have the impression that Jesus just happened to be by the Sea of Galilee (Luke calls it Lake Gennesaret) where he invited four **strangers** to become his disciples. But that is not how it happened at all.

It is highly likely that these men had been witnesses of the miracles that Jesus performed in Jerusalem prior to returning to Galilee. They would have no doubt been in the synagogue in Capernaum. So Jesus' call to discipleship is no spontaneous invitation to strangers, but a reasoned response to a well timed invitation. Jesus had already invested significant time in building a relationship with these men prior to their call to service.

These men understood well what the life of a disciple entailed; the disciple would live with the teacher for a period of a few years in an effort to master all that the teacher knew and to be like him as much as possible. It was to just such a rigorous life that Jesus' was inviting these four fishermen to enter into.

**The Elements of the Miracle** (vv. 4-5)

Simon had been washing and mending his nets, while keeping one ear listening to what Jesus was teaching. After all he had other responsibilities and duties to perform. He had to fish to make a living for his family. Jesus' call for Simon to launch out into deeper water is an analogy of what He wants to do in Simon's life. Jesus is going to take Simon Peter to deeper, more personal commitment to Himself.

The Command of Jesus (vv.4-5a)

*"When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. (5) "But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing;..."*

It seems that in almost every conversation involving Jesus and the disciples, Peter is the first to speak, to voice an opinion, he however is not always right. (Matt 16:22-23,

26:33-34). On this occasion Peter seems to say out loud what all of the disciples are probably **thinking**.

### The Obstacles to Obedience

Peter is clearly reluctant to do as Jesus as commanded. In fairness to Peter, he was an experienced fisherman he had several serious obstacles to overcome in order to respond in faith to the request of Jesus.

But it should be remembered that the people who heard Jesus preach probably also heard Jesus command to Peter to launch out into the deep and try again. So how Peter responds to the command of Jesus is not just a private statement but also a **public** demonstration of faith.

- The obstacle of **fatigue**.

Peter readily admits that he is tired and so are all of the disciples. It's hard to obey God when your body is crying out for rest. I realize that many of you are tired tonight; you are here in the Bible study by a sheer act of will. It is certainly possible to be so busy with our lives that we have no time left for God. The sad thing is that some busy people end up giving God the **leftovers**; of their time, their talents and their resources. But to Peter credit he refused to give in to his fatigue, but rather said, "**but because you said so.**"

- The obstacle of his own past **experiences**

We are tempted to be guided by our experiences instead of what God says. The Lord asks Peter to do something contrary to his own expertise in fishing. According to everything that he knows about fishing, and he is a professional, he can't see anyway at all that what Jesus asks is going to work. The best fishing on the Sea of Galilee was at night close to shore. But Jesus had asked him to launch out into the deep in the middle of the day. This was asking a great deal of Peter. He was asking him to trust His Word. He was in effect asking Simon to try again even though he had failed in the past. This of course would be an important lesson for Peter in the future, not to allow past failure to keep him from serving the Lord. God may ask you to try again even if you have failed in the past. Will you allow past failure to keep you from following the Lord?

- The obstacle of his current **circumstances**.

We are tempted to be guided by our by our circumstances instead of what God says. Verse five reveals that Simon's answer "*Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.*" By his reply he communicates that he and his partners are dog tired, the word translated "*toiled*" indicates very hard work, they had not slept all night and they had worked hard all night. The circumstances of the past evening have indicated that further fishing will be **fruitless**. But Jesus was asking them to take the freshly cleaned nets and row out to the deep water and go through strenuous process of letting out and taking in the nets all over again. But they needed to learn that obedience to Jesus should not hinge upon **favorable** circumstances. Will you allow circumstances to dictate your obedience?

- The obstacle of our **fears**. Sometimes the greatest obstacle that we face in being obedience to God our own fear - the fear of being inadequate, or the fear of failure. Ultimately it will probably mean very little if you do not

overcome fear and go sky-diving, but it is a tremendous loss if you do not overcome the fear of following Christ. What is fear keeping you from doing for God?

It is probably impossible to estimate how many blessings in life have been lost because where too **tired**, too **discouraged** or even too **lazy** to try again.

In Peter's reply he reveals his respect when he calls Jesus, "**Master**" (**epistata**). Underline the word master. This word means master or teacher and is the Greek equivalent of "rabbi," but would have the favor of the word "**boss**" to us today. Peter showed his love and respect for Christ by not letting his better judgment hinder his obedience.

How does Jesus take us from where we are to where he wants us to be? By pushing us, that's how.

Perhaps doing thing your own way has left you empty, and it's time to give God's way a try. Maybe your own knowledge and skills have failed you and you need God's power, God's knowledge and God's skill. You need to do things God's way. Maybe its time for you today to obey God and try things His way, even it you don't understand where, why or how it's all going to work out. I realize that launching out into the deeper water is scary and it is less familiar but it where God's blessings are to be found.

The results of obedience. (vv. 5b-7)

*"...nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." (6) And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. (7) 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."*

Peter knew in his own mind that there was no reason to expect fish where Jesus had told him to let down the nets, yet even so Peter's respect for Jesus caused him to obey. But note that Peter let down "a" net but Jesus had said "**nets**" – **plural**. This seems to be only a partial obedience.

But even Peter's partial obedience was rewarded overwhelmingly. The result of the lowered net was staggering. There was such an immense catch that it was straining the capacity of the net and Peter had to seek the help his fishing partners in the other boat to help him. It is also worthy of note that Peter shared his abundance with others. If we are a receptacle of blessing then we are called on to be a **channel** of blessing to others.

As they harvested their catch, the two boats, each probably over seven and half feet wide and over twenty-seven feet long, were filled to overflowing and began sinking. Several tons of fish were hauled ashore that day in the midst of roar of a delighted crowd.

### ***The Effect of the Miracle (vv. 8-11)***

#### *Its Effect On Peter*

*"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"*

At first his request seems strange, if we take it at face value, that he was asking Jesus to leave. But we have to understand the scene in the light of what has happened. Perhaps the most impressive thing about Peter reaction is that Peter's eyes were not on the miracle. The miracle had forced Peter to look at Jesus in a new way.

It was one thing for Peter to witness Jesus perform a miracle for others, perhaps he had seen at numerous times already. But it was another thing entire to experience this miracle **personally**. He had literally felt the ropes burn into his hands, he had

struggled to wrestle the nets into the boat. Peter had felt and tasted and smelled this miracle for himself and it left him a changed man.

This miracle forever changed the way he looked at Jesus. Earlier as we noted Peter had addressed Jesus as "master" but here Peter uses the word (*kurie*) which has the force of "supreme **Lord**" and is word reserved by the Jews for a description of **God**.

Peter was not really trying to get rid of Jesus; he was simply overcome with a sense of his own **unworthiness**. It is good to recognize Jesus as master and even as friend, but it should never forget that at all times he is LORD of the Universe! This new revelation of the power and glory of Jesus has given Peter an acute sense of his own sinfulness.

We too cannot stand in the presence of Jesus and see Him clearly as the Holy One of Israel and fail to be sensitive to the fact that we are **sinner**s.

Peter's reaction is what we often see in the Bible as man's reaction to a face-to-face confrontation with God. When the prophet Isaiah "... *saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up*" he declared, "*Woe is me, for I am undone!*" (Isaiah 6:1,5). Job had much the same experience; "*I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. (6) Therefore I abhor (despise) myself, And repent in dust and ashes.*" (Job 42:5-6). And John would write of his experience in Revelation 1:17), "*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead....*"

When first introduced to the power and majesty of the Lord we are immensely aware of our own sin, and do not know what to do but try to escape from his presence. Simon asked Jesus to leave him, not because he does not want to be in his presence but because he feels unworthy of being there. But as our experience deepens, and we gain the knowledge that only in Him can we experience the forgiveness of our sins, then a consciousness of our sin drives us to him. Let me illustrate from Peter's own life.

According to John 21 "*after the Resurrection Peter, deeply anguished over his denials of Christ, 'went back to Galilee and in the calm of his old haunts decided to go fishing – perhaps to clear his head and sort things out. He and his old friends fished the night away without success. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No,' they answered. He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.'* When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water (vv. 4-7). Peter stood before Jesus, beard dripping, breathless from his plunge and charge to shore. Peter dashed to Jesus because he knew himself for what he was (all fleshly presumption is gone – he knew he was a weak, frail sinner) and also because he knew so much better now who Jesus was." [R. Kent Hughes. *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*. Vol. One. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998) pp. 162-163]

The story ended with the partners pulling their boats and their catch on shore and leaving everything behind – boats as well as fish – to set out following Jesus.

The Astonishment of the Disciples (vv.9-10)

*"For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; (10) and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon."*

The word translated "*astonished*" is the word (*thambeo*) which literally refers to fright resulting from an amazing event. (Same word is used in Luke 4:36)

Their Decision Of Commitment (vv. 10-11)

*"...And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." (11) So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him."*

Jesus told Peter that his future business would not be catching fish, bringing them from life to death, but catching men, bringing them from death to life. The word translated "*catch*" in verse ten is literally "*to catch alive*" as taking animals alive for a circus or a zoo. Sometimes it seems that we think that there are two kinds of Christians: those who catch the animals for the zoo and those who come to look at them. But this is not the way it is suppose to be. The church is not a spectator society in which we go to the zoo, to see what is happening we all suppose to be involved in the process.

Every miracle had its purpose and this one is no exception. As we have already noted Peter now sees Jesus in an entirely new light. Jesus is Lord and he is a sinful man. Peter saw his own reluctance to obey the Lord's command to let down the nets as sin. Peter had just confessed to being a sinner and testified to the greatness of His Lord. Jesus responds in the second half of verse ten by a command not to fear and promise that he is to be a fisher of men; *"...And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men."*

The story ended with the partners pulling their boats and their catch on shore and leaving every-thing behind – boats as well as fish – to set out following Jesus. So they pulled their boats to shore and by every indication they turned their backs on the biggest catch of their lives and followed him. Verse eleven says, *"So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him."* The word "*followed*" is a word which signifies the deepest inward attachment.

*"The response of leaving everything, implies a question. Must all disciples leave their vocations to serve Jesus? How is the call of believers like and unlike this call to Peter? The answer to that question emerges in the history of the church. As the New Testament letters show, not everyone is called into full-time ministry. In fact, Paul kept right on working as a tentmaker as he ministered. The important element is that the call to walk with Jesus takes a priority, so that we are prepared to be whatever or wherever God calls us to be. For some, like the healed Gerasene demonic, it means staying home to testify to Jesus (8:38-39). For some, it may mean the mission field; for others it may mean the mission field at their daily job or in a parachurch ministry. The mission is 'catching men.' Sometimes one's work is the best place to find the fish...." [Darrell L Bock. *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). p. 161.*]*

Just one word of warning in closing, this text is not teaching that those who are in full time service are more **committed** to Christ than those who are in other full-time occupations. Jesus did not call everyone he met to leave their jobs and become his full-time disciples, he choose a **few**. This text is not teaching that those who are really committed to Christ must leave their secular jobs to be his disciples. God calls everyone to be a full-time **Christian** but He still only calls a few to make Christian service their vocation for life.