**Jesus Calls Simon Peter to Fish for People**

October 17, 2021

Luke 5:1-11

Key Verse 5:10b “Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.”

During his three years of earthly ministry, even though Jesus taught and healed many people, and preached the gospel to the crowds, he focused on raising 12 disciples. It was because Jesus realized that world evangelism is possible only through disciple-making. That is why he gave the Great Commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations” right before his ascension to heaven. Among the Twelve, he focused on the top disciple Simon Peter. In this passage, Jesus calls Peter to fish for people. We learn the beginning of Jesus’ disciple-making ministry and the purpose of his discipleship. May God help us to become Jesus’ disciples and disciple-makers in this generation.

Let me give you a little bit of background. Jesus first met Peter back in the first chapter of John. It was a year ago. At that time Jesus called Peter to follow him. This was a first step in his following Jesus. Peter became a part-time follower, a little bit of fishing and a little bit of following Jesus. It has not been too difficult to follow Jesus and also fish because Jesus has stayed in Galilee. Now Jesus realized that it is time to take Peter to another level. Peter was very reluctant and a difficult person to deal with. He was stubborn, and a man of inner fear. According to theologians, Jesus already called Peter twice before to follow him (The accounts in Matthew and Mark are a separate incident), but he was afraid to commit his life fully to Jesus. But he was also the recognized leader of the apostles. It was important to raise Peter as a disciple because he was the one who had the greatest influence on the rest of the disciples. So Peter is the key person for Jesus. If Peter follows Jesus clearly, James and John, and the other disciples will follow along.

Look at verse 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.” The crowd was putting so much pressure on Jesus, obviously attracted not only by his teaching but by the fact that he had been healing everybody of every disease that was brought to him. His miracle power over the kingdom of darkness, His miracle power over the kingdom of disease, had drawn a tremendous crowd. Jesus knew that the crowds came to him to get healing of their sicknesses. But Jesus taught them the word of God as his first priority. It was fine to do miracles, but miracles wouldn’t bring people into the kingdom of God. It was fine to cast out demons, but being cleansed of demons wouldn’t bring people into the kingdom of God. The only thing that would bring people into the kingdom of God was the knowledge of the gospel, the knowledge of the truth. So the primary ministry of Jesus was a ministry of teaching.

Though Jesus was teaching the crowds, Jesus began to pay attention to Simon Peter. When Jesus saw him, Simon was washing his nets. He was not at the lakeshore listening to Jesus. He just happened to be there that morning. To Simon, washing his nets was more urgent and important than listening to Jesus. But Jesus did not think so. Jesus knew that Simon needed the word of God more than fish. Jesus wanted Simon to hear his teaching. While teaching, Jesus fixed his eyes on Simon. Jesus began to pay personal attention to Simon. Look at verse 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.” Simon had no choice but to listen to Jesus’ message. We need wisdom like Jesus to help our students to listen to the word of God. Some missionaries ask students to translate their messages into their native languages. In this way, they help them to study the word of God.

Look at verse 4. As soon as Jesus had finished his teaching, immediately he turned his attention to Simon and challenged Simon through his word of life. Jesus asked Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” Jesus wanted to help Simon to know that he is the Creator God. What kind of person was Simon? First of all, Simon was a hardworking man. Simon and his fellow fishermen worked hard all night and didn’t catch anything (5a). It had been a bad night for them. Now, they were weary and hungry. So Simon could have gone home and eaten a nice breakfast prepared by Mrs. Simon and slept first to be restored from his tiredness and discouragement. But he didn’t go home. Simon mended and rearranged his nets for a new day’s work. In short, Simon the fisherman was a hardworking man and a man of no discouragement.

Secondly, Simon had a learning mind. As far as fishing was concerned, Simon was a veteran fisherman and Jesus was a junior carpenter. You don’t go fishing in the daytime when the sun burns on the top of the water. The fish go down very deep and below the capability of the nets and away from the shore. But Simon did not say, “What do you know about fishing, you junior carpenter?” Amazingly, Simon humbled himself and was willing to learn fishing from a junior carpenter. He said, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets” (5). Although he had no formal education, he had a great learning mind. This enabled him to grow up to be the greatest teacher who ever lived in history. One of God’s blessings upon mankind is that he made man to grow endlessly through a learning mind. A learning mind gives man a new day and a new knowledge and a new life every day. A learning mind is the gift of God. To our surprise, Simon had an obedient mind.

Then a most amazing thing happened. Look at verses 6-7. “When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 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.” When Simon obeyed, the result was an awesome miracle. From verses 1-3 we see no fish but after Simon’s obedience from verses 4-7 we see many fish. What a contrast it was! Without Jesus, there was nothing. With Jesus, there was more than the boats could hold. Wow! This is a secret of a successful and happy life. Without Jesus, we despair and are frustrated. Peter had worked to the point of exhaustion all night long and had come up empty-handed. Have you ever felt that way? After your best efforts, you have come up empty-handed. Not just after one day but after years of trying, you have still come up short, with not much to show for after all the effort you have invested. Jesus knows and is issuing the same call to you and me as he did to Simon. When we obey Jesus, God’s blessing overflows. Jesus, the Son of God, knew where fish were and led Simon to catch a large number of fish. Jesus restored him from his failure. Jesus enabled him to experience a great success. Luke the author described the abundance of blessing by the words, “their nets began to break and they began to sink.” Before fishing for people, Jesus taught Simon how to catch fish first. It was not by a skill but by obedience.

In this miracle, Jesus showed that he is the Creator God who summoned fish to Simon’s nets. The real miracle was greater than the catch of fish. Jesus had captured Peter’s heart. Jesus opened Simon’s spiritual eyes to see who Jesus was through this miraculous catch of fish. For us who are not fishermen, the catch of fish may not be a big deal. Each person experiences God Almighty differently. One young man who thought he would never marry was introduced to a beautiful girl to marry. Then he exclaimed, “Now I know God exists!” He experienced God through marriage problem. When I was a Ph.D. student, I almost failed the qualifying exam. Only by God’s grace, I was able to get a Ph.D. I experienced God’s grace. For someone who has been struggling with OCD, who was afraid of touching a door handle, touching a door handle by faith without fear would be a miracle. He can experience God Almighty. Each person needs deep water experience.

When Simon saw God in Jesus, he came to know that he was a sinner. Look at verse 8. “When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’” Why did Simon cry out like this? Through the great catch of fish, God opened Simon’s spiritual eyes to see who he was. In the presence of Jesus the Almighty God, Simon was a helpless sinner. So he cried out in his helplessness, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.” This is a normal reaction when a sinner meets God Almighty. Isaiah made the same reaction when he saw the Holy God in the temple in Isaiah 6:5, “Woe to me! I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Maybe Isaiah said many words of unbelief while living among unbelieving people. He felt helpless before God Almighty. God forgave his sin and commissioned him to go and tell the message of God to unbelieving people.

In the past, Simon had no concept of God, not to mention a concept of sin. But after meeting Jesus, he could see God in Jesus. Also, he realized that he was a sinful man. In the past, he thought he was a good guy compared to the other guy, John. But when he met Jesus, he realized that he was a sinful man. There was no evidence that Simon lived for the glory of God. Instead, he lived a selfish life. His life direction was to make money, pay his mortgage, pay boat payment, and buy foods. God created man for mission. (Gen. 1:28) But he has no mission. He labored and toiled to solve his bread problem and he would die as a sinner. He always complained, “How long do I have to work in the night sea?” Now he cried out, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” Salvation begins when we recognize that we are sinners before God. This realization made him a truly humble and great man in history. Peter made three confessions as he grew spiritually—the first one was the confession of sin in this passage, the second one was the confession of faith in Luke 9:20, saying, “You are the Christ.” The third one was the confession of love in John 21:15b, “You know that I love you.” Simon’s first confession of sin was a bold step to come to God and a giant step to become a man of God. Notice that in verse 8, Luke the author suddenly introduces Simon as Simon Peter. It was a turning point in his life, so that even his name was changed.

Look verses 8b again. “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” In the terror of this moment Peter wanted to send the Lord away, but the Lord wants to pull Peter closer. What is so frightening from Peter’s viewpoint that he wants to run away is so encouraging to Jesus that he wants to embrace Peter. At the very point at which the sinner feels the most alienation is the point at which the Savior is seeking reconciliation. This is the glorious moment of his repentance. Just at the point where you think you are on the brink of condemnation because of your sin, you are at the brink of reconciliation because of mercy.

Look at verse 10b. “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” Jesus saw Simon’s fear in his inner man. Outwardly, Simon looked tough as a man of the sea. But inwardly he was fearful when his sin was revealed. Fear is the opposite of faith. As long as we are fearful, we cannot do the work of God. We need to trust Jesus in our helplessness. Jesus drove out fears from Simon and accepted him as he was. Jesus did not go away from Simon but instead gave him a new life direction, “From now on you will fish for people.” Spiritually it has a deep meaning. It literally means, “You are going to catch men alive.” Peter spent his life catching fish dead. Now he is going to catch men alive. You catch fish for the purpose of killing them. Now you catch men for the purpose of giving them life. Simon Peter will become a powerful Bible teacher and disciple-maker. He will work as Jesus’ harvest worker for the kingdom of God. Jesus called him from his shallow life to deeper life with God. Later, Simon caught three thousand men in one fishing trip. (Acts 2:41) It is an astonishing mercy that not only does God forgive the sinner who is overwhelmed by his sin in the presence of the holiness of God, not only does God forgive the sinner, but God pulls that sinner in, in an embrace in which he chooses to use that sinner in his salvation purpose. We then become ambassadors for Christ. We become the missionary force that fulfilled the great commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

What was Peter’s response to Jesus’ calling? Look at verse 11. “So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.” Before meeting Jesus, Peter had a small hope to catch fish in order to eat three meals a day. After meeting Jesus, he had a great hope to catch men alive for the kingdom of God. In order to follow Jesus, he left everything including a large number of fish he just caught. Some people follow fun in the world. Some people follow pleasure of the world. Some people follow fame and power. But following Jesus gives us a greater hope. Of course, in order to follow Jesus, we must put our first priority in Jesus. It is costly to follow Jesus. But it is a great honor to follow Jesus. We learn why Jesus put his priority in calling his disciples. From verses 1-3 we see huge crowds and now in verse 11 we see only four disciples who left everything and followed Jesus. There are many crowds who come and go but there are few disciples who follow Jesus because it is very costly.

In this passage we see Jesus’ calling Peter as a fisher of men. Jesus was extremely patient with Peter who was reluctant, and helped him to see who he is, God Almighty. Likewise, as we raise the disciples of Jesus, we need to be patient, and help them to see who Jesus is by challenging them to grow and overcome their fear. We need to challenge them to go into deep water and overcome fear. It was in deep waters that the nets were filled to the breaking point. It is in deep waters that our faith can grow. May God bless you to hear Jesus’ calling, “from now on you will fish for people.” May God bless you to become disciple-makers in this generation.

Big Idea: God calls us to fish for people to give them life