

A LESSON IN FISHING  
Luke 5:1-11

Intro: (Read the text.)

Our Lord's words in verse 10 indicate to us that there is more to be learned from this miracle than just the fact that the Lord provided a large number of fish for these fishermen who were to be His disciples. There is an obvious parallel here between fishing and winning people to Christ.

It is generally thought that this event is the same event recorded in both Matthew and Mark in a much shorter version. In Matthew 4:18-22 we have Matthew's account, and in Mark 1:16-20 we have the same event. Matthew and Mark wrote nothing about the fishing that Peter (and we assume, Andrew), and James and John had done during the night, only to come in without a single fish, but their call to be disciples was stated in much the same way in both Matthew and Mark. Matthew's account reads, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Mark wrote, "Come ye after me, and I will you to become fishers of men." The longer account of Luke fills in some details which are very important, not only for those four fishermen who became disciples, but for all who ever have, or ever will, serve the Lord.

Let us note first, from Luke's account:

I. THE SETTING OF THE MIRACLE (Luke 5:1-3).

It was not unusual for the Lord to have crowds of people around Him, but it was unusual for the crowds to want what this particular crowd wanted. Luke said that "the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God" (v. 1). They did not come to be healed, nor to have their friends healed; they wanted to hear the Word of God. This was most unusual.

They were down by Lake Gennesaret, which was another name for the Sea of Galilee. This was a very large inland lake in northern Israel, called Gennesaret after one of the towns on the northwest border of the lake, and also called Galilee because it was located in that area of Palestine, Galilee.

When Luke said that the people "pressed upon" the Lord to hear the Word, he meant that they could not wait to hear what He had to say. It is the same word that Paul used to describe the storm that he was in on his way to Rome. Cf. Acts 27:20. So it would be fitting to say that the people stormed the Lord, so anxious, so impatient were they to hear the Word of God. We might say that even this was a miracle. I doubt if any of us has ever been in a situation where people were

pressing upon a teacher to hear the Word of God. Large crowds often go to some churches today, but they probably would not be there if it were not for the entertainment that preceded the service, but their main purpose is not to hear the Word of God. How do we know? Because you can't find most of them the rest of the week.

But this is why the people were there along the shore of Lake Gennesaret: They wanted to hear the Word of God! This was evidence that God was at work in their hearts.

And so to escape from the crowd, the Lord entered into Simon Peter's boat, and asked him to push out a little from the shore. The fishing boat became the Lord's pulpit, and from the boat He preached. What He said, how long He spoke, and what the results were, we do not know. The Lord interrupted the work that the fishermen were doing in cleaning their nets before they went home, and He used their boat for His pulpit. That is all we know about the Lord's teaching.

After the Lord had completed His teaching, He turned His attention to:

## II. THE WEARY, DISAPPOINTED FISHERMEN (Luke 5:4, 5).

We know that this was not the first time the Lord had met these men. John 1 tells us that Andrew and John had been disciples of John the Baptist. They heard John the Baptist's preaching, and began to follow the Lord. Andrew went and got his brother Simon Peter, and brought him to the Lord. And we assume that John did the same with his brother James. So the Lord was not a stranger to these men. They had recognized Him as the Messiah and the Son of God.

Now we must remember that our Lord was not a fisherman by trade; He was a carpenter. So here we have a carpenter telling some fishermen how and when and where to fish. And His words to them came after a whole night of fruitless work. Their nets were almost clean for the day, and therefore ready for the next day of fishing which undoubtedly they hoped would be more successful. This was their means of livelihood.

I am not going to assume that I know what the best time for fishing was, but it would seem that midday, or close to it, was not the best time. I would guess that these men had gone out with their boats the night before, had fished all night long, and finally decided to return home in the early morning. Whatever they did, we can be sure that it was right. But, experienced though they were, there were no fish to be found.

And so it must have sounded very unreasonable to them to "launch out into the deep," and let their nets down for a draught! The Lord's words did not indicate that they would just fish a little longer, and try a little harder, but that they would actually come back, not with just a few fish, but with lots of them!

Notice Peter's words in verse 5.

The title that they used for the Lord, "Master," is a title which we find only in Luke's Gospel. It is ἐπιστάτης. Luke used it again in 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13.\* It has nothing to do with the Lord's teaching ability, but with His authority. In the context here it would almost be like saying that He was the captain of the ship, or the chief fisherman, while they were the hired hands. It was a word which showed their submission to the Lord. It probably sounded foolish to them, and like a waste of time, but, because the Lord was the One who had told them to launch out and to let down their nets, that is what they did!

And what happened?

Suddenly the fish who had not been there all night, were there. Their nets lit. began to break, and after they called for James and John to come with their ship, both ships began to sink. It may have been, according to their experience, the wrong place and the wrong time, but the fish were there! And I am sure that I am safe in saying that those four fishermen had never seen fishing like this!

Now let us look at:

### III. SIMON PETER'S PRAYER (Luke 5:8, 9).

The Lord was in his boat. There was much to do to secure the large catch of fish which they had in their nets and in their boats. But, as far as Peter was concerned, that could all wait. His heart was overwhelmed in him by what he had seen. And so he fell at the Lord's feet, and prayed: **"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."**

And why did he pray like this? Verse 9 tells us why.  
(Read.)

"A sinful man" is one who is not only a sinner (because all men are sinners), but, as Thayer says, an especially wicked sinner, perhaps equal to what Paul expressed when he said that he was the chief of sinners (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15). Paul made that statement at the end of his ministry, but here Peter was saying this actually before his ministry had even

begun. Why would he turn such strong language upon himself? What was behind Luke's words when he said in verse 9 that Peter "was astonished"?

Some say because it was because there must have been some display of the Lord's glory, or His majesty, at this time-- like when the men came to arrest the Lord, and they fell back when He told them that He was the One they were looking for. Cf. John 18:4-6.

There may have been some amazing power which Peter had felt, but Luke did not record it that way.

I think that the reason that Peter prayed these words because he was humiliated that he had even slightly questioned the words of the Lord and the order that the Lord had given. the Lord's words did not fit in with their thinking. But they went ahead just because the Lord had told them what to do, but it seems that they did not really believe that they would get any fish! In giving the disciples the large catch of fish, He was not rewarding their faith; He was exercising His grace.

Peter was seeing that the Lord Jesus Christ was not only the Messiah (as Peter believed Him to be), but He was the God of creation. He was not only the Creator, but He was the One Who had absolute control over His creation--down to the very fish which were in the lake. The fish hadn't been there the night before because the Lord had kept them away. But they were there the next morning in amazing numbers. And Peter seems to have been deeply rebuked in his heart that he had questioned the Lord. He did not just blame it on his humanity, but on his sinfulness, his exceeding sinfulness, that would cause him to have any doubt concerning the Lord's word.

And so he was "astonished" -- amazed, dumbfounded, stupefied (which means that he felt totally humiliated and completely stupid). Peter did what he did because the Lord had told him to do it, but he did not believe that it would accomplish anything.

The account closes with:

#### IV. THE LORD'S CALL AND HIS PREDICTION (Luke 5:10, 11).

James and John and, we assume, Andrew (because Luke said in verse 6 that "they" let down their nets) were affected the same way, not only humbled, but humiliated. But what did the Lord say? "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

The Lord had given them A LESSON IN FISHING. It applied to

their business, but it also was preparation for that which was really to be their life work: fishing for men!

Do you think that Peter thought about this when he preached on the Day of Pentecost after the Lord had ascended back to heaven, and 3,000 people were saved? And day by day the numbers grew!

Concl: What are we to learn from this historical event and the miracle which the Lord performed that day?

Link together the crowd on the shore and the enormous catch of fish which those fishermen got out of the lake. The Lord brought the people together, or they would never have come. The Lord kept the fish away all night, and then He brought them together just when Peter and Andrew put their nets into the lake. Whether fishing for fish, or fishing for men, the Lord gives the increase, He provides the catch. We must never forget this. It is not our methods; it is the power of the Spirit of God. Without the Lord's help and blessing our work is less than useless.

Secondly, we need to be careful to obey the Word of God, but not in a skeptical, unbelieving way, but in absolute confidence that the Lord knows what He is doing, even though it might seem foolish to us at the time. Our methods must sound foolish to the Lord when it is His guidance and His blessing that we need.

Third, let us remember the importance of humility. The Lord gives us fruitless time. He gives us discouraging times. He often brings us to the place where we would rather quit than go on. But He has a purpose in that. He wants us to see how sinful our unbelief is, and that He has a purpose for the fruitless nights of fishing. He wants to show us that our blessings come from Him, and that He can work the most for His own glory when we are inclined to give up.

Finally, be encouraged that the Lord did not give up on Peter and Andrew and James and John. He never gives up on us. What He was doing on that night, and the day following, was in preparation for greater blessing in the days to come.

So let us be encouraged, and let us move ahead trusting the Lord to give us the "fish" that He wants us to have. When we come to an end of ourselves, then the Lord will show us what He can do. This is what He told Moses when to Moses it looked not only like he had failed, but had made the circumstances even worse for the children of Israel. Cf. Ex. 6:1.