

## 8. Jesus Goes Fishing

Luke 5:1-11

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Have you ever sat down and strategized/prayed about how to introduce a person to the new life that God offers? It is wise to think through how you will bring up the topic of spiritual things, and how to approach each person as an individual when you invite them to follow Christ. Although there are important key elements of truth to communicate, there is no “magic formula” when it comes to leading someone to Christ. When we observe the way in which Jesus called Peter to Himself, we can see a strategy of incremental revelatory experiences that Peter had before he finally followed Christ wholeheartedly. Step by step, Jesus drew Peter to himself, revealing one truth after another. Jesus chose his disciples carefully and prayerfully, and found different ways to reach them just where they were. He does the same with each one of us. He meets us where we are. If you consider yourself to be a Christian, know this; Christ pursued you. He reached out to you. Your decision, your commitment to Christ, did not happen randomly.

Wouldn't you like to know the story that was unfolding “behind the scenes” when you made a decision to follow Christ? It may have been sudden, or a gradual process of discovery. It may have happened through years of hearing the Word of God, or on a single night as you reached out in desperation to God, but for each one of us, the Holy Spirit was working, pointing us to Christ, drawing us to the Father. In fact, I am certain that there has been angelic intervention, as angels guarded your steps and protected you along the journey up until this very day! (Luke 4:10). Every person's story of salvation is different. Let's study how Jesus caught Peter in His net:

**<sup>1</sup>One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.**

I notice that Jesus drew the crowd of listeners to where Peter was busy working. We are told by Matthew that Simon Peter was there with his brother, Andrew (Matthew 4:18). Both of them were fishermen and both of them were from Bethsaida (John 1:44), which means, *Place of Fishing*. Jesus chose to preach the Word of God right beside the Sea of Galilee (The Sea of Galilee is also known as the Lake of Gennesaret) rather than from the top of a hill. It would seem that He chose that place deliberately in order to bring Peter under the sound of His message. Peter and Andrew were listening to Him while at the same time cleaning their nets.

**Why do you think they would be washing their nets? What was the significance that Jesus came to Peter when he was washing his nets?**

I was brought up as a commercial fisherman working with my father on his 39-foot trawler named the *Why Worry*. (When I was in my twenties, we had the *Jane Marie* built—a 45-foot fiberglass trawler). My father used to take me out fishing with him from the age of six. I remember that the pay for my day's work was 50 pence in English money, which is the equivalent of approximately 75 cents in American money. We used to sail at 3am in the morning which meant I had to get up at 2:30 am. We would get home about 5pm. He fished six days a

week and I went along with him one day at the weekend. When I left school I also worked with him for a few years, of course for more money!

The only time we ever washed our nets was when we were putting them away. The rats would get at the nets and eat the small weed, mollusks and sea anemones that would cling to the nets. In eating the seaweed and other sea creatures caught in the net, the rats would chew through the nets and we would have large holes that we would have to mend. In cleaning the nets, we would spread them out over a large piece of ground to dry and then shake out the weed one piece of net at a time. We would use different nets for different seasons of the year. You couldn't catch the same fish all through the year. Of course, I am talking about the east coast of England, not the Sea of Galilee, but I suspect that it was a similar situation. Some fish could be caught more easily at certain seasons of the year and different phases of the moon. The feeding habits of fish would change.

On the Sea of Galilee, they would mostly use a purse seine net, which is a long sheet of netting with weights attached to the bottom and floats at the top. One end of the net would be thrown out first and would have a buoy attached. The boat with the net being parceled out would go around in a large circle, hopefully encircling a school of fish. As the boat came back to the buoy they would pick up the both ends of the net from the bottom first, which would form a huge bag. The walls of the net would then be pulled in to the boat or in some cases from the beach with the fish. Today the fish are hauled out mechanically with hydraulic winches and pulley blocks.

<sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup>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."

Try and imagine what it was like for Peter. He had been fishing all night (v. 5), and now after cleaning their nets of all weed, he was exhausted and wanted to go home. I suspect, also, that he was discouraged and disappointed with catching nothing, and that they were cleaning their nets because they were finished with them for that time. As a fisherman in England, we used different nets in the summer than the winter months. We are also like Peter. When we see little fruit from what we are doing, we sometimes want to give up. Many people are stuck in jobs that seem to have little success and get into maintenance mode, just keeping the motion going and the wheels of daily life going. When a fisherman comes back to port, it is such a disappointment to him to have caught no fish and admit to a failed fishing expedition, but this was exactly the situation with Peter. The very last thing he wanted to do was to go out into the boat again! He must have been tired after fishing all night, but since Jesus had healed his mother-in-law, he had no option but to graciously respond obediently. He got into the boat with Jesus and pushed the boat out from the shore, threw down the anchor, and began to listen to Jesus' talk. I wonder what Jesus was teaching that day. We are not told specifically what it was, but it may have been something that would have prepared the way for what Peter was about to experience! As Peter sat there in the boat, probably with Andrew, his brother, their hearts began to be moved as more and more people kept coming to hear the message of this new itinerant preacher as He sat in the boat and

taught them. From the few yards from the beach, the sound waves were reaching the crowds, drawing them in. They were about to witness a miracle.

One problem with fishing, which is peculiar to the Sea of Galilee, is the fact that there is little movement of the water, due to it being an inland lake. There is an outlet, the River Jordan, which flows down to the Dead Sea, but in an inland freshwater lake such as the Sea of Galilee, there is hardly any tidal flow, which means that the water had very little silt and is quite clear. Fish really do have a brain! They are cleverer than we give them credit for. When catching Mullet in England, I would sit on the stern of our boat and watch the Mullet jump over the headline to escape our net. While living in Israel for a year and a half, I got the opportunity to go out with the local Galilee fishermen from Tiberius, and I asked them why they fished during the night. They replied that it was impossible to catch anything during the day, the fish would avoid their nets. During the night the fish couldn't see the net and could be caught easier.

I have found that the Lord will often use some means to get our attention away from the daily grind of everyday living. He knows exactly how to get our attention! With Moses, it was a burning bush, with David it was a Goliath blaspheming the Lord, with Abraham it was God directing his attention to the stars and telling him that his seed would be more than the stars of heaven—that caught his attention! (Genesis 22:17). With Peter it was a huge amount of fish, when he had begun to think that they had overfished the Sea of Galilee to such an extent that now nothing could be caught at the best time of the night. How wrong he was! The Lord promises that if you will dedicate your heart to Him and meditate (think on, mull over) His Word, and be obedient to what you learn of Him, you will have good success in whatever you put your mind and heart to: **“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful”** (Joshua 1:8).

**How did Jesus get their attention? What events has God used in your life to get your attention?**

As we have said, God has a way of getting our attention. With me it was a near-death experience that made me stop and think about eternity. With Peter it was a progression of things that he had witnessed, the demon being cast out in the synagogue, his mother-in-law being healed in front of him, a full evening of amazing healings and deliverances of many people from sicknesses and demons, and now an amazing impossible event that showed him the reality that Jesus really can do remarkable things when we will walk in obedience to Him. Jesus told Peter to go out into the deep water. The deep of the Sea of Galilee measures a depth of 200 feet. There's no way, Peter probably thought, that his nets would go anywhere near down to those depths, and during the hot part of the day, that would be where the fish would be keeping cool. That would require a lot of net, which is very unlikely that he had, but because Jesus had said so, he stepped out in obedience. Jesus was a builder, what did He know about where the fish were and how to catch them? Peter was not expecting to catch one fish. After all, he was the expert when it came to fishing. What would this builder-come-rabbi, know about fishing? It was a good thing that Peter obeyed, despite his doubts.

**<sup>6</sup>When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup>For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, <sup>10</sup>and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. <sup>11</sup>Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

That day Jesus was after catching more than fish. He wanted to catch men. He caught them bit by bit. First, He asked if He could sit in their boat and talk to the people. Then He asked Peter to put out a little from shore. Then He asked them to row out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch (v. 4). Notice, also, the name change of Simon to Simon Peter (v.8). How graciously Jesus gives Simon the new name of how Christ sees him—from now on Simon is called Peter, the **rock** or **stone**. He involved them in a miracle. Jesus didn't have to catch fish, He had much bigger things on His mind. We need to be involved with Him in His enterprise to win the lost.

The Lord loves to involve His people in His work of reaching the lost. The famous American evangelist Billy Graham was won to the Lord by a youth leader who asked Billy to drive a few of his youth to a Tent Crusade. His motive in asking was to draw Billy Graham to the meetings by asking him to drive, of course. He probably knew that Billy would not be ready if he were to ask him outright to attend the meeting, but at least in this way, he sought to develop a relationship and hopefully, down the road, get a chance to share more. He knew that Billy was a helpful boy and would not refuse to be the driver. God had more in store for him, however, than just driving the van! Sometimes you can take a little step for God, and God will do the rest, showing us that He is able to do abundantly more than we could ever ask or think! Billy was bored with sitting in the van and entered the tent and heard the Gospel and responded to the message by committing his life to Christ. He ended up leading countless thousands to faith in Jesus Christ after that. I wonder what that youth leader thought as he looked back on his decision to ask Billy to drive the van? We need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. It is good to scheme and pray and work with the Holy Spirit in the winning of our friends and loved ones to the Lord. You never know what part you may play, knowingly or unknowingly, in someone else's journey!

[What do you read into Peter's reaction to the catch of fish? \(v.8\). Why did Simon Peter fall to his knees asking Jesus to depart from him?](#)

This reaction by Peter is seen a number of times in the Old Testament. When Isaiah the prophet was confronted by the holiness of God, his response was: **"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"** (Isaiah 6:5). When John the apostle saw a vision of the resurrected Christ in the Book of Revelation, he fell at his feet as though dead (Revelation 1:17). Moses was afraid to even look when God spoke to him from the burning bush (Exodus 3:6), and when Joshua, the servant of Moses, brought the children of Israel to the River Jordan to cross over it, he was confronted with the Commander of the Lord's army. Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence (Joshua 5:14). I think each of us, if confronted by the Lord Himself, would also do the same. When we see the light of the holiness of God, we are "undone." Our own sinfulness is revealed, but God does not leave us there. He changes our name, our very nature. **Your eyes are**

too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing (Habakkuk 1:13). Sinfulness cannot bear the presence of God. Peter was convinced by the evidence in front of him, that Jesus was more than a mere mortal. He was persuaded that before him was God in human flesh! At a later date, when he was asked as to who he thought Jesus was, **Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16)**. The evidence as to the true identity of Jesus had slowly become evident to him, even at this early acquaintance of Peter with Jesus. Simon Peter saw himself as a sinful human needing cleansing from his sin.

What Jesus did in telling him where and when to put down the nets, was quite impossible in Peter's eyes. First, it was during the day. Secondly, Peter had never seen a catch like this. They did not have nets strong enough, or boats big enough. This was supernatural and Peter knew it! Thirdly, Peter's nets were not able to go to the depths where the fish were keeping cool in the heat of the day. Yet here he was stunned at more fish than he had probably seen in his whole life for a single catch. He frantically called John and James, his partners in the other boat, to come and help them, because the sheer numbers of fish brought the boat with only inches away from the water coming over the sides of the boat! Even after the other boat came, they had so many fish, that both boats were close to sinking (v. 7). The miracle was not only the amount of fish that were caught, but the fact that Jesus could tell Peter, at that exact time; "let out your nets for a catch." Jesus knew that the fish were there at that precise time. When we obey promptings from the Lord, we often find that the result will be far greater than what we would have been able to accomplish in our own routines.

Peter probably could reason away his mother in law being healed, and maybe even the deliverance of the demon in the synagogue, but he was struck with his own sinfulness at the impossibility of so many fish at such a time of day. He fell to his knees in godly reverential fear at what he had witnessed. Jesus told him: **"don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men."**

### **What Did Peter Learn from Jesus that Day?**

1. The Lord is well able to appear to people and win them to Himself by dreams and visions, but He chooses to call us to work with Him. His commission to the Church is to make disciples of all nations, not just converts, but to teach them how to walk with Him, just as Jesus taught the early disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).
2. The Lord will often cause a lack of satisfaction and barrenness to come to what we are doing, in order to show us where He wants to involve us.
3. The Lord will sometimes wait until we are obedient in the small directives, before He shows us new things. Lessons that are not learned the first time, often means that you have to go around the mountain again until the lesson is learned.
4. Peter could not reach beyond where he was, until he left the fishing industry behind. Think of it, he had the greatest catch ever, and he left it all behind and stretched out to receive the new thing that God had for Him.
5. Dare to reach out into the deep—don't stick to the shallow things of little faith. Dare to risk it all for the glory of God! John Wimber used to say, Faith is spelt, R.I.S.K. William Carey the missionary to India, said, "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."

6. In a parallel passage in Matthew's gospel Jesus said to Peter, "**Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men**" (Matthew 4:19). When we dare to follow Christ wholeheartedly, Jesus will *Make us* to become what He wants us to be. There are lessons along the way of life that will make us more and more like to Himself.

It can be scary to leave the place of the shallows to follow out into the deep, but that's where the big fish are. That's where we shall experience great changes to our character and grow more to be like Jesus, and I think that is what all of us would like. I remember many years ago while I still worked on my father's fishing boat with him, the Lord spoke to me from the above verse, challenging me to leave my father's fishing boat behind and follow Christ. I didn't know anything other than being at sea. I just knew that I had to follow His leading. My intellect, or it could have been the enemy, said, "What on earth are you doing?" How are you going to earn a living now—you have never worked on the shore, never worked in an office, who's going to employ you? You've never been to college to learn a trade." I didn't know what I was going to do, but I had to leave my father's boat behind and push out into the deep to see what God was going to make of me. I began washing windows for a living—it was a very humiliating time in my life, but learning humility was good for the soul, so I leaned into it and later became a painter and decorator while I learned the Word of God, listening to teaching tapes while I painted. I started my own painting business to support us when church planting. Looking back, more than thirty years later, I can testify that God is well able to make of us what He wants us to be. The lessons of God have taken me deeper and deeper into Christ—not that I am perfect—that would be foolishness, but I am ever striving to fulfill His calling on my life and I trust that you are too.

[Have you ever been challenged to step out into something new? A new career, a new location or anything that you had never tried to do before? How did you meet that challenge?](#)

You will never regret leaving the place where you are comfortable, to respond to Christ's invitation; "Come, follow me." The things of God come to those who respond in simple obedience. One would say, "How can I learn to minister like Jesus?" Respond to His call, do whatever he tells you to do. Jesus would say, "Come follow me, and I will *make you* to become...fishers of men." The main way that we can develop a life of intimacy with Christ today is by spending time listening to Him by reading the Word of God, by prayer and seeking to draw near to Him. Surround yourself with others who are encouragers, and lovers of God. He will make you into the person you are to be, and direct your life into one of fruitfulness. He who knows you best, will invite you to walk with Him and work with Him.

Peter was destined for a new mission in his life. For that new mission, Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter. The name Simon was a very common name at that time. It was the Greek form of the Hebrew name; "Shim'on," which means "he has heard." Jesus changed his name to Peter, meaning "rock." One thing that we see throughout scripture, is that when God changed someone's name, he was changing their destiny. It was a new beginning, and a new mission for Peter. God has a destiny and a mission for you, too.

Today, we are actively involved with a net that God is using to reach out into the nations where little is known of the Savior:

<sup>47</sup>“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup>When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup>This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup>and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:47-50).

The end will come when the gospel net is full and the fishermen will pull it up on the shore—what a day that will be! Everyone who is actively involved in the task of “fishing for men” will be greatly rewarded by the Master.

Prayer: Father, help us to hear you, and to respond. Show us that you have more in store for us than what we could imagine. You are able to do far above what we could ask or think, so we pray that you would give us the gift of faith. Help us to move in the faith that we have to leave behind the things that would hold us back, and say “yes” to you, to all that you have prepared for us.

Keith Thomas

Website: [www.groupbiblestudy.com](http://www.groupbiblestudy.com)

Email: [keiththomas7@gmail.com](mailto:keiththomas7@gmail.com)