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Now, This Is a Fish Story Luke 5:1-11

When Andrew introduced his brother to Jesus, Jesus said to him **“You are Simon, son of John, you shall be called Cephas.”** Which in the Aramaic means “ROCK.” The Greek equivalent is “PETROS” or as the English translates it “PETER.” Of course Peter was anything but rocklike, in fact he was just the opposite. However as Peter would submit himself to Christ all of this would eventually change. As Peter would submit himself to the chisel of the master sculptor a work of art was about to emerge.

After Jesus found these first disciples (Peter, Andrew and John) we discover in the New Testament that Jesus performed His first miracle in Cana of Galilee. Following this miracle He left to attend the Passover in Jerusalem. While there He cleansed the temple for the first time, talked to Nicodemus as recorded for us at the beginning of **John 3**, received another tribute from John the Baptist, at the end of **John 3**, talked to the woman at the well in **John 4**, and finally returned to the area of Galilee.

When He returned back to Galilee He was initially received very warmly. He then performed His second recorded miracle in the same city that He performed the first which was in Cana. This time it was a miracle of healing when He restored to health a son of a royal official from Capernaum.

It was about this time that the following incident which is recorded for us in **Mt. 4:18-22** took place. **“And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. (19) And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ (20) And they immediately left their nets, and followed Him.”** We can already see that Christ had begun to chip away at these two disciples. These men made their living by fishing, but as soon as Jesus asked them to follow Him, they just simply dropped their nets, that particular day, and followed.

As they followed they may have asked him questions about what He meant when He said to them that He would make them “fishers of men.” He may have attempted even to explain it. And yet even if they had been given an explanation, the full magnitude of these words I am sure could not have been fully appreciated. It is quite apparent that Christ Himself understood the limitation of these early disciples and He therefore gave them some additional help.

Let us turn in our Bible to **Luke 5:1-11**. Each of the disciples were about to learn important lessons. But it was Peter who clearly was the most shaken by what is recorded for us in this passage. Let us look at this passage from the standpoint of Peter. As we do this, hopefully we will identify with the unfolding of Peter’s story.

Peter Beckoned

VERSE 1, **“Now it came about that while the multitude were pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake Gennesaret”** The crowds were being attracted because of an extensive healing ministry in the City of Capernaum which is recorded for us in **Luke 4**.

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He was being pressed right up to the very edge of what is referred to here as “Lake Gennesaret” which is more commonly known as “The Sea of Galilee.” This leads us to verse two.

VERSE 2, “And He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them, and were washing their nets.” At this point Jesus got an idea so he approached the owner of the boat who happened to be Simon, or as we more commonly refer to him, Peter. Look at verse 3.

VERSE 3, “And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put it out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the multitudes from the boat.” It is very clear that one of the two boats was Peter’s. This helps the story to come alive for us a little more. It helps us to see that Peter’s relationship with Jesus at this early stage of their relationship, even though he believed Jesus was the Messiah, was somewhat limited. How do we know this. As we enter the fifth chapter what do we see Jesus doing? He is fighting the crowd as Jesus was explaining the Word of God. What do we see Peter doing? He is washing his nets. He is not among the crowd. He is continuing his life very much like he did before. I am sure he would not be indifferent to what Jesus was sharing with the crowd. He most likely was craning his neck in an attempt to hear what was being said, but he still very much was conducting his business as usual. And now in the midst of his routine Jesus approached him very much like he had done earlier in **Mt. 4:18-22** and again asked him to interrupt his routine. And Peter did as we would expect him to do. He stopped washing his nets and he **“put out a little way from land”** so that Jesus could teach the crowd from the boat. Then we come to a most startling point in the story.

VERSE 4, “And when He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’” This was a very shocking statement. We have to understand that Jesus was not a fisherman. Peter was a fisherman. And what Jesus was saying to him did not make any sense at all. Jesus was beckoning to Peter to do something that appeared to Peter to be totally ridiculous. Standing in a boat hardly qualified one to be known as an expert fisherman! I am sure that Peter probably knew that Jesus was a carpenter by trade and here He was giving directions to a man who had already, with all of his experience and knowledge been unable to catch any fish.

Peter Bows

Verse 5, **“And Simon answered and said, ‘Master we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but at Your bidding I will let down the nets.’”** Does anyone here believe that this was easy for Peter? He was tired from a night of labor. He apparently had very little, if any sleep and Jesus was asking him to do something that he knew instinctively was **WRONG**. But to Peter’s credit he obeyed. He bowed in submission to Jesus, who, he had come to believe was the Messiah. There were two reasons why Christ’s command would have appeared foolish.

IT WAS THE WRONG TIME. In Galilee, the best time to fish was during the night and the early morning. This explains why they had been out all night. Even though they had caught nothing, there was always a better chance of catching fish during the night than during the day.

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IT WAS THE WRONG PLACE. Every fisherman knew that the best place to catch fish was along the shore, not in the deep water. To put out into the deep with a boat laden with nets would bring ridicule from those who lingered along the shore. Only a carpenter would not know these time honored rules of fishing!

Foolish or not, Peter could not escape this clear command. If Christ was to be his master His authority would extend to Peter's fishing business. There cannot be two captains on the same boat. Dutifully, he let down the nets for a catch.

Peter Blessed

We don't know whether he actually thought he would catch some fish. Possibly he obeyed Christ's command expecting to pull the nets through the water only to have them come up empty once more. Even if Peter had not caught a single fish, we would have to commend him for doing whatever Jesus commanded. Yet because of that obedience, he caught so many fish that others also were blessed by the miracle.

VERSES 6-7 “And when they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish; and their nets began to break; (7) And they signaled to their partners in the other boat, for them to come and help them. And they came, and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.” The blessing being poured out upon this act of obedience was literally crushing. This blessing did not only fall to Peter but also to his brother Andrew, and to their fishing partners James and John. We see this inferred in the phrase, **“And they signaled to their partners in the other boat.”**

What is clearly demonstrated in this passage is the fact that Jesus controlled the movement of the fish. Why were these fishermen unable to catch any fish the night before along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee? JESUS. Why were they now in the heat of the day able to catch fish in the deeper water of the Sea of Galilee? JESUS. He rules over the fish of the seas. Jesus can tell the fish to jump and they will say, “how high.” This is what Peter came face to face with.

We need to understand that this power is not limited to simply fish but to all things. Jesus in speaking to His disciples at the end of His earthly ministry said to them as He was sending them out in **Matt. 28:18-20, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** He was not sending them out into a world that He exercised no power over.

In **John 17:1-2** it says, **“These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee, (2) Even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life.’”**

In **John 6:44** we find another very clear statement by Christ, **“No one can come to Me, unless the Father draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”**

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We should not conclude from this that human beings are animals or pawns who have NO RESPONSIBILITY for their own decisions. But we can be certain that no one can ever choose to come to Christ unless compelled by God through the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit. Only God can overcome the natural resistance we all have to come to Christ, admitting our sinfulness and clinging to His Grace.

The authority which Peter and the other disciples had just witnessed had a profound impact on them which well it should have.

Peter Broken

VERSE 8-9 “But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus feet, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord! (9) For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken.’”

We expect Peter to be thrilled with the sight of a boatload of fish. Here is more money than he and his partners could have hoped to make in a week. Peter, we might think, is already contemplating how these extra shekels might be spent. Every fisherman gloats on a lucky day. Nothing can change our mood as rapidly as news of a financial windfall. The expected check in the mail, the phone call that tells us we are getting a pay raise, such experience can quickly bring sunshine to a cloudy heart.

If Peter had embraced our modern “health and wealth” gospel, he would have approached Christ and invited Him to join his fishing business! Think of the boon it would have been to have Christ become the leading partner of the firm. Why not? After all, followers of Christ should prosper in their business!

Not so Peter. He reacted not to the startling success of that day’s catch but to the person who produced this miracle. **“But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus feet, saying ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’”**

We may look in many places to find a clue to Peter’s eventual greatness, but for now we need look no further. Profoundly aware of his own sinfulness, and equally aware of Christ’s holy presence, Peter illustrates the first lesson we need to learn in service to Christ: THE DEPTH OF OUR WORSHIP IS DEPENDENT ON AN AWARENESS OF THE DEPTH OF OUR OWN SINFULNESS. A principle very closely related to the principle that we find in this passage is found in **Luke 7:47**. The essence of the principle is this “He who is forgiven much loves much.”

Before Peter could work for God, God had to work in him. If he was to kindle a flame in others, he himself would first have to be lit with the divine fire. Like Isaiah, Peter had to say, “Woe is me,” before he could say, “Here am I, send me.” Like Moses in the presence of the burning bush, Peter had to worship before he could work.

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John Bunyan says of his own experience with God, “I was more loathsome in mine own eyes than was a toad I thought none but the devil himself could equal me for inward wickedness and pollution of mind. I was both a burden and a terror to myself. How gladly would I have been anything but myself” When Peter pushed his boat into the sea that morning, he called Christ “Master.” When he returned with two boatloads of fish, he called Him Lord. Like Job and Isaiah before him, Peter was in the presence of the Almighty, where he felt both despair and hope.

When Martin Scorsese made his blasphemous movie, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, he wrote, “What I’ve tried to create is a Jesus who, in a sense, is just like any other guy in the street. In his struggles to reach God and find God, he reflects all of our struggles. I thought it would give us all hope.”

What delusion! Far from giving us hope, a Jesus who is just like us would leave us in our hopelessness. Peter’s pitiful state of despair was the sign of true hope. We do not need a Christ who is like us; we need a Christ who is Lord, King. We need a Christ who can command fish to come into a net. A Christ so sinless, so perfect, and so divine that He can bring us to God. In His presence we are filled with a sense of our own inexcusable sinfulness, and also with adoring wonder.

CONCLUSION

Now that Peter had faced his sinfulness, Christ took his fear away. How relieved he was when he heard the voice of his beloved Master in **V. 10, “And so James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.”**

On the day of Pentecost Peter let down his net and it encompassed 3,000 men and women. In the house of Cornelius, his net had scarcely touched the “water” when it began to fill. If in Peter’s first encounter with Christ he was given a promise of what he would become (a rock), here he is given a promise of what he will do (fish for men).

Now that he had understood who Christ was, Peter was commanded to follow Him: **V. 10, “And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.”** This was the last time that we actually find Peter engaged in fishing in order to make a living.

If we should ask, “How do I become a fisher of men?” the answer is unchanged, “Follow Me.” The nearer we are to Jesus, the easier it will be to cast our net and find it filled with hungry men and women. Peter was brought to Christ by Andrew; eventually he would in turn bring thousands to Christ. The thrill of catching fish along the shores of Galilee would soon be replaced by the exuberance of catching the more important fish that would populate the celestial sea. We also have before us the same opportunity that faced Peter. Christ is still calling His followers to be fishers of men.