

Catching Souls for Christ

Luke 5:1-11

During His earthly ministry, why did Jesus perform miracles? Besides being moved with mercy and compassion, John wrote: *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:30-31*

As we learned last week, the miracles that Jesus performed demonstrated and authenticated who He was, Christ the Lord. They showed that the kingdom of God, or the sovereign rule of God, which overrules the laws of nature, was active on earth. This kingdom authority also attested to the good news of the kingdom of God that He preached. And the good news of the kingdom is that all who trust Jesus as Savior and Lord have access to kingdom authority to be all that we are saved to be.

Moreover, Jesus also used miracles to teach His disciples glorious truths about the Christian life. That is to say, there were messages in the miracles. Now, I’m not talking about hidden truths or secret revelation. I’m talking about plain truths that are affirmed by the immediate and broader context of scripture.

In our text, for example, in verse 10, we can see that Jesus meant to turn a miracle into a parable of sorts on evangelism. After the miracle of the great catch of fish, Jesus said to Peter: *“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” Luke 5:10*

This is what all Christians have been called to do. We haven’t been called to be keepers of a Christian aquarium. We’ve been called to be fishers of men. And to do so we need the heart of Christ.

Main theme: Followers of Christ become fishers of men

To unfold this theme, we are going to examine some attributes and actions that must be evident in our lives through the work of the Spirit if we are to catch souls for Christ.

1. We need His Anguish for Sinners to Fulfill His Mission:

To start with we need the compassion of Jesus—a compassion that caused Him to anguish for sinners if we would fulfill His mission.

Remember, at the end of the previous chapter we learned that Jesus withdrew to desolate places to spend time alone with His Father. And in this place of solitude where He gave God His undivided attention, Jesus in His humanity surrendered all to the will of His Father. Additionally, He received strength to stay focused and to fulfill His primary mission, namely to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Although many who were coming to Jesus for physical healing would have kept Him from leaving their town, because He was focused on their greater spiritual need, Jesus responded: *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose”* Luke 4:43b

Now after showing the resolve of Jesus’ heart to preach the good news of the Kingdom to other towns as well, Luke continues in chapter 5:

“On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret,² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.” Luke 5:1-3

Notice that there was a large number of people crowding around Jesus to hear the word of God. Although Luke doesn’t explicitly say what Jesus was feeling, His actions spoke louder than words. Jesus had a deep burden for people to hear the word.

As in the previous chapter, often people were going after Jesus because they wanted a physical miracle, but in this case the people wanted to hear from God.

Is this our motivation for gathering on a Sunday morning? Do we long for God's word so that we might know Him and obey His voice? This is the test for whether we are true disciples of Jesus. In John 8:31 Jesus said:

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32

Sadly, for many, hearing the word of God which reveals the glory of Christ, is not what's drawing them to the house of God. And because there's not a hunger for God's word, the temptation for some churches is to put on a performance to draw people.

But as I read recently: "When ministry becomes performance, then the sanctuary becomes a theater, the congregation becomes an audience, worship becomes entertainment, a man's applause and approval become the measure of success."

What is the true measure of a healthy church? Does it have to do with how many people our attending? "Our great fear," says Jim Cymballa, "should not be that people will leave our church, but that they would stay in our church and remain unchanged."

How do we become transformed followers of Jesus? In John 15:7-8, Jesus said: *"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."*
John 15:7-8

Now the fact that people were crowding around Jesus on the shore to hear the word would have been a great joy to Jesus. The need that people had to hear the word of God would have moved Him deeply. And because this was the case, Jesus climbed into Simon Peter's

boat and asked him to put it out a little from the shore so that He could use it as a platform to teach the word of God. In these actions, the burden of Jesus' heart is being manifested.

Concerning the heart of Christ for the lost, we read in Luke 19:41: *“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it,⁴² saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!”*

Do we have that same burden, that same anguish in our hearts for the lost to know the eternal peace that only Jesus can give and for God to use us in this regard? When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to be His disciples, he said:

“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4:19

Beloved, true followers of Christ become fishers of men. If we call ourselves followers of Christ and we don't have a burden to bring the lost to Christ, something is wrong. Where do we get a burden for the lost? Once again, Jesus said to those He called to be His disciples: *“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”*

The disciples followed Jesus, they spent time with Him, they learned from Him, they walked with him, and they went where He sent them. And after Jesus ascended into heaven He continued to be with them and lead them in the person and power of the Spirit.

The more they followed Jesus, the more they came to know Him and became like Him. The more they came to know the glory of Jesus, the more they were willing to sacrifice everything for others to know Him.

Likewise, through the Spirit we too can know Jesus and take on His heart as we commune with Him in the word and in prayer, as we listen to His voice, and as we follow Him wherever He leads us.

Let me emphasize that following Jesus and taking on His heart is not simply a matter of reading our bibles and coming to church. That's a

big part but we need to be more than hearers of the word. If you desire to know and take on His heart, you have to go where He is.

I appreciate how Louis Giglio puts it: “If you want to be close to Jesus—and maybe you haven’t felt very close to him lately—if you want to dwell intimately with the Son of God and feel the breath of heaven on your life, then you need to be where Jesus is. Perhaps you have spent way too long trying to get Jesus where you are. What you need to do is start getting onboard with the idea of getting where he is. And I’m telling you where He is: going to the unreached peoples of the earth. That’s where Jesus is.

If you haven’t felt a real intimacy with Christ and closeness with the Holy Spirit, it may be because you’re off doing your thing, and God is elsewhere doing his thing. He’s not responding to all your invitations to come over and join up with your thing. Now it’s finally time for you to respond to his invitation to join up with his thing.”

Once again, followers of Christ become fishers of men. They become fishers of men because they take on the heart of Jesus. And we take on His heart by abiding in His word and abiding in His work.

2. We need to Apply His Strategies to fishing for men

The next point I want us to see is, we need to Apply His Strategies for Fishing for men. After Jesus was done speaking or to put it another way, after He got done fishing, it appears Jesus decided to give Peter a lesson on how to do some fishing of his own—the kind that has eternal implications. He said to Simon Peter:

“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” Luke 5:4

In this verse and the verses that follow, we find some strategies for fishing that we must spiritually apply if we hope to see the lost coming to Christ. Using the word “FISH” I want to share with you an acrostic that I’ve used before to help us remember these strategies:

The “F” in fish stands for: **Find someone God wants you to reach.** Jesus said, *“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”* Here is a simple truth about fishing. If you want to catch some fish, you need to go where the fish are.

When it comes to evangelism, we can’t wait for the lost to come to us; we need to go to them. Jesus told His disciples, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,” Matthew 28:19*

This is not a command for the spiritual elite; this is a command for everyone who is saved and calls themselves a follower of Jesus Christ. But many Christians today are resisting this call by making excuses, like:

“I don’t have the gift of evangelism.” Peter had some excuses too. But notice what followed his excuses and objections: *“And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” Luke 5:5*

Of course, Peter’s response involved catching literal fish, but it also applies to all that God calls us to do. Imagine what could happen if all of us got rid of our excuses and instead responded: “Lord, I don’t think I can do this, I don’t see how you could use me, but at your word, I will go—at your word, I will volunteer and put myself in a position where you can use me.”

If we would all recognize our responsibility and began to pray like that, I believe we would see many more people coming to Christ. Remember, under the Lordship of Christ, kingdom authority has been given to us to do what God is calling us to do. And kingdom authority is activated when we trust and obey God to fulfill our responsibilities.

The “I” in fish stands for **INVEST in their lives.** Simon Peter took Jesus at His word and by faith He launched out into the deep and dropped the nets. A net was the tool that a fisherman used to catch fish.

What is the instrument that God uses to deliver the good news in order to catch souls for Christ? Followers of Christ are the net. God uses our Christian witness to bring men to Jesus. How do we witness? We witness with our life and our lips.

Before we can share Jesus with some people, we need to show them Jesus. And in order to do so, we need to get close enough for them to see Jesus in us. We need to intentionally invest in the lives of people who we hope to reach for Jesus by showing them the love, kindness, and welcome of Christ.

The “S” in fish stands for **SHARE your faith and your church**. As important as it is for us to show others Jesus with our lives, it’s not enough. We need to also share the good news of Jesus.

No one is going to get saved simply because we do nice things for them. We must share the gospel with others in order to win them to Christ.

Let me add, that although we are called to catch men and women for Christ, we don’t actually save anybody. Our job is to be God’s net—the instrument that God uses. We do the sharing; God does the saving. We share the message and hope of Jesus Christ, and trust God to perform the **miracle of salvation**.

The “H” in fish stands for HELP them grow and reproduce. Notice that catching a great number of fish in their nets was only part of the job. Luke continues: *“And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ 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.”* Luke 5:6-7

It was a team effort to bring the miraculous catch of fish into the boats. In the same way, fishing men for Christ is a community effort that as a community of faith we all have a role to play in.

What’s more, our calling to catch souls for Christ doesn’t end with helping to bring people to faith in Christ. We need to help bring them

on onboard with Christ's church and help them grow as disciples of Christ who make disciples. And this too is a team effort.

I want to submit to you that some Christians lack Holy Spirit joy and power because they're not participating in advancing the kingdom of God. Do you want to know the joy of the Lord and the power of kingdom of authority? Go fishing! Find someone God wants you to reach, invest in their lives, share your faith, and help those who come to Christ grow and reproduce. Can I tell you, apart from my own salvation, there is nothing more glorious than being part of this discipleship process.

3. We must have Awe of His Sovereignty to be Faithful in Ministry

The final truth I want us to see about catching souls for Christ is that we must have Awe of His sovereignty to be faithful in ministry. After taking Jesus at His word, which resulted in catching a larger number of fish, and after filling the boats with those fish until they began to sink, Peter realized that he was in the awesome presence of God. As a result, he fell down before Jesus and cried: *"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."* v.8

Beholding the glory of Jesus through the miracle, and understanding that he was in the presence of God, Peter saw himself as an unworthy sinner who did not deserve to be in God's presence. But instead of receiving judgment, Peter received from the Lord loving assurance. Jesus said to Peter:

"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men" (v.10)

Because Jesus knew that He would soon die to pay for Peter's sins that would otherwise separate him from God in Hell forever, He assures Peter not to be afraid. But not only does He assure him not to be afraid, Jesus entrusted him with the call to catch men and women for Christ.

Recognizing who Jesus was and the great mission that He was calling them to, Luke records in verse 11 that these ordinary fishermen, *"left*

everything and followed him.” Remember, true worship is not raising your hands, but coming to God with open hands because He is worthy of it all.

Do you have a passion to personally and sacrificially reach out to lost sinners with the hope of the gospel? I believe that one of the primary reasons that many Christians confess to being apathetic towards the lost is rooted in failing to fully appreciate God’s saving grace in their own lives.

And the reasons that we may not fully appreciate the grace of God is that we are not in awe of *the justice demanding love and holiness of God.*

Several years ago, “the wrath of God became a point of controversy in the decision of the Presbyterian Committee (USA) on Congregational Songs to exclude from its new hymnal the much-loved song “In Christ Alone” by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend. The Committee wanted to include this song because it is being sung in many churches, Presbyterian and otherwise, but they could not accept this line from the third stanza: “Till on that cross as Jesus died/the wrath of God was satisfied.” For this they wanted to substitute: “...as Jesus died/the love of God was magnified.” The authors of the hymn insisted on the original wording, and the Committee voted nine to six that “In Christ Alone” would not be in their new hymnal.” Denny Burk

This decision speaks to the times we live in. Many today who profess to believe in God have rejected the revelation of God in His Holy word. In exchange for the true God, they created a God in their own imagination to suit their sinful passions and desires. It’s been said, “God created us in His image and we returned the favor.” And the consequence of creating a god of our own imagination is, among other things, that we cannot know the purpose for why we were created.

Unless we see God for who He really is, we can’t really know who we are. This is the reason why we have many today who can’t even define one of the most fundamental realities, namely what is a woman or what is a man. This is also why there’s currently a bill being

proposed in the Illinois House that if passed would officially categorize a parent prohibiting any child in their home from receiving "gender affirming services" as "abuse".

Concerning the distorted view that many have of God, Timothy George writes: "The problem comes when we use a term like *wrath*, and [from a strictly human point of view] apply it to the God of eternity. Before long, we have constructed "a god who looks like me," to use the title of a recent book on feminist theology. Consequently, caricatures of divine wrath proliferate, like for example, the caricature of God having a temper tantrum or, as is often alleged with reference to the atonement, practicing cosmic child abuse.

But God's ways are not our ways, and God's wrath is not like our wrath. Indeed, in his brilliant essay, "The Wrath of God as an Aspect of the Love of God," British scholar Tony Lane explains that "the love of God implies his wrath. Without his wrath God simply does not love in the sense that the Bible portrays his love." God's love is not sentimental; it is holy. It is tender, but not squishy. It involves not only compassion, kindness, and mercy beyond measure (what the New Testament calls grace) but also indignation against injustice and unremitting opposition to all that is evil."

Beloved, on the cross, Jesus absorbed, in our place, the wrath of God for our sin, which demonstrated how much God loves us, and also the justice that an infinitely Holy and righteous God demands.

Jesus said that He didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Let me ask you, have you ever, like Peter, viewed yourself as a sinner separated from a Holy God? It is in the acknowledgement of our sinfulness that we can begin to understand the goodness of the good news. For while we were still sinners, the Bible says, Christ died for us. God sent His Son to bring us into His kingdom where there is purpose, righteousness, and true freedom. We only need to come to this holy Lord, confess we are sinners, and trust Him as Savior and King.

If we have been saved from sin and made peace with God, we need to continue to grow in our knowledge of God's grace and Holiness. We need to practice silence and solitude which we must be fiercely intentional about in a world full of distractions. We need to set aside time to behold the glory of God in His word and in prayer. The more we come to know the glory of God's grace and Holiness in Jesus, the more we will be willing to forsake all to follow Him, and be used by Him to bring others into His kingdom.

Conclusion

Jesus is saying to us, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Who will say to the Lord, "I'm a little afraid. I feel inadequate. I feel like people will reject me, but at your word, Lord, I will go, at your word, I will let down the net.

Every other voice is telling me something else, but I will listen to and obey your voice. I will trust you to use me in the ministry—I will surrender to go where you want me to go and do what you want me to do."

If we would lay down all our excuses before God's throne of grace and take Jesus at His word, He will use us in miraculous ways for the good of others and to the glory of His name.