

## The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

### *The Four Fishermen OR Rolling In the Deep*

Matthew 4.18-22, Luke 5.1-11

February 8, 2015

*Now as Jesus was 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. <sup>19</sup> And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. <sup>21</sup> Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. <sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.*

*Luke <sup>5</sup> Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; <sup>7</sup> so 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. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" <sup>9</sup> For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; <sup>10</sup> and so also were 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." <sup>11</sup> When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.*

We've been looking at the huge cast of characters who appear AROUND Jesus Christ in the four accounts, the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

We're only a few characters IN to this study and already we're repeating ourselves. We look again at the first followers, the four fishermen we've met before and the REASON for our revisit is because they've changed since we've last encountered them. They are evidently NOT the

people they once were. And today, they launch out on a new stage of their own spiritual formation, a new depth of training and development and life!

In many ways their experience is unique and different from our own. They see and experience Jesus Christ in the flesh, hear His words, see His signs and miracles like we will NOT in this life. We won't see a miraculous catch of fish. But, in other ways, their experience is normative and typical. In some way or another virtually every follower of Jesus Christ undergoes something like this.

You'll notice that there are four quotations in today's passage and I'm going to use the four quotes (vv.4, 5, 8 and 10) as a framework for this teaching. Each of these quotations contains something that's recognizable to and shared by virtually every follower of Jesus Christ. Each quote expresses a component, a chapter, a stage or level in the practice of (what Francis Schaeffer called) "True Spirituality."

Here are the four quotes, 1) "Launch out into the deep", 2) "But I will", 3) "Go away from me" and 4) "Do not fear"

The first quote (v. 4) is Jesus Christ speaking to Simon Peter and saying, "Launch out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch". And the parallel, the point of comparison to the normal spiritual life is that anyone who comes to believe in Jesus Christ hears the calling and it sounds counterintuitive and even absurd.

For Peter, it would have been very unusual to take fishing advice from a carpenter! Simon Peter wasn't a fishing enthusiast or a sportsman. Fishing wasn't a hobby for him – it was a living! It was what he knew. Jesus was from Nazareth, a city 20 miles from the water. And all around this Lake Gennesaret (The Sea of Galilee) there were fishing villages filled with fishing specialists and if Simon Peter wanted fishing advice IT WAS ALL AROUND HIM.

And all the advice would have said, "Call it a day! Better luck tomorrow night!" You don't drop your nets in the daytime – you don't have to be a fishing specialist to know that. Even carpenters and landlubbers know that!

And add to that, the fact that these guys are weary to the bone! These guys are worn out and after a fruitless night of taking nets up and down – they want to eat and sleep. And they just finished washing the nets!

And knowing all this, the Rabbi, the teacher says, “Put out into the deep water and drop your nets for a catch.” This must be a test...but ...kind of abusive.

Now, Simon Peter had known Jesus Christ up to this point. One advantage to our present method of study is that we’re not limited to one account; we’re looking at all four Gospels. So, we’ve seen the “hand-off” from John the Baptist (when Jesus Christ’s first followers FIRST met Him) and there were apparently many other encounters when they HEARD Jesus say, “Come and See” (see Luke 4.38ff). So, Simon Peter was a follower of Jesus Christ, calls Him “Master” and “Lord” and had Jesus Christ into his home... “but...with all due respect...what does a religious teacher and a carpenter know about fishing?!...He knows about spiritual things but not fishing...and this is, from every indicator, a bad idea!”

And Simon Peter voices that to the rabbi.

Now, let me suggest that every person who hears the gospel – the basic message of Christianity – when it begins to dawn on you what this means for your life, SOMETHING ABOUT IT SEEMS...LIKE A BAD IDEA. It strikes you, at some point, as counterintuitive and even absurd. Just like it did for Peter!

For some it seems far too easy. There are some people (as we saw last week) who are quite certain that there’s no such thing as a free lunch. “I’ve had to WORK for everything I ever got! And the idea that these Johnny-come-latelys get to jump to the front of the line and all is forgiven... and people like me – we slave away and ... we’re treated the same way...that seems like a bad idea!”

For some it’s too hard. One says, “How can I believe this in a scientific age? I wasn’t raised that way!” Another one says, “I just don’t feel anything – seems true – but I don’t feel it. You have to feel it...right?” Another says, “Isn’t the sexual ethic of Christianity totally regressive and outdated? I don’t think I could live that way.”

Point is, no matter what your culture or upbringing or the period of history when you were born, there will always be something...or a number of things that strike you as “going against the grain” in the Christian message.

And it may even be that at present, you see yourself as someone who really does admire Jesus Christ...might even identify yourself as a Christian...but now you're sensing or reading in the Bible or hearing in a sermon or study a kind of call to launch out into deeper water...to DO something that you see and really believe IS what this great Teacher...this Master...Jesus Christ wants for

you. It's becoming clear that He is inviting you...beckoning...commanding...calling you to some deeper step. It may be a forgiveness issue.

It may be a greater commitment to the poor and to a more disciplined course of charitable giving (not just when you feel moved). It could be a tangible demonstration of love (like volunteering to help with ESL or being in a HomeGroup of Class with real people) or maybe a call you're sensing to actually identify with Him and let your friends or coworkers or family know about it.

AND as Peter had VOICES...the specialists and professional fishermen all around him saying, "NO! HE IS NOT! He's NOT going to listen to that Rabbi/Carpenter/landlubber IS he??" And those voices are saying the same thing to YOU...magnifying...reinforcing the absurdity of Jesus Christ's call.

So that's IT – the gospel/calling of Jesus Christ strikes us, like it did Simon Peter as strange...as absurd...as counterintuitive and if it's NEVER struck YOU that way...maybe you've never even heard it...or considered it (Luke 8.12)

Second, the quote, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." – For some inexplicable reason, and even in opposition to your inner objections and the voices of the specialists, you find yourself saying, "but I will do as You say."

Despite his intellectual objections (his knowledge of fishing in Galilee) and despite his fears of being ridiculed by other fishermen and despite his own body's extreme weariness...somehow a deeper motivation prevails and he is saying, "I will let down the nets..."

And, of course, that deeper motivation is TRUST. Simon Peter has passed some invisible line in his soul and begun to have a greater confidence in this amazing Person, more confidence in Jesus Christ than he has in those other voices...including his own voice.

Maybe Simon Peter is saying, even as he complies with this absurd directive, saying, "I can't believe I'm DOING this!" But at some deeper level another voice was saying, "Only trust Him – no man ever spoke as He does – He has the words of eternal life...all you have ever truly yearned for is IN Him...He is the Hero of the whole human story...only trust Him."

And OUT of that deeper place, maybe a small and even weak place (the size of a mustard seed) and in simple trust, Peter says, "Master...I will..."

What objections are voiced in YOU? Are you hearing this amazing Person whose mouth speaks grace and truth and life as He says, “Go deeper...confide in Me completely”?

Is the response of TRUST answering the Voice of Truth, silencing the objections – not always able to answer those objections but nonetheless speaking, “Trust Him...only TRUST Him now...”

If so, then say to Him...as Simon Peter said, “Master...I will...” and go ahead: trust Him. Trust Him more than you trust your objections.

Third, the story reaches its climax when after the miraculous haul of fish when Peter has had - BY FAITH – had an experiential contact with this amazing Person who commands the fish and upholds all things by the word of His power...and Simon Peter has a realization!

Peter’s faith may have been small...but the Ground he was standing on, the Person who was holding him was infinitely strong...stronger than Peter imagined. And NOW, this deeper, wider view of WHO Jesus Christ IS leads to Peter’s self-discovery and that same kind of trauma that Isaiah had, “Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips and I live among people of unclean lips!”

In the same way, Simon Peter recognizes that THIS is a supernatural being and that HE, Peter is IN way over his head...and that he is ill-equipped to stand in His company. He feels sinful and he expresses it, “Leave me alone – GO AWAY FROM ME, LORD...for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

It’s not that Peter has low-self esteem...or that he’s psychologically maladjusted (as we’ll see later – his self-esteem is pretty high – Matt 26.33) but that for the first time he’s not comparing himself to shades of grey...to relative forms of righteousness...but to the very essence of purity Himself. Suddenly everything else is dim and the Light is illuminating and exposing everything...including himself – he feels naked and ashamed.

And as in the life of every Christian the sense that I am sinful and guilty and YET this glorious Being has taken an interest in ME...He is coming after ME...He wants to engage ME... And now I see that life can NEVER BE THE SAME. And for Peter and I think for every Christian, that strikes this kind of fear into us. The German theologian Rudolph Otto called it the “mysterium tremendum et fascinans” – the mystery that is both terrifying and fascinating. But at this point, for Peter it’s just terrifying.

Like Isaiah (“woe is me!”) and like John the Revelator who fell down like a dead man before the risen Jesus Christ (Rev 1). In all these cases, it’s a person who is getting a real glimpse of God’s true nature... and only THEN are we really able to see our own true nature. John Calvin wrote

these famous words, "It is evident that a person never comes to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself." Peter says, "You have the wrong man!"

And when Peter or Isaiah or John when they see what purity looks like and what THEY themselves ARE and are overcome with fear, THEN, they hear that most welcome Voice, our last of four quotes, Jesus Christ says to the sinful and PETRIFIED PETROS..."Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men."

Jesus Christ is saying, "That which you feel ...that complete incompatibility between your sinfulness and My purity...that absolute incongruity between fallen man and holy God is why I have come – the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world! DO NOT BE AFRAID."

So, Jesus says quickly, as the Father said to the Prodigal Son, "Here is a token of My love – a signet ring, a token of your belonging...I am come to live and die for you to INCLUDE you again in My Father's work, to fish for men and bring them INTO the Kingdom...to gather the lost sons and daughters and gather them INTO the house of joy and feasting...and YOU PETER...will join in with this work...come hold My hand and as I have fished with YOU now YOU fish with Me – become a fisher of men!"

And this, Jesus Christ says to all those with just the tiniest faith, "See My majesty and My mission; recognize your sinfulness but also that I have come to pay the price...don't try to send me away...I have come for YOU. Leave the past to Me and join Me in the great harvest of the New Creation...I have come to give you life."

So, where are YOU? Still offering objections? Waiting for them all to be answered before you launch out deeper with Jesus Christ... As we close in prayer...try to see yourself at some point on this journey...respond to this Amazing Person who calls you into the deep and into His mission.

Let's Pray.