

A Sinful Man

Molded by the Master's Hand

By Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Luke 5:1-11
Preached on: Sunday, September 13, 2020

First Presbyterian Church
1324 Marion St
Columbia, SC 29201

Website: www.firstprescolumbia.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/fpcolumbia

Father, as we turn now to the Scriptures, we bless you for the fact that holy men wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. We thank you for a word that is infallible and inerrant, but we bless you most of all for in it we find the beauty of the Lord Jesus. So minister to us, we pray. Help us not only to be hearers but doers also. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please be seated.

Now turn with me to Luke 5 and verses 1 through 11 as we continue in our series on the life of Peter. Luke 5:1,

1 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. 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 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. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Well, so far God's holy and inerrant word.

There's a story of a priest who went fishing and caught nothing and on the way back called by the market and the fishmonger and asked for three fat fish, and he said to the fishmonger, "Before you wrap them, throw them one at a time to me so that when I get back I can tell the Monsignor that I caught them and then I'll be speaking the truth."

Well, this is a fishing story of Simon. This was his business. You'll remember that Peter and Andrew, Peter and his brother Andrew, first encountered Jesus in Bethany. Bethany is way down towards Jerusalem on the other side of the River Jordan as the waters of the Sea of Galilee make their way eventually via the River Jordan to the Dead Sea. And they were there because they had probably been at Passover in Jerusalem. They're on their way back and they encounter this phenomenal ministry of John the Baptist and one envisages thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands of people listening to John the Baptist, and John had pointed to Jesus, a relative, a cousin of his, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." And it was at that moment that Jesus, you remember, changed Peter's name, his name was Simon in Greek but he is given the Aramaic name Cephas which translated back into Greek becomes Peter.

Now since then in chapter 4 of Luke and we won't go into it now, but there's been an extensive ministry that Jesus has been undertaking in the regions of Galilee and in the synagogues, and he's been preaching the word of God and performing healing miracles and casting out demons, and also of interest, Jesus has been in Peter's home where Peter's mother-in-law was sick and Jesus healed her. The mention of the mother-in-law, of course, signals that Peter, as probably all of the disciples, was married and probably had children and that Peter had had, therefore, perhaps weeks and perhaps it's difficult to get the chronology straight but perhaps even months now of interaction with Jesus.

Now as we come to the section that we are looking at this morning, I want us to see four things and the first thing is a moment of futility. A moment of futility. He has been fishing all night and caught nothing. A moment of futility. Ernest Hemingway, who I think was a keen fisherman among other things, wrote a book, "The Old Man and the Sea," and if you've ever read that book, you'll know it's a story about a man who goes fishing in the Gulf of Mexico and considerable way out into the Gulf of Mexico, catches this huge marlin, too big to hoist into the boat, and he ties the marlin to the side of the boat and makes his way home only to encounter sharks, not just one shark, and by the time he gets home there's nothing left of the marlin except the skeleton.

Well, there's a metaphor here, there's a parable here indeed, and it's a moment of futility. You can work all your life, make a good income, save enough money, retire, plans for retirement and only to discover two years after you retire you get a heart attack and you die. Or you work hard to give your company to your children only to find that your children turn out to be scoundrels. You may be working on a project in your office, an important project. You've spent months, perhaps a year or more on this project and it doesn't come to anything. You're outbid or whatever and it's a moment of futility. Peter and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee have a fishing business, a successful fishing business, it's how they got income for their family, and there are moments like this in any business, in any life, in any family. "We toiled all night and caught nothing." They're

washing their nets. These are trammel nets, large mesh on the outside and thin thin mesh on the inside, and I don't know how it works but it works. And you drop these nets and I'm told the nets in the Sea of Galilee, at least at the levels they were at, probably went from the top of the water all the way down to the bottom and it would then pick up all kinds of weeds and other things. And that's what they're doing, they're washing their nets, they're cleaning their nets and it's a moment of futility.

Crowds have gathered and Peter may well have been tired and frustrated, after all, he's been fishing all night, and he overhears Jesus and there's a problem, great crowds, we don't know how many, hundreds, perhaps more, and they're pushing because the ones in the back can't hear and they can't see and Jesus is now being pushed all the way to the edge of the water, perhaps his feet are in the water, and there are people at the back and they can't see. And Peter and Andrew and James and John are within perhaps hearing distance and they're washing their nets and they're looking at this crowd and they're listening perhaps to Jesus, but it's a moment of futility and it's into that kind of moment that Jesus comes. That's maybe where you are this morning and you're in one of those moments of futility in life in your job, in your home, in your family, in your dreams, in your aspirations, and it's a moment of futility but everything can change in a moment. It can turn on a dime because Jesus is there. Jesus will turn this moment of futility into a moment of enormous opportunity.

The second thing I want us to see is that this is a moment of frustration. Jesus asks Peter to put out the boat a little. He gets into the boat, goes out a little. It's a perfect amphitheater. The physics makes sense. He sits in the boat like rabbis did when they taught and when he speaks, angling perhaps a little down, there would be a natural reflection of the sound waves and folk on a slight incline coming down to the shore of the Sea of Gennesaret or the Sea of Galilee or sometimes called the Sea of Tiberius, and the ones in the back now could not only hear but they could also see him and he preaches the word of God. One doesn't know what he was preaching, perhaps some of the things that end up in the Sermon on the Mount, we know for sure that Jesus preached some of those thoughts and ideas more than once, and he's preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. And you have to imagine this audience, some are standing, perhaps some are now sitting, and they're listening to Jesus of Nazareth.

And then when it's done, he tells Peter, "Now put out into the deep and let your nets down for a catch." And what is it that Peter says? And he says, "'Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.'" I think you need to add an inflection into Peter's response here, "Master," and the word he uses. Now in verse 8 he uses the word "Lord," which is a divine title, but here the word he uses here, "Master," it's like, "You're the boss." It would have that kind of connotation about it. Peter is frustrated. He's tired. He's caught nothing and he's frustrated and you might think that in the inflection of Peter's voice, Peter might be saying something like this, "You know, Master, why don't you stick to preaching and I'll stick to fishing. You know, I've been fishing all my life. I know this sea like the back of my hand. I know every nook and cranny of it and there are days like this when we catch nothing. Trust me, there's no point in putting these nets down now. We need to go home. I need to get rest. I need some

food. Why don't you stick to preaching?" I've been told that more than once when I've ventured to give a piece of advice about something that was way beyond my knowledge.

The point I'm trying to make here is Peter's faith in Jesus at this point is weak faith. It's not strong faith. There's doubt mixed in this. He's going to do it because the Master tells him to do it, and we'll come to that in a minute, but behind all of that lies the thought, I think, that Peter doesn't fully trust what Jesus is actually telling him to do. It's mixed with doubt. It's weak faith. It's frail faith. It's slender faith. But I want you to see that nevertheless it is still faith in Jesus. It may be as thin as a spider's thread but it's attached to Jesus. The Master is drawing out Peter's faith. The Master is growing Peter's faith. Maybe that's where you are this morning, you're in a moment of weak faith. The trials and difficulties of life have stretched you thin, this season has stretched you thin. You're fed up with it. You want it to go away. Your nerves are on edge. Your faith is weak and full of doubt like Peter's was but, again, it's a moment of opportunity because Jesus is there.

Thirdly, it's a moment of fear. It's a moment of fear. A miracle takes place and we don't know precisely how to explain this miracle. Was it that Jesus had foresight and that he could see into the waters by a prophetic ability to discern that there would be fish here? Or is it an exercise of his sovereign power that he commands the fish to gather? We don't know, all we know is that it was a miracle. They hauled down the nets and all of a sudden the nets are full, and as they pull up the nets, there's more fish than can accommodate one boat, indeed, they fill the two boats to the point of sinking, Luke says. There's a bit of history for you. Luke has done his research and he says, "You know this miracle when those fish?" Some of you have been to Galilee and you've paid an enormous price for St. Peter's fish which wasn't very good, it was mostly bone, and Galilean tilapia, I think they call it, and maybe that's what these fish were, fairly big fish and the boats are sinking. A little factual detail, as though this story is being told by somebody who was there like Peter and when he tells Luke the story, "You know, those boats almost sank. For a minute, I thought we were going to go down." It's a moment of fear.

Miracles are signs and in the wake of the sign of this miracle, the sign that this is the Messiah, this is God's Son, this is the incarnate one, this is the promised one, and he comes performing miracles and healing and exorcising demons, and proclaiming the word of God, and there's an instant reaction in Simon Peter. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Depart from me. It's the response that every person has when they encounter the holiness of God, that there's something about the holiness of God that, as it were, drives you away because you're unclean, you're unfit to be in the presence of this holy one. Like Abraham in Genesis 18 at the trees of Mamre when he encountered the Lord, he fell down before him. Like Job in the closing chapter when he says, "My eyes, now my eye sees you and I repent in dust and ashes." Like Isaiah in the sixth chapter when he sees the Lord high and lifted up, "I am a man of unclean lips," he says. He had the cleanest lips in Israel but in the presence of the holy one, his lips feel so unclean. Like the Apostle John in the first chapter of Revelation when he sees the glory of the Lord Jesus, he fell down as though he were dead.

Peter knew he was in the presence of God. He uses the term Kurios, he uses the term Lord. It's a divine title. Astonishing, isn't it? He's a Jew and immediately, immediately he recognizes in Jesus that there's something about this person, this human being who's sitting in the boat next to him, and he calls him Lord. He understands that he is the Son of God. Ligonier Ministries do a survey every year of the state of religion in the United States and 29% of Evangelicals believe that the statement "Jesus is a great teacher but not God" is true. 29% of people who call themselves Evangelicals do not believe that Jesus is God. My friend, if Jesus is not God, you cannot be saved. You have no one to represent you.

I wonder this morning as you think about who Jesus is in all of his splendor, in all of his majesty, in all of his glory, imagine yourself sitting in that boat, fish flopping about everywhere, a few of them perhaps flopping back into the sea, and here is Peter and he's saying, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." If you're a Christian you understand that. You understand the instinct that's implanted in your heart that you are unworthy of Jesus, you are unworthy of his grace, you are unworthy of his love, and at the same time you are full of wonder that he would love you still.

It's a moment of fear and then, fourthly, a moment of following. Jesus says, "Don't be afraid." I wish we had time this morning to go through all the passages in Scripture that include that little statement, "Don't be afraid." "I will make you fishers of men," Jesus says. "Come and follow me." It's the immediacy of it. The text this morning ends by saying they left everything when they got to the shore. You know, I think the fish was probably sold to provide for their families because they were away a lot over the next three years. They would go back periodically and there would be weeks of ministry with Jesus and then they would go back, and this fish was probably the provision that would enable them to get through this season. It's typical of God to provide in that way. But it's the immediacy of it. They left everything and followed him not knowing where he was going to take them. There was something about Jesus that captivated the hearts and emotions and aspirations of Peter and Andrew and James and John sufficiently that they would leave everything and follow him.

"Follow me," Jesus says. He wants everything there is of you. He doesn't want a part of you. Too many people view religion as something that they just do on a Sunday morning. That would be fairly typical, I think, and Jesus is saying, "No, I want everything. I want everything there is of you and I want you to follow me wherever I go." No questions asked, that you are so captivated, you are so enthralled by Jesus that you are ready to risk everything and follow him. Is that fanaticism? Is that radical? Yes, it is. This is how radical it is, Jesus will say on another occasions, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Now he doesn't literally mean that you hate them, it's a Hebraic way of contrasting that your love for Jesus isn't in the same category as the love that you have for your wife and husband and siblings and so on.

Now not everyone is called to be an apostle. Not everyone is called to do what Simon Peter was called to do as we will examine it in the weeks to come, but every one of us is

called to be a fisher of men and women, to give a reason for the hope that lies within us with meekness and godly fear. Every one of us is called to follow Jesus with all our hearts, and all our minds, and all our strength.

Peter had an encounter with Jesus. It was a day that changed his life forever. You've had days like that, I've had days like that, that changed the course of our lives forever. Here's the lesson, that God uses broken people like Peter, a man at this stage with weak faith. The only reason he let down that net was because Jesus said so but I think in his heart he didn't believe he was going to catch anything, and that's the kind of person God uses and grows and transforms. Oh, that we might pray today that we might have that kind of encounter with Jesus, that he would become our all in all.

Father, we thank you, thank you that you use imperfect people, people like Peter. It's a beautiful thing for us to see because we feel like that most times. So bless us, write this word now upon our hearts today, encourage us in gospel ministry, encourage us in discipleship, grant us a vision of the beauty and splendor and majesty of the Lord Jesus. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.