

The Great Catch of Fish; The Healing of the Leper

Luke 5:1-16

*Luke 5:1-16: So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, **2** and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. **3** Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. **4** When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." **5** But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." **6** And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. **7** So 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** 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 which they had taken; **10** and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." **11** So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him. **12** And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." **13** Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him. **14** And He charged him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded." **15** However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. **16** So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.*

Background Notes

Luke chapter 4 gave us the announcement of the Lord's Messiah-ship at Nazareth and the beginning of His great Galilean ministry. Luke then proceeded to record a number of our Lord's miracles that demonstrate His authority over all areas. These miracles back up His claim to be the Messiah and Son of God. We saw His authority over demons and over disease at the end of chapter 4. In the first part of chapter 5 we see His power and authority over nature in the miraculous catch of fish, and His power over the dreadful disease of leprosy.

In reference to the miraculous catch of fish: recognize that there are two big catches of fish in the gospel record – one at the beginning of the Lord's earthly ministry (Luke 5) and one after our Lord's resurrection (in John 21, when Peter was restored). These are not the same event that the gospel writers mixed up or got wrong, as critics of the Bible sometimes suggest. No, they are two separate miracles!

Verse 11 tells us that when they had brought their boats to land after the miraculous catch of fish, they *“forsook all and followed Him.”* This was not the first time that Peter (and possibly the others as well) had met the Lord. John’s Gospel says that during our Lord’s earlier Judean ministry, Andrew brought Peter to the Lord. And some disciples were present when the Lord changed the water into wine at Cana (John 2), and also when He met the Samaritan woman (John 4). These events had already taken place before the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5. But here Peter and the others became more committed to following the Lord, as they left the fishing business behind them. In Luke 6 we’ll see the official call of the Twelve to apostleship.

Doctrinal Points

1. Christians should be creative in their ministry.

In this miracle of catching fish, there are a lot of lessons to be learned about serving the Lord by “catching people” for Him. It was on this occasion (according to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark), that the Lord said, *“Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.”*

The lesson that “the Lord knows where the fish are” and that He can direct us to where to we should let down the nets is part of the teaching of this miracle. Maybe some of us have been like the disciples and have “fished all night and caught nothing.” Our neighbors and colleagues at work don’t seem the slightest bit interested. Ask the Lord to teach you *how* to fish and direct you *where* to fish.

There’s also the lesson of “launching out into the deep.” Maybe we’ve just been living (and fishing) in the easy, shallow areas of the Christian life. If we become more involved and more committed, we’re more likely to see better fishing results.

Another lesson is that there will be problems, even in a successful ministry. There were so many fish that their nets were breaking and their boats were sinking! We would call these “good problems” - but they’re still problems! Whenever you’re working with people, there will be problems. The more successful and blessed the ministry is, the more people will be involved – and there will be more problems to be resolved.

Then there’s the lesson that believers should be creative in their ministry. This lesson is illustrated in the way the Lord used Peter’s boat as a platform so He could more effectively speak to the large crowd of people on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. (The Lake of Gennesaret is another name for the Sea of Galilee.) Would we have come up with the idea of using Peter’s boat to speak to the people? We would now, because we know the rest of the story - but what about then? We should follow the example of our Lord and be creative in ministry methods, in order to speak to more people.

Think of the creative ways Christians have used the internet to reach more people around the world for the Lord. The most creative ways to evangelize are yet to be thought of! Christians should be creative in their ministry.

2. Christians should be compassionate in their ministry

Verses 12-14 describe the healing of a man who had leprosy. Dr. Luke diagnosed the man as being “*full of leprosy.*” This was definitely an advanced case of leprosy. Most of us would have turned away - we would have been reluctant to get involved. But the Lord showed compassion! He reached out and touched the man - and healed him. Would you touch a leper? Leprosy is contagious. Touching a leper made you unclean under the Law of Moses, but the Lord showed compassion. So should we. Most of us are not involved in ministry involving literal lepers, but all of us are involved with people who need our compassion.

In the Bible, leprosy is the picture of the ugliness and pervasiveness of sin. In the early stages, the effects of leprosy can be covered up - but it's only a matter of time before the horrible effects are manifested. So it is with sin. The ugliness of sin and its effects in our lives become obvious with time. It's hard to show compassion to someone who is in the “ugly” stages of sin. But as the Lord showed compassion and was willing to reach out and heal this poor man who cried out for help, so we should show compassion and be willing to help sinners who call to us for help - even those who have the horrible scars and sores of sin.

After the man was healed, the Lord told him to “*show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.*” Under the Law, cleansed lepers were to show themselves to the priest, who would officially declare them to be “clean.” I wonder how often that happened in Israel's history? But it happened here, and thus this healing became a testimony that Jesus was truly the Messiah. His claims to be Messiah were backed up by His authority over disease, even over the dreadful disease of leprosy. In healing this man, the Lord showed compassion, and thus Christians should also be compassionate in their ministry.

In verse 16, notice that the Lord took time to get away from the crowds - to spend time in prayer. This is how the perfect Son of Man, the Lord Jesus, stayed focused without burnout. We need to remember this, and do the same.

Practical Application

1. You can loan your boat to the Lord!

Some of you may be thinking that you'd love to get more involved in serving the Lord, but you don't know what your spiritual gifts are, or how to get started, etc. So what could you do? You could be like Peter, and “loan your boat” to the

Lord! I say “loan” because the Lord is no one’s debtor. The Lord will always make good on what He borrows from you as He did here with the miraculous catch of fish.

But you may say, “I don’t have a boat!” Well, maybe not, but you probably have a home. You may have a vacation condo. You may have a van or a pick-up truck. Maybe you have a business, or some type of equipment. **All** these things can be used - in a variety of ways - to serve the Lord. So get going! You, too, can loan your boat to the Lord!

2. Let’s remember that we are not worthy.

In verse 8 we read of Peter’s initial reaction and response to the Lord after the miraculous catch of fish: “*When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’*” When Peter realized that he was dealing with the Lord of the universe, a Man who could control even the movements of the fish in the Sea of Galilee, he rightly recognized his total sinfulness and unworthiness.

How would we have reacted if we had been in Peter’s sandals, and we realized that the Lord of the universe had just blessed us with a miraculous catch of fish? I’m sure we would have been very thankful - but would we also have wished that we had a bigger boat so we could make more money by selling more fish? Would we have wanted the Lord to become our permanent partner in a lucrative fishing business? Would we have just stood there in awe saying, “I can’t believe it!” Or would we have gone down on our knees, as we recognized that we were dealing with a holy God, and as we realized our own unworthiness. That should be our reaction to the Lord!

Notice - we are not *worthless*, because we’ve been created in the image of God. But apart from Christ, we are totally *unworthy* to stand in the presence of God because of our sin. We should realize that we’re *only* worthy to be in His presence because of He has done for us on the cross. In fact, it’s only because of the righteousness of Christ, which is given to us as part of our salvation, that we can freely enter the presence of God (Hebrews 10:19).

Let us never lose sight of the fact that *in ourselves*, we are totally unworthy. So when the Lord blesses us with the next miraculous catch of fish, let’s remember to come thank Him for His great love for us, and His grace to us!