

The Art of Man-Fishing

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[0:00] Take your Bibles and open them to Luke chapter 5.

And we're going to read, I'm going to read here in just a moment, verses 1 through 11. Luke chapter 5, 1 through 11. This is a fish story, but it's a true story, unlike a lot of fish stories.

A true story with a very important spiritual lesson. Luke chapter 5, verses 1 through 11. So it was, as the multitude pressed about him to hear the word of God, that he stood by the lake of Gennesaret and saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets.

Then he got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, that of course is Simon Peter, and asked him to put out a little from the land, and he sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.

When he had stopped speaking, he said to Simon, launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. But Simon answered and said to him, Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing.

[1:21] Nevertheless, at your word, I will let down the net. And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.

That, by the way, would be Andrew and James and John, no doubt. And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish. 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.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken. 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 catch men. So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed him.

[2:31] Now, I have to admit to you that I've never been all that crazy about fishing. I'm not a fisherman. And I guess I could probably count on one hand the number of times that I've gone fishing.

It's just never been my thing. And yet, when I was a kid growing up in Missouri, I do remember watching from time to time Harold Inslee's show, The Sportsman's Friend.

Anybody ever remember that? I don't know if it played here or was broadcasted here in Oklahoma. It was primarily Missouri and Kansas. And I can still remember the theme song, Gone Fishing Instead of Just a Wishing.

And yet, still, I'm not much of a fisherman. And I guess over the years, I have watched some fishing shows from time to time. The old dance and some of those. And always kind of in awe at how they really have reduced fishing down to a very exact science.

And yet, even some of those pros, those anglers, you know, that we have today, Even they would admit that they've been out fishing and have caught very little.

[3:42] And probably some of those are pretty well versed in coming up with some stories About their great fishing exercises and so forth. In fact, I heard about a wife who had been invited by her husband to go on a weekend fishing trip.

And this was the very first time they ever did anything like this. And she was very excited about it. And when she got home, her girlfriends asked her how it went. And she said it was terrible. Just terrible. She said, I did everything wrong.

She said, I was too noisy in the boat. I used the wrong bait. I held the fishing rod the wrong way. And I reeled in my line too soon. And the worst thing, I caught more fish than he did.

Ladies, I wouldn't recommend that you do that. Well, in this passage, in Luke chapter 5, We read about some guys who had kind of one of those typical fishing trips Where they went out and they fished all night.

And they didn't catch anything. It was one of those fishing trips that they'd rather forget all about. They didn't have any fish stories about the one that got away Because they all got away. But then, the master fisherman, Jesus, Took them on a fishing trip that they would never forget.

[5:02] Not like the one they had been on the night before. Not like those fishing trips where you drown a bunch of worms And feed the mosquitoes and then bring home fish you bought at the grocery store.

Not one of those kinds. This was a fishing trip with Jesus that radically, radically altered, Redirected their lives from then on and forever.

Now, as we approach this narrative in the story, In Luke's Gospel, This story, as we come to it, We need to remember something about the way Jesus taught and preached.

Kind of his method of preaching. You certainly know, and may have realized as you've read the Gospels, That Jesus hardly ever missed an opportunity to use his surroundings As instruments or tools of communication.

And it seems that Jesus primarily always taught outdoors. You know, it's kind of interesting when you analyze his preaching. Always outdoors. Maybe outside the temple gates. Maybe walking through some vineyard.

[6:13] Or walking through some garden. Or on the mountainside. Or on the sea, by the Sea of Galilee. And that, of course, was the setting for this event in Jesus' ministry.

And he took full advantage of it. You see, Jesus brought several very visible things into his teaching and his preaching that day.

The sea, of course, was right there. He used the sea. He used a fishing boat. He also used some frustrated fishermen who had been out fishing all night and hadn't caught anything.

And they're kind of right there, washing out their nets. Jesus incorporated that into his teaching and preaching. That day. He certainly used the multitude of people that had gathered there that were indeed pressing in upon him.

And he also used a multitude of fish that were caught that day in the sea. See, both multitudes, by the way, were ready to be caught in the nets. And so it was a prime setup, prime opportunity for Jesus to present, to teach to his disciples a spiritual lesson.

[7:23] And not only to his disciples there that day, but to his disciples who are seated here today in this place. And so we need to understand that Jesus was not just simply teaching the word of God while sitting in a fishing boat.

That was a part of it. But he was actually illustrating something. Acting out something. And so Jesus' actions and his words recorded here in the scriptures show us something about our purpose as disciples.

That's what we need to understand. And what is that? That purpose. Well, Jesus means for his disciples, his followers, to catch people to faith in Christ.

That's what he's teaching here. The Scottish Puritan Thomas Boston put it this way. He called it the art of man fishing. Now, here's what we need to learn.

Here's the lesson in the text. The greatest purpose we could have in life as followers of Christ, indeed as an assembly, a group of followers of Christ, the greatest purpose we could have in this life is to join Jesus in catching men and women for his kingdom and for his glory.

[8:46] That would be our greatest purpose. Now, how can we do that? Well, I would submit to you that Jesus teaches us that right here in this text, this event in his life, an early event in his ministry.

He teaches us, he shows us how we can fulfill that purpose as his disciples. First of all, man fishing, I'll just call it what Boston called it, man fishing requires, number one, that we always communicate the word of Christ.

That is the gospel. Number one, and the first thing we see in the text, in fact, it's the first and last thing we see in the text. Number one, we should always, if we're going to be man fishers, then we need to communicate the word of Christ.

Look again at verses one and three. So it was as the multitude, you can kind of picture that, the multitude of people pressed about him. And why did they press about him?

To hear the word of God. To hear the word of God. That he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, that's Luke's name for the Sea of Galilee, by the way, and he saw two boats standing by the lake, tied up next to the shore, I would imagine.

[10:09] But the fishermen, of course, they had gone from them and were washing their nets. 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 he did what?

He taught. Taught the multitudes. Implication being he taught the word of God. Taught the gospel to the multitudes from the boat.

Now, in the first place, we ought to notice that Jesus is being very practical here. I mean, it's very practical. We're not told how many people were there that day. We don't know how much a multitude is, but it could have been hundreds of people, maybe more.

And they were crowding, pressing closer and closer to the teacher, the master, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it was, of course, almost impossible for those who were standing on the fringe, out there in the fringe, to hear what Jesus was saying.

And so Jesus, being very practical, he turns a fishing boat into a pulpit, and he has Simon Peter kind of put it out a little ways out from the shore. And then he sits there, and he continues to teach, and now everyone can hear him.

[11:18] And so he's being very practical. But I would suggest also that Jesus is being very scientific. I mean, they didn't have any sound systems, electronic sound systems in that day. And so Jesus is using the water as kind of an amplification system, a sound amplification system so that everyone could hear.

Being very practical, being very scientific. But I would say, most importantly, that Jesus is being very visual. Very visual. Not just necessarily for those multitudes of lost souls there.

He's being very visual, visual rather, in teaching a lesson to his soon-to-be disciples, and very soon-to-be apostles. Peter, and Andrew, James, and John, and maybe there were others there as well.

So he's being very visual. He is presenting a very visual lesson on evangelism. He is showing us that sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ is analogous to fishing.

He's putting those two images, those two things together. And it's really very hard to miss the analogy when you think about it. I mean, like fishermen who get in a boat and fish, Jesus is sitting in the fishing boat, and he is casting his net into, not the Sea of Galilee, but into the Sea of Lost Souls.

[12:42] That's what he's doing. It's very visual. You can see that. He's casting out the net to the multitudes that had pressed around and now are standing there, and maybe some sitting there on the shoreline as Jesus teaches the gospel.

Now, I ask you, what is the net? It's the Word of God. It's the Word of God. And Jesus is casting the Word of God to the multitudes of souls that had gathered there around him.

Listen, that's what this world needs. The Word of God. The world does not need our wisdom, our rationalism.

The world does not need our interesting stories that we might tell. It doesn't need entertainment. It needs the Word of God. They need the Word of God. And they need it to be taught to them, and that's our responsibility as disciples.

To communicate the Word of Christ. That is the gospel. And to do it in every possible forum. In every possible scenario. To do it in a hundred, multiplied hundred different ways.

[13:51] Through our life. Through our speech. Through everything that we do and are as disciples of Christ. To communicate the Word of Christ.

I like what John Piper said about this. He said, The Word of God is the greatest Word there is. Now, that's not very profound. But listen to the rest of it. He said, The Word of God is not some little jingle to manipulate customers to buy your product.

Which I think is what it has become. Or what many churches in our day are trying to make it.

Rather, he said, The Word of God is truth that aims to claim a person's rational mind.

And win a person's authentic affections toward Christ. It is truth the Word of God is. Not technique.

And we must give it to them.

See, this is the first mark of disciples who do man fishing. They communicate the Word of Christ.

They teach the Word of God. And that is exactly what this world needs.

[14:59] I don't know if you've noticed. But we're living in a culture. And I'm talking about American culture. We're living in a culture, in a society that does not know God. Now, it used to be we lived in a society where primarily most people knew God, the one true God, but they just didn't want Him.

But now we are living immersed in a culture where many, maybe even the majority now, do not even know the true God. And we must teach them. Our society has become very much like the Athenians in Acts chapter 17, by the way, who have set up idols to every conceivable God, even one to the unknown God, the one they didn't know.

That's our society today. They kind of give lip service to the unknown God. And then they worship a plethora of gods and more actually being added every single day.

There's just no end to it. That's what we have become. We're living in a society that does not know the true gospel. Where the word gospel has become just a generic kind of all-inclusive word that just simply encompasses what is thought to be true.

You know, it's the gospel truth. We don't have any idea what the true gospel is. Not in our culture today. And the typical 21st century American today does not know what sin is.

[16:19] Not really. They don't know what God's law is. They don't know who Christ is. They don't know what He did on the cross or the significance of that to any degree.

And they do not know what grace is, what truth is, what faith is, what love, real love is. They don't have any idea about that. And they do not know the truth about heaven and hell.

That's the society we live in today. And so we need to understand that to be effective evangelists in this day requires teaching.

You can't just simply assume that the person you are witnessing to or sharing some testimony with, you cannot assume that they have any framework whatsoever for Christianity.

And so we must teach more than we've ever needed to in America. We need to explain the gospel. We need to illustrate it. And again, we can do it in a hundred different ways.

[17:17] But let's move on. With each step, by the way, as we work our way through this narrative, each step we take in the story, we're challenged with deeper levels of commitment.

So here's number two. Second, man fishing requires that we comply with the will of Christ. We comply with the will of Christ in every way, in every context, but even especially in this context of man fishing.

We're to comply with the will of Christ. So we communicate the word of Christ. We are to comply with the will of Christ. Look at verses four and five again. Now, we need to remember that Peter is an experienced fisherman.

Right? And we know that about Peter and his brother Andrew and James and John. They're partners in the fishing business. He was an experienced fisherman, a commercial fisherman, I think, no doubt.

Very likely Peter had been a fisherman all of his life. And so he was a career fisherman. And so Peter knows a thing or two about fishing. Right? That's how I think we can almost hear what Peter is thinking.

[18:46] He's thinking, now, look, Jesus, I'm a fisherman. You're a carpenter. You just leave the fishing to me. Can't you just kind of hear this is Peter's thoughts?

I mean, remember, and we studied this last week, just the day before, if the timing is correct, and we don't really know about the timing of it, but before this, anyway, Jesus was in Peter's house, remember?

And he healed Peter's mother-in-law, and he cast out, no telling, how many demons that day.

Remember? And so we can imagine that Peter was tempted to say to Jesus, Jesus, let's have an understanding.

I won't tell you how to catch, or you won't tell me how to catch fish, and I won't tell you how to cast out demons. Now, folks, the amazing thing about this is that Jesus didn't kick Peter out of the boat. Jesus knew his thoughts. And he also heard his half-hearted response to Jesus' command, his half-hearted obedience.

[19:54] And Jesus did not kick Peter out of the boat. Rather, and this is encouraging to us, I believe, Jesus accepts Peter's half-hearted obedience, and Jesus performs an amazing miracle.

Now, let's just suppose that Jesus could have made all those fish just swim up to the boat and jump in. Could he have done that?

Of course he could have. But he didn't do that. Because Peter had to obey. He had to launch out into the deep water, and he had to cast out the net.

And then a multitude of fish were caught in the net. I guess we could suppose that God could just bring all the fish and jump into our church. But he doesn't do that, does he?

We have to launch out into the deep. Not places we want to go. Not activity we really want to do. And we have to cast out our net.

[21:01] See, obedience is everything here. To comply with the will of Christ. Is Jesus telling you to launch out into the deep, and to let down your nets for a catch?

To catch souls for Christ? And will you say, I've tried that all before, and it didn't work out.

Nevertheless, at your word. Or, Lord, I'm not very good at it.

I really don't know what to say. But nevertheless, at your word. Or, Lord, I'm afraid. Honestly, just afraid to do that. Nevertheless, at your word. And I'm suggesting to you, telling you, that God will bless even a half-hearted obedience like that.

He will. I bet you've discovered that. When you didn't want to go. Or you didn't want to say anything. Or you didn't want to write that letter to a lost friend.

Or you didn't want to call them up. Or go, or give any kind of testimony. And yet, you did, and God blessed. Folks, there's plenty of fish out there today.

[22:08] I mean, right here in Barnum. Certainly more than enough to fill this vessel. And many more just like it. And if we want to see God fill the vessel.

Then we must be willing to let down the gnats. And let them down when and where and how he says. Comply with the will of Christ.

And let me make something clear. I'm not talking about a commitment to vocational ministry. That's not what we're talking about here. Let's just be honest.

It's easy to marginalize the importance of personal evangelism in our minds. By saying, well, you know, I'm not a preacher. I've not been called to be an evangelist.

And we might even catch ourselves thinking, you know, about this particular passage here. Well, you know, Pastor Jesus is calling his apostles here. That's what he's doing. And he says, they will catch men.

[23:09] But I'm not one of those apostles. And so I've not been called to catch men in this sense. But you do err if you come to that conclusion.

You need to know that Jesus is not calling Peter and Andrew and James and John to be his disciples. His apostles, rather. He's not doing that. Not here in chapter 5, he's not.

Now, Jesus is going to do that in chapter 6. We'll get to that later. But he's not doing that here.

Jesus, what he's doing here is calling Peter and Andrew and James and John to be followers of Christ.

And to be his disciples. That's what he's doing right here. It's very likely that this is where they're saved. And he's calling them to be his disciples.

Just as he has called each one of us here today. And so by the grace of God, he called us, he saved us, and he made us his beloved disciples.

[24:11] And all his disciples are to engage in man fishing. Every one of us are. This preacher is.

And every one of you, if you're one of his disciples, have been called to man fishing. We're not talking about a vocational ministry here that you must surrender to and be ordained to do and so forth.

This is something we've all been called to. And let me also say very quickly something else. I'm not talking here about some specific organized program of the church.

You say, well, I would like to be a part of Grow on Tuesday night, but, you know, I can't make it then. All right, so. We're not talking about a program. When was it that we as Southern Baptists, and we're very good at this, when was it that we started thinking that personal evangelism was only to be done in the context of the organized ministry of the church?

When did we start thinking that? I don't know. And some of you have been wondering about sending people to Ukraine and sending people to China, maybe people to Colorado, when there are plenty of lost people right here in Bartlesville, right?

[25:30] Well, I don't even mean to be ugly, but are you winning them? You see, we may send ten people to Ukraine for one week.

We may send some people to China for one week. We may send a handful of people to Colorado for a week.

But dear beloved, every day of every week of every year we have an entire membership living and working and playing and shopping right here.

Every week we have 150 or so fanning out all around this community. Bartlesville and even Dewey and even points beyond that.

You see, we are all of us individually responsible for our Jerusalem. Every one of us.

[26:45] That's not a program. That is obedience to the will of Christ. Christ. The greatest purpose we could have in this life, dear people, is to join Jesus in catching men and women for His kingdom and for His glory.

Now, how can we do that? Jesus is showing us here. He's showing us. His disciples. He's showing His disciples. Man fishing requires that we always communicate the word of Christ.

That's the gospel. He said, teaching the multitudes. Man fishing requires that we always comply with the will of Christ. Launching out into the deep waters where we're not comfortable.

Where we might be challenged. Launching out into the deep waters and letting down the nets for a catch. fish. And then third, man fishing requires that we always comprehend the worth of Christ.

The infinite worth of Christ. This is very interesting. Starting with verse 6, look at it again. And when they had done this, that is, they let down the nets.

[28:07] That is, when they obeyed, they caught a great number of fish and their net was breaking. 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.

Now, pay attention to this. When Simon Peter saw it, now this part of the story is just strange to me. And so it causes me to think there's something here we need to learn.

When Simon Peter saw it, this miracle, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, depart from me.

Literally, go away from me. For I am a sinful man, O Lord. This is interesting. Someone has called this the Peter's Isaiah experience.

Remember Isaiah chapter 6, verse 5? Isaiah goes into the temple and he sees the Lord, the thrice holy Lord of glory, Yahweh God, sees Him high and lifted up and all he can say is, woe is me!

[29:17] for I am undone, ruined, ruined, destroyed, is what he's saying. I'm destroyed for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

He said, I'm a sinful, my lips, my tongue is sin. And I've seen the Lord, I'm ruined, I'm destroyed.

This is the kind of experience that Peter is having here.

You see, in the Bible, I don't know if you've noticed this, but when people have a real encounter with the living God, the holy God, they're usually traumatized by the experience.

And, they come away with a renewed sense of the greatness of God. the holiness of God. And they also come away not only with a sense of the greatness of God, but the smallness of themselves.

And the sinfulness of their hearts. That's what happens when people encounter the living God. And notice, there's nothing really said here about sin.

[30:30] I mean, before this, Jesus didn't say anything about sin. Now, he might have said something about it in his preaching, his teaching from the boat. We're not privy to what he was teaching. Maybe he said something about that, I don't know, but there was nothing in the text that tells us about sin.

Nothing here about Jesus' holiness. We don't have anything about that. And yet, immediately after this miracle, Peter sees it, this miracle.

Peter is then overwhelmed by two things. He's overwhelmed by the greatness, the infinite worth. of Christ. His holy, his absolute holiness.

He's overwhelmed by that. And then he is also overwhelmed by the greatness of Peter's sinfulness. He sees God and he sees himself just like Isaiah.

He's undone. He is, I think we can understand here, he is suddenly overwhelmed with the peril of being in the presence of holy God.

[31:40] I think that's why Jesus said to Peter in verse 10, do not be afraid. That helps us understand the point here. The point is that sinfulness, it does not disqualify God's disciples to be man fishers.

And aren't you glad? In fact, to be an effective servant of the Lord in every context, we need an honest estimation of the greatness and infinite worth of Christ.

And at the same time, we need an honest evaluation of ourselves and who we really are and who we would be apart from the grace of God.

Oh, how we need that. If you ever think that you have it all together spiritually, and if you think that you are perfectly qualified to serve the Lord, guess what? You're not qualified to serve the Lord if that's what you think.

By the same token, because I know some of you are thinking, if you think that somehow you can't serve Him because you're not qualified, and that would be most of us, right?

[33:08] That somehow I can't serve Him because I don't have it all together, then guess what? You're qualified. You're qualified. God. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2.14, he said, Thanks be to God who in Christ always leads us in triumph in Christ.

Now that's good. Now listen to the rest of it. And through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. everywhere. You understand what he's saying there?

This is what Paul's thanking God for. Through us, through me, Paul says, through us as disciples of Christ, God, through us, is spreading the fragrance, the sweet fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere.

everywhere. But then Paul says, who is adequate for this? He's just being honest. I'll have it in me. I'm not sufficient for this. But then later in the next chapter there in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 5, Paul answers his own question.

[34:24] He says, our adequacy is from God. He qualifies us. So we must, like Peter, comprehend the great worth of Christ, the infinite worth of Christ, the holiness of Christ, and have the right valuation of Him, of our Lord, and then have an accurate estimation of ourself that we're just sinners.

Just sinners. Someone has said that cocky witnesses contradict the message of grace. And I like what Jonathan Edwards wrote.

He said, a truly Christian love, either to God or men, is a humble, broken-hearted love.

He said, the desires of the saints, that's all of us, the desires of the saints, however earnest they may be, are humble desires.

Their hope is humble hope. Their joy, even when it is unspeakable and full of glory, is a humble, broken-hearted joy.

[35:46] And all this leaves the Christian poor in spirit, is not a bad thing. In fact, what did Jesus promise to the poor in spirit?

He said, for theirs is the kingdom of God. The greatest purpose we could have in this life is to join Jesus in catching men and women for his kingdom and for his glory.

And Jesus is showing us how. Man-fishing requires that we always communicate the word of Christ. That's the gospel. That we always comply to the will of Christ. To launch out into the deep and to cast out the nets for a catch.

And always to comprehend the worth of Christ. To see him who he really is so that we can see ourselves for who we really are. Then we're qualified.

And then one more. Man-fishing requires that we always continue the work of Christ. Christ. That's what we're doing.

[36:51] We're not starting our own work. We're continuing his work. Verse 10. The latter part of verse 10.

And Jesus said to Simon, do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men. So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed him.

It's pretty radical. Forsook all and followed him. There's a whole lot that we could maybe glean from that, but let me say this.

It's as if Jesus is saying, Peter, Andrew, James, John, are you amazed by this miracle that I just performed?

I tell you, you haven't seen anything yet. That's what he's saying. Just wait until you see multitudes of souls being caught in the gospel net that you're throwing out or going to throw out.

[38:05] The Bible tells us that these men left their fishing nets behind. another place in scripture says they left father and mother. They left it all behind. In fact, I think it's implied that all those fish they caught, they just left those too.

And they followed Jesus. They followed him. And because of that, you and I are here today. You ever thought of it in those terms?

I mean, this same Peter who bowed at Jesus' feet there in the fishing boat, humble, broken over his sin, that same Peter stood up in Jerusalem on Pentecost and he preached the gospel and 3,000 souls were saved.

Incredible. And that story is repeated throughout the book of Acts. And the people saved as a result of the gospel witness of the apostles, the people who were saved, picked up the gospel net and they cast it far and wide, everywhere they lived, everywhere they went.

And others picked it up after them and others after them and still others after them until one day someone cast the net and caught me. And you.

[39 : 32] That's the way it works. That's just the way it works. Jesus started the work and he showed his disciples how to do it. And as his disciples today, we're to continue that work.

Leonardo da Vinci was a great master artist, painter. teacher. And the story is told that he was working on one of his masterpieces and he had been working on it for a long time.

And as was very normal, he had a student that was there with him observing, learning. and this student was just utterly amazed at this master with his brush and how he could paint and his mouth just gaping open most of the time.

just before finishing the painting, da Vinci turned to his student and he handed him the brush and he said, now you finish it.

There was a student suddenly said, oh no, no master, I'm not adequate, I can't do it, I can't do this. And da Vinci looked at him eye to eye and he said, will not what I have done inspire you to do your best and to finish the work?

[41 : 17] Do you hear Jesus saying that? I think he is.

Thank you.