

The Catch of a Lifetime

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bible with you, you can open it up to Luke chapter 5. Last Sunday, we heard about Jesus' visit to the town of Capernaum.

And we heard about the response of the people to Jesus when he went there. We heard about how they were astonished at the power and authority of his words.

Because with his words, he cast demons out of people. And he healed all kinds of sicknesses and illnesses and diseases. One of the people that he healed was the mother-in-law of a man named Simon.

And Luke now circles back in this gospel to tell us about Simon and how he became a follower of Jesus. And so we pick up the story here in Luke chapter 5.

One day as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats left there by the fishermen who were washing their nets.

[1 : 08] He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

So in these first couple verses here, Luke sets the scene for us. Jesus is standing by the lake of Gennesaret. That's just another name for the Sea of Galilee.

It has to do with a plain that was named the Plain of Gennesaret in the northwest of the sea there. Luke's always really careful to refer to this body of water as a lake, probably because he cares about the size and didn't want to give people the wrong impression.

The lake. And so Jesus is standing there by the lake, and Luke tells us that the people were crowding around him, and they were listening to him as he taught the word of God.

So this is a teaching moment. And Jesus spots these two boats belonging to fishermen, and he asks Simon, who was one of the fishermen, to take him out in his boat.

[2 : 17] Jesus then uses the boat as a platform to teach the people from. And this is kind of a great idea if you think about it.

Think of all the people that would have been crowding around Jesus, and many of them are desiring to get real close, perhaps for healing, or for healing for a loved one.

Others are simply pressing in, trying to hear better. So you can imagine how Jesus might begin to find himself right up against the water. And going out in a boat kind of gives Jesus some space, and it allows everyone to be able to see him better and hear him better.

The water may have kind of acted as a natural amplifier for his voice, carrying it to the people. And it's worth mentioning at this point that Jesus and Simon had probably already been acquainted.

According to John's Gospel, Simon's brother, Andrew, had already spent part of a day with Jesus. And after spending that time with Jesus, Andrew immediately went to find his brother, Simon.

[3 : 25] And he said to Simon, We have found the Messiah. We have found the Messiah. And then it says that Andrew brought Simon to Jesus.

So that little account from John's Gospels probably already happened before what we're about to read in Luke's Gospel today. Perhaps even the day before.

The sense is probably that these things happened very close together. We don't know the exact order or timing of all this. Perhaps Simon was still making up his mind about Jesus.

And in the meantime, life must go on. There was work to be done. And Simon was a fisherman. And fishermen did their work at night when the fishing was best.

We don't know for sure, but maybe Simon and his brother, Andrew, intentionally pulled their boats up on shore here after fishing through the night because Jesus was here.

[4 : 23] Maybe they wanted to, you know, see what was going on with Jesus in the crowd and maybe even listen in a little while they did some of their work. Whatever the case, I imagine that Simon in this moment was probably quite surprised when Jesus asked him to use his boat as a teaching platform.

Verse 4. The teaching is over.

I imagine the crowd still there on the shore. And Jesus basically says to Peter, let's go fishing. But notice a few details about how Jesus says this.

I think it will help us get the right picture of what happened. First of all, we notice where what we're about to read will take place. Put out into deep water.

So this isn't right at the beach, but this is further out. They're going out on a little fishing excursion. Next, we know how Jesus says it.

[5 : 33] He doesn't ask the question, can we go fishing? It's kind of the language of command. It's an imperative. Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

Usually Simon makes the decisions about what to do with his boat and where to go and when to fish and when not to. I don't think Jesus was being rude or impolite, of course. But he was telling Simon what to do in his own boat.

One of the neat things about the original language that this was written in is that embedded in these imperatives is the number of people that they are addressed to, whether singular or plural.

And when Jesus says put out into deep water, it's singular, which means he's saying this to Simon. But then when he says let down the nets, it's plural.

Simon, which means he's speaking to more than just Simon. This is our clue that Simon's brother Andrew was likely in the boat with them and possibly one or two hired hands.

[6 : 41] Mark in his gospel actually mentions the hired men of Zebedee in the other fishing boats. So it's probably not just Simon and Jesus in this boat.

Likely Andrew and maybe one or two hired men were with them. And lastly, I love the way that Jesus describes what's about to happen. He could have said, let's go fishing.

But he doesn't. He doesn't even say, let's try and catch some fish. He says, let down the nets unto a catch or for a catch.

Maybe it's just me, but I imagine almost a twinkle in Jesus' eye as he said that. There's almost a note of certainty in the way that he says it.

There's going to be a catch. That's going to be the outcome here. Well, Peter, Simon Peter answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything.

[7 : 45] So Simon meets Jesus' imperative with reluctance. There's just not a lot of enthusiasm coming from him in this moment. He's respectful. He calls Jesus master.

But he also tells Jesus that he's feeling worn out. Already been out, working hard, fishing the whole night. But didn't catch a thing. And of course, every good fisherman knows that the best time to fish is at night.

In the evening and at night. And the slow time for fishing is in the middle of the day. Jesus wants to get a catch in the middle of the day.

And so you can imagine what Peter's thinking. Like, we're not going to catch anything. But, because you say so, I will let down the nets.

I always imagine a long pause between these two statements. We've worked hard. We haven't caught anything. And I imagine Peter just kind of letting that sit for a bit and seeing if Jesus is going to, you know, give in and say, Well, okay, don't worry about it.

[8 : 57] We'll go fishing another time. We don't have to go today. But then I imagine Jesus just sort of looking at Peter and waiting. And waiting. And Peter realizing that Jesus is set on doing this.

He means business. And finally, Peter just kind of gives in. But because you say so, I will let down the nets. So they let down the nets.

And they probably continue to roll around a bit. Verse 6. When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

Imagine this from Peter's perspective. All of a sudden, the nets begin to pull on the side of the boat. The rope of which the nets are made is fraying, snapping, busting, because there's such a large number of fish in the nets.

Just how many fish were in the nets? Well, Luke tells us that Peter, who's a fisherman by trade, signaled to his partners in the other boat to come and help them.

[10:12] In other words, they realized very quickly that this haul of fish was too much for just three or four guys to handle. That's a lot of fish.

And they came, the guys in the other boat, and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. I spent a lot of time thinking about this this week.

How many fish were in the nets? There were so many fish in the nets that it filled both boats so full that they both began to sink.

So we're not talking about just, you know, the little smattering of fish over the floor of the boats. We're talking about both boats filled with fish. And I couldn't help but wonder, approximately how many would that be?

Well, we happen to have the remains of a Galilean fishing boat somewhat intact today in a museum somewhere over in Israel. There's a whole story behind this boat.

[11:24] They found it in a season of drought when the water went way down and it was buried in mud. And, of course, they had to go to great lengths to get this thing out intact. All kinds of preservation stuff.

There's a picture of it on the screen there. Dates to the first century A.D. Discovered in 1986 on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel. It's about 27 feet long, or 8.2 meters long, 7.5 feet wide.

And it had a, probably if it was fully restored to its actual height, it would have been about 4.5 feet tall. So you can't see the whole thing.

It's because some of it's missing. But at that size, they suggest it could have easily carried up to 15 men. And for fun this week, I just did a little digging to find out, you know, what's the common market fish coming out of the Sea of Galilee?

Or what has it been historically? This is already on the conservation list, but it's tilapia. And these guys weigh on average about 2.2 pounds and are about 12 to 20 inches in length.

[12:35] So just for fun, I fed the dimensions of the boat into an online calculation tool to see what the max weight capacity would be before sinking, and then included the weight of the three or four guys, some fishing gear, the nets, the oars, sails, rigging ropes, all that stuff.

You know, and you could select so that it would give you the displacement calculations for a real world scenario, which means that this thing likely would have sunk not just from the sheer weight, but because of tipping in the water for the balance of having all this stuff in there.

And, you know, probably there were some little bit of waves. We don't know that it was a perfectly calm day. Anyways, I fed all this into the calculator and the calculation tool, and even after reading that number, I thought, no way.

That must be way too high. I think I'll just take a few thousand out just to be safe, just to be on the safe side. It may have amounted to two to three thousand of these fish per boat for a total of about four to six thousand fish between the two of them, which is like something in the ballpark of eight to thirteen thousand pounds of fish.

No wonder Peter had the reaction that he did. Verse eight. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord.

[14:09] I am a sinful man. For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. Peter, the fisherman, was astonished.

He immediately recognizes that this is so far beyond luck and the natural way of things. He falls down before Jesus and tells Jesus to go away because he realizes all of a sudden he's a sinful man.

So Peter knows that this is a supernatural act of God in this moment. This catch just put all the wildest fishing stories that Peter has ever heard combined to shame.

He knew that this was unnatural. The sheer amount of fish, the time of day, and perhaps even the amount of time it took from putting the nets down to hauling it in.

And so Simon's conclusion, this can only be explained by divine power. And it's as if Peter knew that what just happened under the boat was directly connected to Jesus, the man in the boat with him.

[15:30] Somehow, amazingly, Jesus, you did this. You made this happen. Or God made this happen for you or through you.

and it's as if Simon suddenly feels naked and exposed. He feels guilty and conscious of his own sins.

Now, we don't know much about Simon's life before all this, but if Simon says he's a sinner, then probably all kinds of wrong things that he had done or had been doing were coming to his mind. And he's thinking, I'm not worthy to be near you, Jesus. You are a holy man. You shouldn't be in the boat with me. And it wasn't just Peter who had this strong reaction.

all of his companions, it says, were astonished. Which probably refers to Andrew and at least one or two hired men with him.

[16 : 41] All of them were flabbergasted. They could scarcely believe what they had just experienced. They were all astonished and on top of them, so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

We know from the other gospels that those are the two brothers in the other fishing boat. And they had hired men with them. Every single one of them was utterly floored by this.

None of them had the reaction of, hmm, that's a pretty decent catch. I've done better a few times. No, they were shocked because they'd never seen a catch like this.

It was beyond anything anyone had ever heard of or seen because it was a miracle of God. then Jesus said to Simon, hold on a sec, we'll just back this up.

Simon says, go away from me, Lord, I'm a sinful man. man. And then Jesus said to Simon, don't be afraid. From now on, you will fish for people.

[18 : 09] So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed Jesus. Jesus' response to Simon to Simon here lets us know exactly what Simon was feeling in this moment.

Not just exposed, not just guilty, but afraid. Don't be afraid. The fear of God came over Peter in this moment.

God did this. And here, I've been living a sinful life contrary to what he has commanded.

Simon would have known what the scripture said about how God is just, about how he punishes sin. And so you can almost imagine Peter wondering what Jesus will say next in this moment.

Is he going to say, you're right, Simon, you are a sinner. You've been blowing it big time. You need to stop this now. You better straighten out immediately or God's going to wipe you out. And what does Jesus say?

[19 : 27] Don't be afraid. fear not. From now on, you will be catching men. Jesus doesn't condemn Peter.

He doesn't send Peter away for being a sinner. There's just mercy implied in Jesus' words here. Fear not. From now on, you will be catching men.

I've got work for you to do, Peter. And again, we notice the language, I think, it's not quite right in this translation on screen, but catching, not fishing, catching.

You're going to be catching people now. Your days as a fisherman are over, Peter. I want you to come follow me. Jesus is on a mission from God to gather a people for God who will be the citizens of this kingdom that Jesus has been proclaiming.

and you're going to work for me now, Peter, and help with gathering them in. I have chosen you. And this great miracle, this awesome sign, just seals the deal that day for Simon.

[20 : 45] Not only for him, but for Andrew, for James, for John as well. They pull their boats up on shore and they walk away from them. they walk away from their careers to follow Jesus full time from then on.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all emphasize the gravity of this moment. It's like there was no hesitation after they witnessed this. No hemming and hawing, no deciding whether Jesus really was the Messiah.

Jesus called them, he said, come, follow me. And they immediately, without delay, got out of the boats, left everything, and followed Jesus.

Mark tells us that James and John left their father's ebony in the boat with the hired men. Dad, we gotta go. He's called us to come to follow him.

Should be enough fish there to feed everybody for a long time. And they began to travel with Jesus from place to place and town to town, witnessing everything that he did.

[21 : 58] All his preaching, his teaching, the miracles. Well, what are we meant to take from this story? For some of you, it might be really familiar to others. Maybe you've never even heard this before.

How should we react to this? How should we respond? Many things came to my mind this week as I was meditating on this. First, I think we should be in awe at the power of God.

I like to imagine myself out there in the boat with Jesus. And even imagine that I was a highly skilled fisherman. And yet for all my skill and fishing prowess, what power do I really have over the fish? I could hunt them, I could know their spots, I could present the most irresistible bait. But this is so many more times fish, so many more fish than I've ever caught in my entire life.

Like how could this even happen? Neither Luke nor the fishermen even had a clue about how this miracle happened.

[23 : 13] Did Jesus' presence attract all of the fish in the area to the bottom of the boat? Did Jesus summon the fish with a silent thought? Did God simply command the fish to swim into the net and they came from all over the area and just swam right into the net?

We don't even know how this happened. But it demonstrates God's rule and power over the natural world. Even the fish in the lake obey him.

Second, it's no coincidence that the miracle God does to convince the fishermen is a miraculous catch of fish. God personally tailors this miracle to them and to what they know best.

This might not have had quite the same effect on a boatload of carpenters. They might have wondered, wow, what a catch. Is that typical for an afternoon out on the water?

What's one of those fish worth anyway? it would have been less meaningful, less personal to someone who wasn't a fisherman. And that quality of the miracle cuts both ways.

[24 : 25] It would have been even harder to fool a fisherman had this been a deception of some sort. And so the personal nature of this miracle authenticates it and it reflects the intimate knowledge and choosing of these men in particular.

similar. Notice even how the call that Jesus gives them comes in the terms of fishing. I will make you fishers of men. So our first reaction to this I think really should be awe at the power of God on display here and at the personal nature of this display.

Look at what God did. Look at what Jesus did. If God can do this, if Jesus can do this, what else can he do?

Next, I'm captured by the responses of Simon to Jesus in this account. There are three key responses of Simon to Jesus in this story and surprisingly all three of these responses are spoken of throughout the scriptures as the responses that we should all have to God God and especially to his son Jesus.

The first response we should all have to Jesus is to trust him and specifically to believe his word, to trust his word.

[25 : 54] That's where it all started. Jesus said to Simon, put out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Can you imagine if Peter had simply refused?

Would he have seen the power of God like this that day? Jesus gave Peter this simple opportunity to trust. Just let down the nets for a catch.

And what was his response? I don't feel like it right now. It goes against my better judgment as a fisherman. But upon your word I will let down the nets because you say so.

I will do it. This is the first response that all of us should have towards God. Towards Jesus. Simple faith in the words and promises of God.

This is where it all started with Abraham thousands of years before this. Abraham believed God. It says faith is where it must start.

[27 : 03] We must put our trust in God and especially in his son Jesus whom he has sent. You're probably familiar with these words.

Jesus said them. John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust Jesus? Do you take seriously to heart the words of Jesus?

Next our response to Jesus must also look like Peter's response after the miracle took place. What does Peter do? he falls before Jesus knees and says I'm a sinful man.

I'm unworthy to be in your presence. as God reveals himself to us and as we begin to take God at his word just like Peter we will feel exposed.

[28 : 18] We will feel the weight of our own sins our own guilt. That fear of God will enter our hearts as we read in his word about what we deserve from him because of our sins.

A sense of our unworthiness to be in close relationship with him will overtake us. And as this happens God has made it clear by his words that it is good and it is right for us to confess our sins to him.

This is what God calls repentance. This in a sense is a little view of Peter's repentance. Jesus will take up this very word repent and believe the good news.

Have you had your Simon Peter moment with God? Your moment of realizing your unworthiness your sins your guilt?

love love love love love Have you humbled yourself before Jesus and acknowledge and confess those things to him?

[29 : 42] only then are we ready to hear the gracious response of Jesus to us do not be afraid Jesus doesn't say anything here about what he's going to do later to remedy the sinfulness of Peter or us but eventually it comes out that Jesus offers full and free forgiveness of all of our sins through his own atoning death on the cross for us finally after believing and repenting our response should be the same as Peter's when he got back to shore Jesus gives the call to all to follow him to be a disciple of his to do work with him in the service of God's kingdom come follow me said Jesus and this call hits us all differently for

Peter and Andrew and James and John follow me was to be taken quite literally it meant come with me right now let's go it was a very tangible!

physical following of Jesus for these men that day and we might be tempted to think that because of that maybe somehow it was easier for them to follow Jesus but I would suggest maybe not for them it meant actually physically walking away from their jobs their careers from the greatest catch of fish that they'd ever seen it meant leaving their possessions behind even their families and it meant walking with Jesus into the company of hostile people on many occasions often not even knowing where their next meal would come from living with Jesus day to day in complete dependence on God but for all who would answer Jesus call to follow later and become a disciple of his for us following him looks different

Jesus is now in heaven the Bible tells us and you know so we don't walk around beside him or behind him neither are we always called to leave our homes or our careers or family to follow him following him today may even look like persevering in faithfulness with our families pressing on in the same difficult career while being content to live in the same home or to drive the same car for us today following Jesus however still means taking him at his word and clinging to his promises but it may lead each one of us to take different decisions and paths through the circumstances that God places before us God offers each of us our own unique way of glorifying him with our lives Peter and his companions were fishermen and so

Jesus called them very specifically to join him in catching people for God and this is our command as well to go and make disciples of all nations and to help with the great gathering of God's people today in our world but just as Peter and his companions were fishermen and Jesus related the work that he had for them to their skill I would suggest that Jesus also has work for every one of us to do in his kingdom that's related to each of our own skills and giftings what has God made you to be good at what skills has he given to you to use in his service whatever it may look like for us to follow Jesus today we shouldn't miss the urgency and the importance that we see in Peter's response they left everything and followed him they recognized that following

[34 : 06] Jesus was the single greatest opportunity the highest priority when following Jesus came with a cost they were willing to sacrifice and leave behind whatever was required all of it in order to follow him is following Jesus the highest priority of your life would you trade everything for it is that reflected in the decisions that you make in the way that you spend your time in what you do with your finances and how you relate to other people whether family or friends is following Jesus the highest priority in your life what other things are competing with

Jesus for the priority in your heart will you leave them behind if necessary to follow him I'm really amazed at how this encounter with Jesus sets before us the path that we must all take to be close to him and it's not complicated believe repent and follow I want to encourage you to reflect on where you're at with Jesus today let's pray father in heaven please speak to each one of us in these moments give us a clear understanding of where we stand with you because nothing matters more give us the strength and help we need to take you at your word to humble ourselves before you and to follow you with all our heart soul mind and strength and may you be glorified in us in Jesus name amen