

The Strange Response of a Believing Soul to Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 April 2010

Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0 : 00] Well now let's just take a moment in prayer before we turn to the word. O Lord our God, as we come before you and wait upon you, how dependent we are upon your blessed spirit, the spirit of whom we've been singing, the spirit that convicts us of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

And the spirit that so works that we are not left convicted merely, but we are convinced that the way of relief is open to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank thee that we can say there is a fountain open for sin and for uncleanness. And it is found in Jesus. And we bless you that as we were singing in the language of the Old Testament of the bench of hyssop and the blood that was dipped into and then sprinkled on the people and on the books and on the equipment of the tabernacle and temple.

So Lord, we know that in the Lord Jesus Christ and through his atoning death, we have cleansing. We know he said himself as he anticipated his sufferings and death on the cross, I sanctify myself that they also may be sanctified.

And we know that he set himself apart to this, that he would give his life a ransom for many. And we bless you that in him we are set apart through faith in him to be the servants of the Lord.

[2 : 02] And we pray that we may know the reality of this day by day. Give us a sight of what it is to be always abounding in the work of the Lord.

And encourage us by giving us the help we need, O Lord, to do your will and delight in the same. O Lord our God, we pray for friends and brethren involved in mission work, whether it is in faraway places or on the home front.

We just pray for those that are upon our hearts tonight. Whether they work among the Jews or the Asian population or other groupings that have come in among us.

O Lord, we just pray that the work of your kingdom may go on apace. And as we were reading, that it may come in the hearts and lives of people.

Be with us now as we turn to the scriptures and make the things that are familiar to us, full of light and power, that we may be better able to have confidence in you and to trust you, to do exceeding abundantly for us, above all we can ask or even imagine.

[3 : 25] See, O God, our shield and look upon the face of your Messiah and bless us in Him now. Amen. Before we start, I think it's a wee bit loud.

I was hearing it echoing back at me. Is that better? You okay with that? I was frightened to lift my voice, you see. We're going to turn then to Luke's Gospel and to chapter 5.

At the prayer meeting just recently, we'd be considering the breakfast by the shore.

We've been looking at some of the contact Jesus had with the disciples after his resurrection. And we noted how that it was as a result of that catch of fish on the lake that John, in the first place, recognized it is the Lord, you remember.

And when he said, it is the Lord, Peter was over the side and he made for the shore. And we remarked at that time that this was a reminder to him and to the other disciples who were in the boat that Jesus had said way back at the beginning, I will make you fishers of men.

[4 : 54] And I thought tonight we would simply just look at this earlier miracle and to look at the strange response of a believing soul to Jesus.

So we're just going to read a few verses from the beginning of Luke 5. So it was, as the multitude pressed about him to hear the word of God, that he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, that's Galilee, 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, 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.

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.

[6 : 12] So they signaled to their partners on the other boat to come and help them. And they came and they filled 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, 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. So when they had brought their boats to the land, they forsook all and followed him.

Our text is in verse 8. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

[7 : 24] That's where we're calling it the strange response of a believing soul to Jesus. Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man.

Now, it's generally reckoned that there are at least two calls to the disciple band prior to this one.

The first one came in the reading that we had in John's Gospel, chapter 1. Not long after, Peter had received the good news about Jesus as the Messiah.

And then we read about the other one, in Mark's Gospel, chapter 1, from verse 9 through to verse 20. And it's generally understood by expositors of the New Testament, of the Gospels, that each call is to be viewed as part of the preparation of the disciples.

And part of their preparation for the great work that was to be theirs. If you were talking, and sometimes you hear this when we have a minister visiting at communion times, and sometimes when they're telling you their story, they'll tell you about, the Lord began to call them there, and then they decided this is what they'll do, and that's what they'll do.

[8 : 52] And then the call comes again to them. And they're a bit clearer the next time, and they're a little bit more convinced that the Lord really has laid his hand on this one or that one, to become a minister of the Gospel.

And maybe then they'll tell you in their story later on, the next time, I just knew. I couldn't do anything else. You often come across that in testimonies from ministers.

And it certainly was the case with the disciples. There was this step-by-stepness. Jesus was calling them, first of all, to follow them, but it was to follow them within the context of making them fishers of men, of making them successful witnesses, so to speak, to share the good news about him, and to bring people to know him through the message.

And if you think about it, that was true in the case of the Old Testament prophets as well. It's something that you can trace out down through the biblical history when God called his servants to the work, and you can trace it down through church history ever since.

But it's interesting, you see, that when the Lord does lay his hands on those that he would make fishers of men and put them into the ministry of the word in some form or another, what he does is he gives them a clear insight into their own hearts.

[10 : 30] He actually shows them how unfit they are for the job in themselves. And then he gives them an insight into his glorious majesty and his capacity to make the difference for them.

And so, in this particular passage, you notice how as they grew in their confidence in Jesus that he would make them, what he said he would make them fishers of men, they move along the way.

They move from simply calling him Rabbi to calling him Master and to calling him more explicitly Lord.

The word Master in the Greek is the same word, kurios, as Lord, but it's clear and sometimes it just means Master and the context determines that.

And other times it has reference to an abridged deity. And so there is this progress from Rabbi to Master to Lord as they become more and more settled in their minds about Jesus and themselves and what he's calling them to do.

[11 : 49] And so I want us to look at this miracle to tread some familiar ground but hopefully get some insight into how this bears on ourselves tonight.

We want to look at how Jesus used it, the miracle, to prepare these men that he had chosen for their special mission as his special ambassadors.

But in so doing, we want to see how he really made clear to them not just their unfitnesses, as we've remarked, but his capacity for making them different and therefore useful in his service.

And if there's one thing we can learn is that, last point. He can use us. He can make a difference through us in sharing the gospel with other people.

I think one of the things that's a big mistake, and perhaps in our own free church tradition, it was a mistake of decades, and that is leave it to the minister.

[12 : 54] Instead of realizing that we all who love the Lord Jesus Christ are his ambassadors, we're servants of his.

We are those that are to share the good news with others, or as Jesus said, to catch men, in other words, catch people for the kingdom, that they may become followers.

I want to just to think about two main things, but obviously within these two main points, we look at different angles. First of all, in looking at the miracle of this huge catch of fish, what Peter saw.

And then, secondly, we'll look at what Peter said, and within that, what he actually meant. And we can say what he saw in a word was a huge net full of fish, a full net.

So much so that they needed two boats to deal with what was in the net. But it's not just about a big catch of fish.

[14 : 07] We need to notice just how this came about. Peter and the disciples and a great crowd had been listening to Jesus teach. And then all of a sudden, when Jesus stopped teaching, verse 4, he said, launch out into the deep and let down your net.

And in a moment, Simon says, Master, you can almost feel the exasperation in his voice. Master, we've toiled all night. We've toiled all night. We can't, we can't just go and catch. And then all of a sudden, nevertheless, at your word, I will let down the net. So, from the context, Peter had agreed to go offshore into the deep water and to try and put down the net and see what would come of it.

But there's not a, there's not a, a spontaneity about this. He's not, he's not simply saying, okay, okay, I'll do it. No, no, he's considering. And then having considered, it's almost like he says, okay, at your word, I'll do it.

[15 : 29] Verse 5, at the end of verse 5. Nevertheless, nevertheless, in other words, I'm not really for it, but because you've asked me, I'll do it.

And, it's not difficult to understand from the strength of the words here, that there was no real point, as far as Peter was concerned, there's no real point in going to try to catch fish at that time of day.

Inshore, offshore, it didn't make any difference. It was the wrong time of day to go fishing. We've toiled all night and caught nothing.

And, we probably know this from expositions before, but it's good to remind ourselves. We've toiled all night and caught nothing.

Tells us about the whole approach. That was the best time of the 24-hour day to go fishing. At that time of year. It was, in the expert's view, the best time to do the business of fishing.

[16 : 41] And, it was only because Jesus said, do it, Peter said, okay, nevertheless, at your word, we'll do it. But, we've got to bear in mind that from their point of view, this is a bit of a waste of time.

It's a waste of time and effort. But, Peter and the others who had already taken to following Jesus, as we saw in the, in the reading back there in John's Gospel and in Mark chapter 1, Peter had already taken to following with the others and he was prepared to do it at Jesus' word.

He had gained enough knowledge at that stage and he had sufficient faith in Jesus to obey him. I, I think in this that there was a, there's a, there's a twist in it in the sense that here is Jesus and he, and, and Peter knows him as the carpenter from Nazareth.

Nazareth, okay, he's the Messiah as far as we can understand he's the Messiah. But, but he's a carpenter. That's what he, that was his trade. He's the man from Galilee, Galilee of the Gentiles, like ourselves.

Nevertheless, he says, at your word, we'll do this, we'll let down the net. And as the, as the account, and falls, it's clear, they were right into a bag full of fish so that the net was like to break.

[18 : 16] Very vivid, a real bag full of fish. I've often heard it said that, that the nets they used were these, these hoop nets that you, you had weights on the end, a big circle, and you just threw them out.

And that's only one kind of net that they used in those days. You had, you had a drag net. Jesus tells the parable of the drag net which had long wings.

And just a little poke on it to catch up what the wings gathered in. And the net they used, the bigger net they used, was very much like a, what, what I would call like a, a salmon net that they used from a salmon, salmon cobalt.

Long wings, weights on the bottom, and corks on the top, and a, and a, and a bag in the middle of the two wings where the fish went into.

This is the thing, a fairly basic, nothing as sophisticated as a sea net or a trawl net. But enough to catch a bag full of fish.

[19 : 33] It's interesting too that Jesus tells them to go out into the deep. And the first thing that comes to mind from a fishing point of view is that the net itself wasn't ideal for the job.

because it wouldn't be very deep. It was really meant for shallow water. Nevertheless, at Jesus' word they go and do what he says, they accept his knowledge as superior to theirs, and they go and do it, and suddenly the haul yielded a great catch.

And it's clear from the passage that, that Peter and the others were filled with amazement. They were wondering, they were staggered at what they saw.

And suddenly all their understanding of the fishing the lake was thrown into confusion. Not the best time, not the best place.

And Jesus gives them a haul that fills two boats till they're almost sinking, verse 7. And they came and filled both boats so that they began to sink.

[20 : 47] Their rafts were down in the water. And these were quite chunky boats, not just cobbles, but fairly chunky boats. And they were full to the gunnels, as we would say.

And I'm sure I've said this to you before, I remember as a boy, it was a great novelty. We had quite a bit of salmon fishing at home in the mouth of the river.

And many at the time we saw two salmon boats full to the gunnels, just managing to get into the shore, because they were loaded with salmon, full to the gunnels.

Many at the time too I saw fishing boats with great big bagfuls of cod. And the deck full, and the hold full, and the net still full, and towing it ashore into the harbour, because they had so much fish.

So these things, these things happen, and they've happened. If you're like me, occasionally watch the program Trawler Men, and you'll have seen some of the huge quantities of fish that can be caught.

[21 : 56] But in those days, on Galilee, they had none of the sophisticated stuff to catch the fish, nor the nets, but they had Jesus.

And at the word of Jesus, they brought this net creaking full of fish alongside, and got the fish into the boats, so that they nearly sank for weight of fish.

And as I've said already, and all the preconceptions of these apostles, these disciple fishermen, were simply blown away, because at the word of Jesus, they did what they were told, and they caught a bag full.

Simply at his word. And if anything, this has to teach us, and surely it has this to teach us, it has to teach us about really and truly waiting with confidence upon the Lord.

We know that he knows all things, we know that he sees all things, we know that he's all powerful, we know that he is able to enable us to make a difference in the life of others.

[23 : 21] And so in the life of faith we are called upon to rely upon him in this way. And you know at a practical level there's nothing more difficult. We are living in days, and this is a generalization, but it could be particularized in most places.

We're living in days of real difficulty for the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of it in our land. Difficult days. I remember in 1982 being told by an old elder, we're walking down to a funeral with a whopping big church, yes even bigger than this church, it would hold eight or nine hundred people and he was remarking on how when somebody died in the community, perhaps somebody had a very tenuous connection with the free church, that practically the whole village was at the funeral service and they were there, some of them, three quarters of an hour before the service, half an hour certainly, they were all there.

And I remember him saying to me, isn't it strange how people are ready to go out of their way, for a person, in this case in my mind it was a man, they'll make time for a man, they'll make time to be there to remember a man, who's dead and gone, come the Lord's day, they'll not be there to remember and to worship the man from heaven, who is Lord of all, and he was right.

And then suddenly he said, and he knew his church history, this old chap, and he said to me, oh, he said, Mr. Cowie, he always called him Mr. Cowie, he said, oh, Mr.

Cowie, he said, he said, the old ministers had it easy, they had it easy, the people came, now the people are running away, it's very difficult, and that was in 1982, too, and it has become steadily worse since then.

[25 : 47] So, what I'm saying is we need a reality check here, we're living in difficult days, we're living in extremely difficult days, for getting an ear of the people who are totally unchurched and ignorant of the Bible, and others who perhaps know it and are keeping clear of it.

And so, what we need to do here in learning something from what Peter saw is, he saw the power of Jesus to bring about something that as far as he was concerned, could not happen.

We toiled all night, Master. We toiled at the best time, of the 24-hour day, and we caught nothing. Nevertheless, at your word, I will let down the net.

And you see, when it is that we're called upon to toil in the gospel, in days of darkness and difficulty, days of ignorance, and indifference in some cases, and hostility in others, and we have a sense, we feel a bit in our hearts, an absence of the Lord's blessing.

We are to encourage ourselves by remembering what he has done, and not in the distant past, as in this case, but down through history.

[27 : 23] And he has come, and he has, in his time, he has blessed the means of catching people for the kingdom. We see it in the gospel record time and again, when people were brought out of their native darkness into light.

Who would have thought that on that visit to Jericho, little Zacchaeus up in that sycamore tree would become a believer, and would be instrumental in bringing others into the kingdom.

Who would have thought that the man who was, an converted man who was stuck at the pool of Bethesda and could never get in there, would become a trophy of grace.

The woman who touched the hem of his garment, the tassels on his robe, would become a trophy of grace, and so on and on. People that, as the gospel writers remark, the common people heard him gladly, and so many came into the faith.

Who would have thought it, that in Jerusalem itself, thousands would come into the faith. You can't read the book of Acts, thoughtfully and carefully, but that you'll see there, thousands, including many priests, hundreds of the priests became obedient to the faith.

[28 : 58] It didn't happen, it didn't happen prior to Jesus' sufferings and death, but it happened post-Pentecost.

Thousands were added, even in Jerusalem. The stronghold of resistance to the Jesus, the Messiah.

in the most unlikely place, the place that had hardened its neck against him, the place that had condemned him, the official representatives of the Jewish nation resisted, and then post-Pentecost suddenly thousands are coming in.

you might say, not the best place to be looking for a harvest, or to stick with the catch, metaphor, a great catch of souls for the kingdom.

But that's what had happened first, Jerusalem, beginning in Jerusalem. And that night of sorrow that rained long was suddenly gone, and the sorrow and sighing fled away, and joy came in the morning.

[30 : 18] Christ, by his word and spirit, dispelled the spiritual darkness and deadness. And we need to remember that.

And if I just can remind those who were with us on Thursday evening, we were thinking about the whole business of persisting in prayer, and getting to grips with the Lord, crying out to him, if the widow in the parable prevailed upon the judge, he was afraid he might be assaulted by her, so insistent she was.

If that was true that the unjust judge decided, oh, I'll help her, how much more, our blessed Lord, how much more is he willing to help us.

And so we need to see where we are here, as it were, and learn from this passage, that we are to believe that he will come, and not keep silent, and that he will come, as the one who there for the disciples did such an astonishing miracle.

And what was the end piece about it all? Simon, verse 10, Simon, do not be afraid, from now on, you will catch men.

[31 : 50] Generic term for the people. And it's interesting, you see, he said it to Simon, because Simon was the most privileged after Pentecost.

A Simon sermon brought in 3,000 right away. a huge catch. Doubtless Jesus had that in mind.

But you see the point we're making? The Lord is in charge here. He knows and sees, and he has his purpose, and he will fulfill it.

But it's ours to plead with him that he will fulfill it. That's what prayer is about. Seeking his mind and seeking his will that we might be privileged to see such a catch.

He is able to do this, and we are to seek him in his sovereign rule to act on our behalf. And then, like Peter and the other disciples, we will be wondering, as we sing in the psalm, our tongues will be filled with laughter, and our mouth with melody.

[33 : 10] What he saw then, this astounding miracle, this miracle that filled him and the others was amazement. But I want us then to move on and to think secondly about what Peter said, and in that what he meant.

Because, and this is a strange thing, he said, verse 8, depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. Go away from me, leave me alone.

Usually, it's understood by interpreters that Jesus was sitting in the raised part in the stern of the boat, in the back of the boat, and Peter came and fell at his feet there, went down on his knees, and fell at his feet, and cried out, depart from me.

But did he mean literally, depart from me, go away from me? I don't want to hear you or see you again. Usually, if somebody says, depart from me, go away from me, that's what they mean.

You remember that when the Jews of Gadara were stunned when they lost their thousands of pigs, they ran down into the lake, because they were driven by the evil spirits, and they lost their livelihood, and they begged Jesus to depart from their coast.

[34 : 46] Or long ago before that, long, long ago, was Peter like the Israelites at Sinai, who were murmurers, and stood afar off, and said, don't let the Lord come near us, or we'll die.

Some interpreters actually suggest that Peter was somewhat profane in the way that he spoke, and that he was irreverent. He couldn't judge between what Jesus was and what he himself was.

I find that almost incredible, that they could think that. And so we say no to all these suggestions. You see, the context tells us that Peter is afraid.

Peter is very afraid. Don't be afraid, said Jesus. Don't be afraid. Verse 10. So that what Peter said has to be understood.

We have to get to grips through what he's saying here. He's afraid. He's terrified in Jesus' presence. And what he feels is his own sinnership.

[36 : 00] I am a sinful man. Go away from me. I'm not fit company for you, Lord. He feels uncomfortable in the Lord's presence.

You must have along the way come across people who have perhaps fallen into godly company and they're uncomfortable and they went out of it.

Surely you've come across that. Maybe they've happened to just come into the company, perhaps it's been on a train or some situation and they begin to listen to the language, the chat, the fellowship and they're out of their depths and they don't want this and they clear off.

I remember once coming down the Mercer Valley many years ago from taking services and in the Welsh mind quite a long time ago now the Welsh Christians thought the Mercer Valley was a very dark valley that it had lost the wonderful impact of the revivals in 1904 and it was a dark place Mercer anyway I was coming home on Sunday evening and this chap was hitching a lift so I stopped pulled over stopped gave him a lift and got chatting to him and chatted away and then just a bit further on I began to ask him about his background was he church going or had he been brought up with the knowledge of the Bible and so on and first of all he was giving a little and then when I began to talk to him about personal religion that was all he could take and he begged me to stop the car and let him go that's what

I had to do there are people like that they feel uncomfortable when the things of God come home to them they feel uncomfortable in the presence of godly people but Peter a believer feels uncomfortable here in the presence of Jesus depart from me oh lord go away from me for I'm not fit company for you lord I'm a sinful man such was the impact of the miracle of Jesus that it impressed him with the holiness and majesty of Jesus it was beyond him the presence of Jesus intimidated him it was like having God right there and of course that's what it was but it impacted Peter you see Peter was only learning he was only beginning to appreciate just who

[39 : 21] Jesus was and he he was hit hard as it were by the reality of what Jesus had done now you see that's not that's not something that was new in the New Testament time we read of Moses who was called God's friend like Abraham before him a man who knew God face to face as it were and Moses tells us that when he was in the presence of God he trembled and he shook exceedingly such was his sense of the overwhelming holiness of God his majesty that he trembled and he was like to come to pieces Isaiah said the same thing when he saw the vision of the pre-incarnate Christ you find it in Isaiah 6 woe is me he said for I am in den

I am utterly exposed my heart is laid bare and I'm afraid I am a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the king the lord of hosts and it's interesting you see that that when God was preparing these disciples just like Isaiah and just like some of the minor prophets had the same experience but just like Moses long before that they were impressed with the awesomeness of the lord with their own sinnership and with the wonderful privilege of being caught up and renewed and prepared to be servants of the king job was a very godly man but when he was cast into trials that just almost defy our comprehension and he was left a physical and emotional wreck he began to say some things that were just over the top and almost well he came pretty close to charging the lord with some injustice as far as job himself was concerned how can he do this but we read in chapter 42 of job verses 5 and 6 when god brings job to the place where he shows him what he himself is like and what job is like this is what job says and

I quote him now my eyes see thee the bit that goes before it is I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear but now my eyes see thee and I abhor myself and I repent in dust and ashes there is something wholesome about this on the one hand we know that there is forgiveness with him that he may be revered but we need this sight of him as the holy one as the one who is totally other than us and who makes enemies friends and the disciples had to learn that in order to help others to learn it I know that it's too common nowadays to be superficial in these things and there is little of the real fear of

God there is little of a sense of the gulf that is fixed between ourselves and the Lord that the Lord bridges and the men of God in scripture and in history too I think that have been so greatly used of God have been those in whom he has worked in this way that they felt unfit for the fellowship of God they've perceived the difference between themselves and the Lord and they've abhorred themselves I'm not fit he says for fellowship with you depart from me go away from me Lord I'm a sinful man a man defiled a man unholy in and of myself but you are sinless and then defiled you are holy and harmless Lord depart from me and you see the Lord taught not only

Peter but the others too taught them about himself in his glorious majesty and that he had condescended to you sinful people renewed by him and fitted by him not only for fellowship with him but for service and it's useful to us to ask the question how much of Peter's experience do we know ourselves do we need to be asking the Lord to give us a little something more of this for ourselves oh wretched man that I am said Paul who will deliver me from this body of death who would have thought that reading Paul reading what he was like but Paul knew his heart he knew that when he would do good evil is present I find in myself there's a war going on and I need the majesty on high to empower me and we need that same majesty on high to make us catch people for the kingdom and may his spirit teach us that it's true in this context of bringing people into the kingdom that he is the same yesterday today and forever and we are not to doubt his power to do it

[45 : 58] I've often been struck by that unnerving verse according to your faith be it unto you that's a very unnerving word a very unnerving it's a word that gets in under the skin it gets into our soul it's not saying you don't have beliefs in me that are true it's not saying to us you don't have saving faith no no it's talking about our trust in him to do above and beyond what we can ask it's trusting him to do nevertheless lord I don't think this can work but you've asked me to do it so I'll do it and I'll leave it to you and the result was a bag full according to your faith be it end to you according to your trust in me your confidence in me to do it well it's no bad thing to abhor our own weakness and to confess our mistrust our lack of confidence in the lord to actually do to make the difference it's no bad thing to come clean with him and tell him that's the way it is but we're also to be brought out from that state into a true confidence in him that enable us to really launch out as it were in trust in him to do far above and beyond what we can ask or imagine well as we've we've we've we've we've we've trodden this path again tonight may he bless to us his word and may we be the better for having considered it together do not be afraid

Simon from now on you will catch people Amen