

The undeniable call of Jesus

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[0 : 01] Isaiah chapter 6 and verses 1 to 8. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim, each had six wings, with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

And the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, Woe is me, for I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.

And he touched my mouth and said, Behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?

[1 : 26] And I said, Here I am. Send me. Luke chapter 5, verses 1 to 11.

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake.

But the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets.

And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.

[2 : 33] And they came and filled both the boats so that they began to sink. But 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 that they had taken. And so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon.

And Jesus said to Simon, Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men. And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Rachel, thanks very much indeed for reading. Why don't we pray together as we look at Luke chapter 5.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you very much for this opportunity that we now have this morning, just as those people by the lake were able to hear the words of Jesus.

[3 : 38] Thank you that we now have the words of Jesus before us. And we pray that you would please help us to be attentive to them. Help us to be transformed by them.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, our aim this morning as we look at Luke chapter 5, verses 1 to 11, is to see what a genuine response to Jesus Christ looks like.

I hope you're persuaded, by the way, that the gospel writers don't simply give us what we might call a sort of holiday scrapbook view of Jesus. In other words, you know, a miracle here, a bit of teaching over here, all sort of jumbled up in no particular order, just in the order in which, you know, you might remember things if you're writing a holiday scrapbook.

No, Luke is a doctor. He tells us he's interviewed his key eyewitnesses. He tells us he's written an orderly account. And he tells us he's writing so that we will be certain, confident, sure about who Jesus is and why he came.

Which is why we've said that the aim of this series of talks is to help us to distinguish between what we called last week a vague kind of Christianity and a real, genuine Christianity, a Bible Christianity.

[5 : 01] So two weeks ago, if you were here, we looked at Luke chapter 4, verses 14 to 30, and the message of Jesus. The message of Jesus to bring the forgiveness of sins to those who are under the judgment of God.

Great news. Last week, chapter 4, verses 31 to 44, we saw the priority of Jesus, the priority of Jesus as a preacher and teacher, because that is how his kingdom advances.

And now today, in chapter 5, verses 1 to 11, we see what a genuine response to Jesus looks like. Looks like to help us to distinguish between a vague sort of Christian, of which sadly there are so many in our culture, and a genuinely Bible Christian.

Or to put it another way, Grace Church has a mission statement. It's on our website if you haven't seen it. It is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. But what does a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ look like?

I take it that's an important question for all of us, an important question for those of us who are looking on the Christian faith, as we perhaps ask ourselves the question, what would it look like in practice for me to begin to follow Jesus?

[6 : 13] But actually important for those of us who already describe ourselves as followers of Jesus as well, to hold up a plumb line, so to speak, and to ask ourselves the question as we look at Luke chapter 5, how does my following of Jesus measure up with what we see here in Luke chapter 5?

Well, there are two simple responses to Jesus in our passage. I've tried to capture them on the outline on the back of the service sheet. One is depart. The other is follow.

I'm sorry if you don't think they're very imaginative headings, but hopefully we'll see that captures what is going on here. First of all, depart, verses 1 to 3.

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to be put out a little from the land, and he sat down and taught the people from the boat. Now, it's almost a throwaway line, but will you notice in verse 1 that you don't come to Jesus to hear his own words, but to hear the words of God.

[7 : 31] Isn't that very striking? Just a throwaway line that Luke writes? It's just a reminder, isn't it, that Jesus is God on earth, and as God on earth, he speaks the words of God.

So then picture the scene in verses 1 to 3. The crowds are pressing in on Jesus. They're hungry to hear God's words. And so he climbs into Simon's boat as a platform to speak from. And then verse 4.

And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. And Simon answered, master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word are let down the nets.

Now, Luke doesn't tell us, does he, in verse 5, the tone of voice that Simon speaks in? But I take it we can imagine, after all, who of us in this room likes being told by someone else how to do our job?

Not, of course, that this is Simon's first encounter with Jesus. We saw last week, if you remember, how Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law. And no doubt that evening, as people in Capernaum brought everyone to Jesus who was sick, everyone who was ill, and as Jesus healed them simply with a word, no doubt Simon couldn't have avoided noticing the awesome authority of Jesus.

[8 : 57] And now, of course, it gets personal. Here is the carpenter's son telling the fisherman how to go about finding fish. His response, verse 5, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing.

They fished at night, so the fish couldn't see the nets. And therefore, it's perhaps only respect that prevents Simon also from saying, frankly, it's a pretty silly idea, and when you don't find any, then don't blame me.

At which point, two things happen. First, verses 6 and 7, there is a scene of frenetic activity. The nets fill, they begin to break.

We're not told whether Jesus knew where the fish were or whether he simply summoned them into the net. Either, of course, would be equally miraculous. Frantic calls are made to James and John to come quickly to help.

Water is coming in over the side of the boat. The boat risks sinking. If the boat sinks, the business sinks. But notice that amidst the activity, there is then a far deeper response.

[10 : 12] Verse 8, For 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.

Simon's been listening to the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God. Simon has heard the call of Jesus to turn around and believe the good news.

But suddenly, you see, this is the moment. I guess you could have heard a pin drop because this is the moment when it suddenly dawns on Simon that he is not simply hearing about the kingdom.

No, he is face to face with the king in the very presence of God. And so he reacts, as human beings always do, in the very presence of God.

Just like Isaiah, in that first reading from Isaiah chapter 6, Woe to me, for I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts.

[11 : 26] Last week, in the wake of Hurricane Harvey in Texas, there was an article in the New York Times commenting with considerable surprise on the response of many to the devastation that the hurricane caused.

Far from undermining people's faith in God, the journalist had shock horror been down to Texas and experienced people praying, people calling others to pray, and in prayer meetings, people's faith, it seemed, had been strengthened.

Clearly a complete mystery to this journalist from the New York Times. Now, it revealed, of course, his assumption that God is essentially there to serve me, to meet my needs, to make my life easier, to get, if you like, behind my agenda for my life, to help me do what I want to do with my life.

It's the way so many people relate to God. A small God who is there to serve and meet my needs. And if God doesn't do that, if a hurricane comes along and destroys my house or livelihood, then I ditch God because he's no longer there lining up with my agenda.

It's the assumption, you see, that I'm at the center of my world. God is a small God. He is there to serve me. These words in verse 8, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

[12 : 57] They show, don't they, this is the moment when Simon's world has been completely turned upside down. Not a small God, but a big God. Not a far away God, but an imminent God, an immediate God.

A God whose holiness requires complete moral distance. An entirely other God. An unapproachable God.

It is a deep conviction of his own sinfulness. Notice, will you, that he doesn't say what I guess our tabloid culture might say, which is, I've done some pretty terrible things.

I've committed some horrible sins. And then kind of goes on to list them. Now, Simon recognizes, doesn't he, the problem is far deeper. The problem is his heart.

Verse 8. Not, I've done sinful things, although no doubt like all of us he had. But actually, I am a sinful man.

[14 : 08] Rather like when you take that bruised apple from the fruit bowl and you get the knife out and you think to yourself, I'll just cut the bruise out and it's going to be fine. But actually, the more you dig and the more you cut, the more rotten it gets.

Rotten to the core. Which is why here, of course, for Simon, there's no pretense, is there, before the Lord Jesus Christ? There's no pretense or no excuses.

Only a sense of deep, deep personal conviction. I wonder if you've ever thought to yourself, I guess many of us have, wouldn't it have been wonderful to have been there in the first century, to have seen Jesus, to have heard Jesus, to have come face to face with Jesus?

But I imagine that if Simon were here this morning, he'd be saying to us, you really don't have a clue what you're talking about. It was completely terrifying at that moment, coming face to face with God himself.

In other words, if you have never had a Simon moment like this, it's either because you have underestimated Jesus, you think less of him than you should, a small Jesus.

[15 : 30] It's either because you've underestimated Jesus, or it's because you've overestimated yourself, and you have a much higher opinion, a much bigger idea of yourself than you really should.

But if, like Simon, we know what it is to fear Jesus, then actually we have made a great step forward if we know what it is to fear Jesus as God.

Because Simon demonstrates, you see, as he responds like this, he demonstrates that he's just the sort of person that Jesus has come for. Do you remember chapter 4, 18, a couple of weeks ago?

At the start of Jesus' manifesto, chapter 4, verse 18, Jesus says, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. And what Simon is doing here, you see, is he is recognizing his spiritual poverty.

And as we'll see next week, Jesus Christ alone is the one who has authority on earth to forgive sins. Jesus is the one who came not to call righteous people but sinners to repentance, people who know they are sinners like Peter, like Simon Peter here.

[16 : 47] The one who, indeed, by the end of Luke's gospel has died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Which means, of course, there's also a second part of what a genuine response to Jesus looks like.

Not just depart, depart from me, but also follow. Have a look at verse 10. Let's go back to verse 9.

For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that 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'll be catching men. And when they brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. Simon has had his world turned completely upside down.

Which is why those four words in verse 10, as Jesus says to him, do not be afraid, surely, are actually some of the most beautiful words in the Bible, aren't they? Do not be afraid.

[17 : 55] Do not depart, but follow. Is that not astonishing? As from now on, Simon will be engaged in the work of Jesus' kingdom and serving Jesus in the work of his kingdom.

What does a genuine response to Jesus look like? It is to follow Jesus and serve him. It is a radical change of allegiance. How could it be anything else given who Jesus is?

Given that Jesus is Lord. Which is why, of course, Jesus doesn't say to Simon, you're forgiven, now run along and go and live the kind of life you were going to live anyway.

No. Come, follow me because he is Lord. a genuine response to Jesus involves following him and surrendering everything we have to him in his service.

Now, I want us just to pause there for a moment and to try and see together the full significance of what is going on here in Luke chapter 5 in the context of the whole Bible. I want to try and persuade us there is far more going on than simply Jesus calling one man.

[19 : 14] So, will you keep a finger in Luke chapter 5 and turn back to Genesis chapter 1? Genesis chapter 1 at the very beginning of the Bible.

Genesis chapter 1 verse 27 What does God do at the beginning when he creates mankind? Genesis chapter 1 verse 27 So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God he created him male and female he created them. What does it mean, we ask, to be created in the image of God? To be an image bearer? Well, verse 28 And God said to them Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

Mankind is created to bear God's image and to serve God in the work he gives him to do. Now, tragically, that is all spoiled in Genesis chapter 3 when the devil says to the woman in verse 5, Genesis 3 verse 5, As he tempts her to eat the fruit for God knows that when you eat the fruit your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God knowing good and evil.

That phrase knowing good and evil has the sense of determining good and evil. In other words, deciding what is right and what is wrong in God's world. I will live my life my way without God.

[20 : 52] And what then follows is the world that you and I experience every day. So verse 16, for example, pain in childbirth, the battle between the sexes.

Verse 17, the work that Adam had been given to do becomes burdensome and painful. And in verse 19, death itself for you are dust and to dust you shall return.

As verse 24, Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden and banished from God's presence. I don't know if you saw the film We Need to Talk About Kevin.

It was a British-American psychological thriller that was released in 2011 starring Tilda Swinton as the mother of Kevin who was a detached, remote, rather strange boy even from a very young age.

As a baby, he cries incessantly. He seems unable to reciprocate and to demonstrate affection. Things get worse as he gets older. His sister's pet guinea pig is killed.

[22 : 00] She is then blinded later on in one eye. And if you've seen the film, it ends in tragedy and disaster. Now, the title comes from the mother's gradual realization that there is a problem and yet the father is in denial.

We need to talk about Kevin. Well, surely, in a far, far greater way, don't we need to talk about humanity, human nature?

Yes, every generation thinks it has the answers. So, in the 1960s, it was to put an end to starchy, formal Victorian values. But 50 years later, it's clear, isn't it, that unbridled secularism has not come up with the answers.

because the problem of humanity is far, far deeper. The problem is that each one of us rejects the creator. We are rotten to the core.

And that is why Genesis chapter 3, verse 15 is such a glorious promise. As the Lord God says to the devil, I'll put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

[23 : 17] He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. It is a promise that one day the devil will be destroyed. Now, fast forward to Luke's gospel.

In Luke chapter 4, verses 1 to 13, Jesus withstands the devil's temptations. as such, the devil is put on notice. In chapter 4, verses 31 to 37, Jesus' first miracle is to cast out and destroy evil.

And therefore, it follows, doesn't it, that as he destroys Satan's rule, so he also overthrows the effects of the fall. We saw that last week wonderfully, as disease, death, and sickness were all overthrown.

And as we were given the most wonderful glimpse, the most wonderful foretaste of what the new creation will be like. And far from driving away sinners, as Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, and as Simon knows he rightly deserves, the Lord Jesus now calls sinners to follow him and summons them to his service.

Jesus. Luke chapter 5, verses 1 to 11, you see, is far greater simply than the calling of one person to follow Jesus.

[24 : 46] This is the beginning of a whole new humanity, a humanity restored, restored to its original purpose to serve God in his work.

In other words, to follow Jesus Christ can never be a small thing. It can never be, you see, the attitude that says, I'm going to give Jesus part of my life, the spiritual part of my life, or the Sunday morning part of my life, a small part of my life, but not the other parts of my life, my work life, my ambitions, my relationships, my finances, and so on.

Because a genuine response to Jesus, who is Lord, involves following him. It means to be involved with God's enormous purposes, stretching, across all of history, leading to a new creation and a new humanity, restored, a new humanity restored to its original purpose.

In other words, to follow Jesus is to surrender all that we have and all that we are in his service. So let me finish with three implications.

Implication number one, we can trust the testimony of the apostles, those like Simon Peter. Now Luke doesn't mention it here, but in chapter six, he's going to name all twelve of the apostles who were commissioned by Jesus, commissioned to proclaim the gospel after his departure, and who would be responsible for the writing of the New Testament.

[26 : 22] Indeed, the first part of the book of Acts, Luke's second volume, some of us will remember from when we looked at Acts several years ago, Peter is the dominant character as he proclaims that Christ died for our sins, rose from the dead, and is Lord.

He was indeed a great fisher of men. His first sermon in Acts chapter two, we're told that three thousand people repented and believed in the Lord Jesus. And here in Luke chapter five, Luke reminds us that Peter was there, an eyewitness.

We can read the New Testament with confidence and certainty about what they saw, what they heard, what they touched as they teach us about Jesus.

The second implication, this calling by Jesus of sinners into service, is not limited to Peter and the apostles. Yes, Peter is one of the foundational apostles, they were unique, but it's interesting that Jesus will say exactly the same to the next named person in Luke.

So to Levi, in chapter five, just over the page, chapter five, verse 27, Jesus says to Levi, follow me. And we're told, and leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

[27 : 46] Indeed, throughout Luke's gospel, we're told this is what a genuine response to Jesus looks like. So I've put on the outline, Luke chapter nine, verse 23, where Jesus speaks about anyone.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. In other words, to serve Jesus in the work of his kingdom, to do so with all that we have and all the resources and energy available to us is the hallmark of a genuine follower of Jesus.

Some of us are doing that. I hope we're really encouraged to be looking at Luke chapter five this morning because we see ourselves, whether we're at work or at university, whether we're at school, whether we're friends or colleagues or all neighbours, we see ourselves first and foremost in the business of serving Jesus with our time, energy, resources and so on, seeking to advance his kingdom as far as we are able to do so.

But I guess there are bound to be others and if we're honest, we're weary of serving Jesus in this way. Or perhaps actually we've never really got round to it.

After all, to live like this, it's actually incredibly countercultural, isn't it? When everyone else is simply living to please themselves, following and pursuing their own agenda, it is radically countercultural to live like this.

[29 : 20] So easy for other things, whether it's a career or a particular relationship or financial security or what other people think of us, so easy for those things to become more important to us than seeking to advance Jesus' kingdom.

In which case, will you spend some time this week looking again at Luke chapter 5 verses 1 to 11? Will you remind yourself of the enormous value of Jesus who says to those who by rights should depart from him who says, come, follow me.

And then the enormous significance of being involved in his kingdom work, of using our resources and energies in such a way that others might come to follow Jesus Christ and to be part of that renewed humanity in the new creation.

Third implication, if you've never responded to Jesus as Peter responded, and I guess there may be one or two here this morning, you've never responded to Jesus in the way that Simon Peter responded, then will you do so?

What is stopping you doing so? Perhaps you've never really investigated. Will you do so? I'd love to encourage you to do our Christianity Explore course or a guided read-through at one of the Gospels with someone.

[30 : 50] I hope you can see that there is far too much at stake simply to ignore Jesus, or perhaps you've deferred putting off investigating. Far too much at stake to do that.

Let's have a few moments for reflection and I shall then lead us in prayer. Depart from me for I am a sinful man.

Heavenly Father, we praise you very much for the Lord Jesus Christ, that he is God on earth. We recognize as we see Simon's response to Jesus, we confess our own sin as we recognize in part at least your amazing holiness and our rottenness in our own hearts.

And therefore we marvel at this invitation to follow and to serve. And we pray that we would delight to do that, thrilled to be caught up in your purposes of creating a restored, renewed humanity.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.