

From fishermen to fishers of men

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Date: 19 February 2017

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[0:00] Well, what does it take to make a disciple or to become one? Well, if you ask Yoda from Star Wars, then it's all about feeling the force, right?

Or as Yoda would say himself, feel the force you must. On the other hand, if you speak to Mr. Miyagi of Karate Kid fame, then it all starts with waxing on and waxing off, doing the basics over and over, even through menial tasks like polishing the car to learn the fundamentals of the discipline.

And then there's Sifu in Kung Fu Panda. Now, he would say that it's about creating the right motivation. And in the case of Kung Fu Panda, it's training so that he's free to eat.

Now, I re-watched the famous, some of you have seen the famous chopstick sequence. I couldn't resist it, so I'm going to share it with you. So two minutes here of pure Kung Fu, right? Let's go.

After you, Panda. Just like that? No sit-ups? No, no, no, no, no 10-mile hike? I vowed to train you, and you have been trained. You are free to eat.

[1:23] Enjoy. Hey! I said you are free to eat. Have a dumpling. Hey!

You are free to eat. Am I? Are you? What? What? What? What?

What? Oh, come on.

Love you.

Okay, we could go on, but you might like, if I did go on, but anyway, that's it.

[3:08] Well, there we have it, insights onto how to make disciples from three different masters from Hollywood. But what about Jesus? How does Jesus make disciples?

Well, we're going to find that out tonight. But in our passage, Luke gives us Jesus' first account of his disciple, the making of his first disciple in the person of Simon Peter.

Now, if you recall, Jesus has been preaching around Galilee, proclaiming the good news to the poor, as he says in chapter 4 and verse 18. He has come to set the captives free, and he's been proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor.

But Jesus isn't just coming to set people free, only for them to then wander off. Instead, he's actually freed them so that they can become his disciples, people who leave everything to follow him.

Now, everyone is unique, so Simon's calling will not apply exactly to everyone else. Nevertheless, I think we're going to learn from his story what discipleship looks like and how Jesus goes about doing it.

[4:18] So let's begin with the passage where one day Jesus was standing by the lake, surrounded by people wanting to listen to him. The way Luke describes it, it's almost as if Jesus stumbles on Simon's boat by accident.

The reality, of course, is that it's anything but. You may recall that Jesus, last week, he already knows Simon. In the previous chapter, he entered Simon's house to heal his mother-in-law.

Simon and his family with him had experienced Jesus' power and compassion. You see, this was actually part of Jesus' careful preparation.

Jesus is about to call Simon to follow him, and when he does, it's actually his family that will bear that cost of his discipleship. You see, for two whole years, Peter would actually not be at home.

They wouldn't have him there fishing to earn an income to live off. And so Jesus' compassion to them in the house, I think, was a preparation for this coming day that we're going to read about.

[5 : 23] And so having laid the groundwork, Jesus comes to just that part of the shore where Simon's boat happened to be parked. He comes at just the right moment when Simon was just finishing his work.

Jumping into Simon's boat, then he asks for it to be put out from the shore so that he could sit and teach the ever-increasing crowd. Now, because Jesus had been kind to Simon, I think that would have gone a long way to making Simon amenable to that request.

But still, if you think about it, this is actually a rather inconvenient and demanding request. Simon and his crew have just worked all night, and they've just finished washing the nets.

And despite all this hard work, there was actually no reward for all that work. There was no fish to sell, no income to take home for the night.

So they would not only have been physically tired, they would have been emotionally deflated as well. And yet, to Simon's credit, when the request was put to him, he shows a willingness to endure a little inconvenience, a little hardship maybe, and he puts the boat out for Jesus.

[6 : 43] Now, Jesus would have taught for a while, I think. And really, during that time, I don't know whether Peter was thinking this, but he could actually have been at home, feet on the couch, sleeping, resting, because he's going to have to do it again that night.

But when Jesus finally stopped teaching, and he turns to Simon, not to ask him to go back to shore, no, but instead, in verse 4, he tells Peter, or Simon, to put out into the deep water, and then cast down the nets for a catch.

Now, how would you have reacted to Jesus' request? It's not hard to imagine saying what Simon did. Master, we've worked all night.

We haven't caught anything. There really isn't any fish down there, you know. If they didn't come last night, then they're not likely to come now, particularly when the sun's up, and the nets are fully visible to the fish.

And yet, again, to Simon's credit, he adds, but because you say so, Master, I will let down the nets.

[8 : 02] And so that first response, I don't think was a complaint, so much as Simon just telling it as it is. Any reasonable fisherman would know the fish weren't there.

There was little point casting those nets. Further, if you think about it, if Jesus was wrong, guess what? They'll have to wash those nets again, all before the coming night's catch.

And yet, Simon obeyed Jesus, even when logic tells him that there was nothing done there, even when he didn't fully understand Jesus' command. And Simon's faith is rewarded by Jesus, because we're not talking here about a mere carpenter.

No, we're looking at the Lord of creation. Jesus, as a mere carpenter, may look like he's ignorant of commercial fishing, but as Master over creation, he knew where the fish were and how to summon them to Simon's net.

And so full was this miraculous catch that Simon had to then call the second boat over to help. And so full were both these boats, in verse 7, that they were on the verge of sinking.

[9:14] What a sign of overwhelming generosity and providence from God, not to mention his power. You almost get the sense that actually there's more fish down there to catch, that they were only really limited by the size of the boat.

Had they had a bigger boat or had they had more boats, they would have caught more. They would have filled more boats. Now, I suspect Simon and all his partners would have been overwhelmed with joy and elation, especially given the disappointment of last night.

And yet, as we look at the verse, that is not Simon's response, is it? Instead, two things dawned on Simon.

First, Simon now sees Jesus in a different light. The person that he called Master, in verse 5, is now his Lord, in verse 8. Both titles are titles of reverence, but the fact that he was falling at Jesus' knee and calling him Lord, I think takes his worship of Jesus to a new level, a higher level.

I think Simon has caught a glimpse of Jesus' divinity. He's beginning to understand who Jesus is. And even though he may not understand everything, he sees in Jesus something only God can be.

[10:35] And so that's his first realization. But then that leads to the second realization, that of his own sinfulness. So even as Simon's view of Jesus is elevated, his view on himself is correspondingly diminished.

No longer is he this professional fisherman who knows the lake like the back of his hand. No, he's now merely a sinful man in front of a holy God.

And so he says to Jesus, Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. I don't think Simon is saying this because there's any specific sin that he's thinking on his part.

After all, if you look at the whole story, his behavior up to now seems to be fairly faultless, isn't it? Rather, Simon is simply reacting as anyone would when they come face to face with the living God.

We saw that same reaction that we know with Isaiah in our first reading tonight. Isaiah said when he was entering God's throne room in a vision, Woe to me! I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.

[11:50] Now, when I was working in the city a few years back, I used to have white shirts that I wore to work, and I remember washing them fairly regularly, or maybe my mom did, I can't recall.

Anyway, but to keep them as white as possible, we would often, and we would always, I think, throw in that extra, you know, extra strength detergent. I don't even know what it is.

Is it white power or something? Anyway, it's one of those detergents spent to help. Now, with those shirts, if I wore those shirts on my own, on its own, or if I wore a black suit with it, they would look pretty white.

In fact, I've brought in one. It's a white shirt, yes? Pretty good. Now, I know some of you moms looking at this will know this is not really white, is it?

Because I only need to put it against a brand new white shirt. Yes? For you to see, just try to do this.

[12:56] That is not that white, is it? Can you see the difference? It's cream. Yes. Thank you. Actually, it was a cream shirt that's turned white.

No. It's pretty non-white, isn't it? Compared to this, and I'm sure this will become pretty non-white in a while when I start wearing it. But, that's exactly how our own righteousness is when put up against God's righteousness.

Sure, when we look at the criminals on TV, we don't look that bad. In fact, when we compare ourselves with our colleagues or fellow students, yeah, we look pretty good too.

You know, there's no scandals in our lives. Everyone keeps telling us how moral we are. We come to church regularly. We listen to God's word attentively. Some of us even take notes during the sermon.

But as Isaiah says in chapter 64, verse 6, I've got that verse on the screen, he says, all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.

[14:06] We all shrivel up like a leaf, and all the wind, and like the wind, our sins sweep us away. The problem is, it's not that, our problem isn't that we do bad things sometimes, which we do.

No, our problem is that even our righteous acts are like filthy rags before God. Our white shirts aren't white at all. And so often, the good we try to do ends up being evil, or at least stay with sinful motives or selfish desires.

Think, for instance, how we often have an ulterior motive whenever we help others. We do it so that hopefully we get a return favor, or we do it so that we get good publicity from it.

When we help an old lady across the road, for instance, we think, even as we're helping her across the road, and we haven't even got to the other side, we think, I do hope someone is watching to see how kind I am.

Or we pat ourselves on the shoulder, mentally, telling ourselves how selfless we are. And if we're honest with ourselves, we'll see how deep down our motives are actually often impure, and our selfish desires are often there.

[15:24] It is this realization that caused Isaiah to cry out, woe is me. And for Simon, when he's looking at himself, to say, go away, Lord, I am a sinful man.

They may have been able to hide their flaws from others, maybe even themselves, but when you come into the presence of God, there is nowhere to hide. We come face to face with the truth whenever we come into God's glorious presence.

Now for us, we don't see God like Isaiah or Simon would see Jesus. For us, that happens when we open the Bible and read God's Word.

The way God works now is through His Word, and when we hear and read it, that's when we come face to face with God by the conviction of His Spirit. Have you ever experienced that before?

Have you opened the Bible, read something, and see yourself in it? that part of itself that actually no one knows, and yet strangely it's being described of you in the Bible?

[16:33] Well, that's the Lord speaking to you and me, showing you who you really are. There's nowhere to hide. It may seem like a fearful thing, you know, opening the Bible, having all those ugly things about yourself exposed, but yet, it's actually the best thing that can happen to you.

You're in one sense repulsed by what it says about who you are, and yet you're strangely drawn to it. And this is exactly how Simon Peter reacts to Jesus.

Look again with me at verse 8. See how Simon, on the one hand, he falls towards Jesus and on his knees, and yet at the very same time as he does that, he asks Jesus to go away.

So he's drawn to Jesus in worship, and yet he realizes his deep sense of unworthiness because of his sin. But now look at the grace of Jesus in verse 10.

See how gently his response to Simon is. See what he says, do not be afraid, Simon. From now on, you will fish for people.

[17:45] Simon's fears are calmed. Now Jesus is not denying he's sinful, but he shows that he's loved by God even because in spite of his sinfulness.

He's saying to Simon that he will take his filthy rags and clothe him with his own righteousness, and then after that give him and entrust to him a noble task, that of being a fisher of people or fisher of men.

he will do just what Jesus did with him, fish others out of the sea of sin and give to them life in Jesus.

Simon will proclaim the good news of Jesus to others. Think about it, that's a great honor for a sinful man to do what Jesus is doing, to do something on behalf of Jesus, to do what is Jesus' most important task on earth, that now he's given to Simon to do.

Friends, there is nowadays, I think, an aversion to this talk about sin. Now, whether you turn on the TV, read the papers or at schools or at uni, it's almost as if people only want to focus on the positives of humanity.

[19 : 05] And sadly, I have to say that this is true even in some churches. People want to say that everyone's basically good and what you really need to do is inspire people to achieve.

Tell them that they're beautiful inside and somehow get them to unlock that potential so that they can do great things, they can lead happier lives. If you tell them about sin, well, that only lays heavy burdens on them.

It damages them with false guilt. People already have low self-esteem as it is. Why tell them about sin? Now, in one sense, you can see the good intentions behind that thinking and yes, only talking about sin is not helpful but neither is this approach where you only, you know, this positive thinking approach where, you know, you only talk about the positives of humanity because remember, Jesus' good news is only good news to the poor.

It's good news to the blind. It's good news to those who are captive. And so, if we don't face up to our own sin that we're actually spiritually blind and morally captive, then we'll never really see the true self in us.

We'll never let people know that what they desperately need is Jesus in order to be free. people will then keep thinking that, no, we can get there on our own.

[20 : 34] That, you know, we just need to try harder when deep down, I think all of us know we've tried harder and yet we're not good enough. And so, we never talk about sin.

We will never experience the wonderful truth that God loves us in spite of our sinfulness. That actually His love for us does not depend on how good we are, but rather on His Son who loves us, whom He loves and sent to die on the cross for us.

Tim Keller, I think, has this famous quote that sums it up nicely. The gospel is we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.

And friends, when you see this truth about yourself, that is the most liberating thing that you can know. Because all of a sudden, you no longer have an over-inflated view of yourself.

You are humbled, yes, and yet at the same time, you have this great sense of worth and security. Worth and security that actually comes not from your own achievements, but from God. You no longer need to pretend that you're someone you're not, just to be loved.

[21 : 50] You no longer have to achieve this or that in order to be someone of value. it's the most humbling and yet at the most, at the same time, the most life-affirming truth of all.

On the other hand, if you take the other approach, that positive thinking approach, if you take that to its logical conclusion, I think what you end up with is someone like Donald Trump. Now, many people think, you look at him on TV and think, this is an arrogant guy, but I tell you what I see, I see an extremely insecure man.

You see, because even with all his power and wealth, he's so insecure that he can't even take criticism from others. Every insult on Twitter, he feels like he needs to respond and attack, because it's an attack on his self-worth.

And the only way he can feel good about himself is to keep telling himself and others that he's the best. God But when you know from God himself that you are loved even though you are deeply sinful, it actually frees you.

It frees you to serve him. It frees you to follow him wholeheartedly. And so that is what happened to Simon that day. And actually, if you read verse 10 and 11, it's not just him, is it?

[23:09] His partners with him that day, James, John, and possibly Andrew as well. When they pulled their boats up on shore, verse 11, they left everything and followed him.

That was the impact that Jesus had on Simon. Now those five words at the end, that phrase, that's actually Luke's way of saying they gave Jesus their total commitment. In the next chapter, we will see it next week, Levi too will leave everything and follow Jesus.

And then we see in chapter 14 later on, verse 27, it culminates with Jesus himself saying this, whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

So Simon and his friends are simply a model of what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus. It takes total commitment, a willingness to leave everything to follow Jesus.

It wasn't just leaving their boats and nets physically, no, it was leaving their careers, their dreams, their livelihoods, and even their family for a time. Just imagine these disciples, they had just experienced the biggest catch of their lives.

[24:20] This is the highlight of their career. If you're a dealmaker, this is the deal of the century. And yet, because of what they saw in Jesus, what he did for them, they were going to leave everything at once to follow him.

I thought, what did they actually do with the catch? Two big boatloads worth. Did they even bother to sell it for income?

Luke doesn't tell us, does he? It's not important. It's not important. And friends, the same thing is required of us to follow Jesus today. Do we find it daunting to leave everything to follow him?

Now, I'm not saying that by this we all leave our jobs and our homes, that may not be what Jesus wants of us specifically, but it means willing to endure hardship for him. That inconvenience that Simon suffered that day is nothing compared to the sufferings that awaits him in his ministry.

Likewise, when Simon was asked to believe in Jesus, well, he will have greater tests of faith as he moved forward in his discipleship.

[25:32] But Simon was able to follow Jesus only because of what happened at Jesus' knee. He met the living God that day. And each of us, it is only when we meet the living God that we will have the strength and the courage to leave all and follow Jesus.

And so, friends, if today you have not met this Jesus, then please open the Bible, open the pages of the Bible and read and feed on the words of God, because you will meet him there.

He will reveal himself to you. But for those of us who already know Jesus, then let's resolve to leave everything to follow him. Let us pray that God will use us like Simon to fish for other people, that is, to make disciples of other people.

Just as Jesus fished us out from the sea of sin and death, let's pray that he will use us as well to do the same for others. Yes, there may be dreams that we've got and plans that we would like seen fulfilled, but we need to be able to be willing to leave them behind, put what God wants of us first in order to follow him.

And so, friends, if there are fears, come to Jesus. Because Jesus said to Simon, don't be afraid. He knows our fears. Those words are for us too, those of us who find it difficult to leave everything and follow him.

[27:13] But, friends, let us do that. We may not know what it means going forward, but let's just take that first step. Let's just say, yes, I will leave everything to follow you.

and then as we keep walking, let's keep saying that. All of us as Christians will keep finding things that we just need to keep letting go of in order to be a disciple of Jesus.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this example of Simon. We thank you for your care in the way that you called him and brought him to yourself.

and we know that same care that you give to each and every one of us. You know what is in our hearts. You know our sin. You know that we are unworthy. And yet, Lord, even as we might say, go away, Jesus, you say to us, do not be afraid.

Come to me and I will make you fish for people. So, Lord, give us that courage. Help us to see you as you really are, the Son of God, the one who has died for us, the one who loves us.

[28:29] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.