

The Catch that Changes Everything

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[0 : 00] So let's have a look at Luke chapter 5 verses 1 to 11. Now many years ago I used to do a lot of travelling at night in the particular ministry that I was engaged in and I used to listen to radio shows that were on the ABC radio and there was one that was called, it was one of those talk shows loved by the ABC and it was called A Brush With Fame.

And what it consisted of was people ringing in and telling the world about the famous people they had met by chance. You know, there would be those accidental meetings with politicians, movie stars, sportsmen and women and even assorted criminal elements.

Now I wonder if you have ever had a brush with fame. You might like to think, you know, you know one of those people you just sort of accidentally come across that are famous or infamous for one reason or another.

After the service you might like to tell others about it. Now, when you met, if you ever have met such a person, I wonder if the meeting had any long-term impact upon you.

Apart from the meeting itself with such a person, is there anything you remember about that person that shaped your future existence? Friends, today we are going to look at the meeting between an ordinary person and an extraordinary person.

[1 : 21] A fisherman's encounter with the most famous man in all of history. So let's take a look and let's see what happens when these two meet. First of all, I want to tell you a little bit about our fishermen.

Now, you want to have Luke chapter 5 open. So while I open it, you can open it as well. So Luke chapter 5. Let me tell you a bit about our fishermen. His name is Simon.

Our fishermen in his day were fairly ordinary people. They were working people who were considered to have some sort of artisan skill. Simon and his friends were doing okay in developing that particular skill.

Most fishermen in their days were hired labourers, but not these ones, not Simon and his friends. You see, they owned the boats that they worked in and they owned them in what appears to have been some sort of cooperative business partnership.

He and his friends were therefore very skilled fishermen. They were good at their work and they had apparently done quite well in it. They knew what they were about and they knew they were doing okay.

[2 : 21] They had a decent income probably and they were undoubtedly comfortable, if not well off. So that's Simon. Now, chapter 5 verse 1 tells us that one day some incidents happened to him.

We don't know whether they occurred before the incidents in the previous section where Jesus is in Simon Peter's house. We don't know whether Simon and Jesus had met before, but what happens here is profound.

I mean, imagine the scene if you can. Apparently, Simon and his mates had been out fishing. As verse 2 says, they had dragged their boats to the water's edge.

The men are there, they're cleaning their nets. And now we're not told, but there's every chance that the nets they're cleaning were night fishing nets. They were, if so, they were made of linen and are not usually used during the day because they could be seen by the fish during the daylight hours.

Anyway, if they were linen nets, they were heavy and difficult nets. They needed two to four men to deploy them. They also needed rigorous washing every morning. Now, as Luke tells us in this story, in verse 6, It had not been a good night's fishing.

[3 : 32] They had been through long, a long and fruitless night. They had fished without success. And they were now tidying up their gear before they headed for home.

They were undoubtedly tired, weary, ready for bed. And as verse 3 tells us, it's into that situation that these men experience this itinerant preacher who just appears on the scene.

Now, we already know about this preacher from the preceding chapters. His name is Jesus. He has been in Nazareth. He's been in Capernaum. He has a growing reputation as a preacher.

What's more, he has a growing reputation as a person with an amazing gift of healing and exorcism. And so people are gathering around from all the surrounding area to hear him.

And on this occasion, he has chosen to preach in the open air beside the lake. There's lots of pushing and shoving, as you can imagine. And Jesus is apparently in need of a place to stand and preach.

[4 : 34] And so it is that he spies the boats and he makes personal contact with Simon. And he asks if he can make use of the boats, a sort of floating pulpit, it seems. Anyway, Simon agrees.

Jesus hops on board. Simon pushes out from the shore. Jesus sits down out of arm's length from the people and teaches the word of God from the boat. Now, in my mind, I can imagine the scene.

Simon would be pretty weary, possibly a bit down. We're not told that this sermon makes any particular impact on him as a person. But we are told that when Jesus finishes, he speaks to Simon and tells him to put out into the deep water.

And look at Simon's response in verse 5. So chapter 5 and verse 5. We read these words. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

And then look at what Simon says. Master, we have worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets. Now, these words, I think, give us a little glimpse into Peter's mind.

[5 : 47] And if I might say so, you get the impression that Peter feels as though Jesus might be teaching grandmothers to suck eggs. Do you know what I mean by that?

That is, someone unskilled trying to tell a skilled person how to do the job. After all, you see, imagine it. Jesus is simply a preacher and a carpenter.

Peter, well, he's a fisherman. Simon, he knows when to use the nets and he knows how to use the nets and he knows it is not during the day. And he knows where the fish are and he knows they are not out there today.

He has worked hard all night. He's had no success. He's got clean nets. Letting them down in the water will mean having to clean them up again. And now this raw preacher is telling him to give it another shot.

We're not told why Simon agrees. I wonder whether it's respect for the preacher. Perhaps it's a sense of owing him something for helping out his mother-in-law in the earlier chapter.

[6 : 48] But agree he does. Simon agrees to give it another shot. And he puts out into the deep and he lowers the nets into the water. And then this extraordinary thing happens.

The nets fill with fish. And they begin to break. And there's much excitement and there's urgent signalling to the other boat that's engaged in. Now, I don't know if any of you here are fishermen.

I used to fish a lot when I was a bit younger. And used to fish for these fish that came in swarms. And if you got in the right place, on the right beach, on the right day, and you cast your line out, they just went thump.

And then you pulled them in and you threw out again. And anyone anywhere else on the beach who'd seen that you got the right spot, what did they do? They tried to get as close as they could and they wished you would go home.

So they could rush in. I remember the one day this happened. We took home a bag of fish. We left. And everyone just went to that particular place.

[7 : 56] And it's sort of a bit like that here, except these are friends and so you want them to come in. And they do come in. And they work the nets together. And they manage to get a whole lot on board, even though the number of fish threatens to sink both boats.

Simon is overwhelmed. His brush with fame, if you like, turns into a brush with shame. He realizes that the man he is dealing with is no ordinary itinerant preacher.

He is no ordinary man. Somehow, we don't know exactly what he believes about Jesus at this point, but he knows that somehow he's this special agent of God, somehow inextricably linked with God.

And we know this because of the words he says in response. And in the face of knowing these truths, Simon's character is so patently obvious. Here he is, confronted with a representative of the Lord of fish and of fishermen, the Lord of nature, the Lord of men in their daily work.

And a few minutes ago, Simon Peter had presumed to tell this man that he didn't know what he was doing. And in face of such a revelation, Simon Peter knows his nature.

[9 : 13] He is patently a sinner. And sinners have no place in the presence of God or of God's messengers. And so he sinks to his knees in humility and shame in verse 8.

Can you see what he says? He blurts out to this extraordinary man, Get away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. And the great news is that Jesus doesn't depart.

Jesus has so far met with Satan who tried to tempt him to leave the correct path God had chosen for him. He had met with the people of his own hometown who tried to kill him. He had met with people who wanted him for what he could give them in terms of miracles and so on.

Here, finally, in Simon Peter, he's met with someone who understands. In this raw fisherman, he saw something he could work with.

He saw his attitude and ability and he saw it could be used in a great cause. And so he comforts and encourages Simon and his friends. And he says to them these words.

[10 : 18] Don't be afraid. From now on, you will fish for people. Can you see what he's saying? He's saying something along these lines. Don't worry, Simon. Don't let sin and shame overwhelm you.

In spite of your sinfulness, I can make something of you and I can use you. From now on, you are going to be turning your ability at fishing into a new cause.

You'll be catching people. And Simon Peter's life and the life of his partners from this day on will never be the same. And so they pull their boats up onto the shore.

And notice what it says here. They leave them. Can you see it there? So they pulled their boats up on the shore, left everything and followed him.

You see, what they have done is they've met something far more important than filling their stomachs. They have met Jesus. And they have met his purpose in life.

[11 : 21] They have met his mission. They have been integrated into the mission of God through Jesus. And so, as verse 11 tells us, Peter and his mates bring their boats on shore and leave everything and follow the new determiner of their lives.

So there's the story. Now, what's it all about? Well, at the core of this story is about a normal human being like you and me. Like all of us, this human being is consumed with the ordinary.

That is, he's a worker and he's very good at his work and he's related to real people. He's got a family. He's got friends. He's got relationships. He's interested in religion. Presumably attends a local synagogue. Undoubtedly a believer in God.

He's even a believer in the one God of biblical faith. But something happens to him this day that changes him. You see, on this day, he's confronted by God in a very special way.

In some way, his existence now assumes a new and sharp reality. Somehow, this incident causes him to become aware of reality as God sees it.

[12 : 30] And as God sees it, he is a sinner. Friends, can you understand this? The reality of life is that there is a God. And that God is the king of all the earth.

The ruler of the world, of nature, of physical existence, of spiritual existence, of us. God is the only one who knows how life is to be lived. And God is the one who knows who I am, who you are, who we are.

God is the only one who knows what is best for us and our world. God is ultimate reality in that sense. And what happens in this story is that Peter gets a glimpse of it and is shamed by his own life in front of that.

He realizes that what happened to him on the boat was a small picture of his entire existence. For on the boat, he heard God telling him to do something.

But he also heard himself tell this representative God, this God in the flesh, that doing such an action was pointless. And he also heard himself telling God that he didn't know what he was doing and that he, Peter, did.

[13 : 38] He may have humoured God and his representative. He may have gone fishing at his suggestion. But underneath it all, his attitude was one of independence and self-assertion.

How do I know that? Because that's how Peter interprets it himself. He, Peter, knew what was good for him and what worked for him. And then God did the incredible. And God acted. And God, the creator, filled his boat with fish.

And an awful reality dawned on Peter. God did know what he was doing. And that's what floored him, I think. I've struggled to try and understand this passage. The only way I can understand what's going on.

God did know more about the world and how it functioned than he did. God did know what was good for him. And God's reality he came to know was far better and fuller than his reality.

What's more, Peter was utterly sinful in doubting it and questioning it. God was right. He was wrong. God knew best. He did not. God's way was full of richness and blessing.

[14 : 41] Unlike the empty boat at the beginning, God's way was filled with goodness, richness and blessing. The fish at the end. And in this brief moment, the penny, I think, dropped for Peter.

All of a sudden, it dawned on him what life was about. Life is about knowing and loving and serving the true and living God and his son, Jesus.

And so Peter, I think, did the manly thing. He fell to his knees before God and reality and acknowledged the truth. You see, life is not about the small and limited existence he was pursuing.

Life is about knowing and loving and serving the true and living God. It's about letting him determine your existence. It's about allowing him to call the shots, going where he directs, doing what he does, saying what he says, being concerned with what he's concerned with, being at his beck and call.

To live, it was necessary to eat and therefore to do business. And being a fisherman had been as good a way of putting food in his stomach as any.

[15 : 44] Such an occupation was good and honourable in God's world. But now Peter realised there is far more to life than eating, which means there's far more to life than fishing, even when you do it with the right motives.

Life is about relating people to God. It's about spiritual fishing. And so Peter left his secular employment to devote himself to spiritual work. I want to close by reminding us of some great facts.

You see, we Christians know that God is the God of all the earth. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. He has a great purpose in his world. That purpose is that people be brought into relationship with him and live in that relationship for eternity.

This is God's great good for his world. Him and us living together in restored relationship with him and each other.

Him and us living in a new place where Satan does not dwell and we are not our own kings and queens. This is the good great God that we worship.

[16 : 53] And this good great God sent his son into the world. And this good great God sent his son into the world to die. You see, friends, in these next few weeks, we are going to be looking at the birth of this man.

And there's a great propensity for us to think this is a lovely story, isn't there? That is, it's got all those cute things. It's got babies.

It's got animals mixing around and them all being friendly, apparently. It's got people in desperate need and finding a place. It's got angels worshipping.

It's got such good stuff in it. And it looks so nice. But this one born into the world dies so that we might enter God's great good.

God sent Jesus for one great purpose, to die for us, to seek and to save the lost, which is us. God's great purpose goes on even to this day.

[18 : 00] He is still, you see, seeking the lost. He's still seeking to save the lost. And he still calls people out of ordinary life to join him. He still comes to, if I can put it this way, fishermen, carpenters, tradespeople, ex-carpenters, ex-tradespeople, retirees, IT professionals, nurses, physios, OTs, housewives, househusbands, people in every walk of life.

And he still invites them to leave ordinary life with its ordinary pursuits. And challenges them to forfeit their small ambitions, to join him in his great task.

And there is no day before your dying breath that you cannot join him in this. You see, friends, our God still calls us. Calls us out of the safeness of our suburban existence and confronts us with himself.

And so today I want to put the question to you and to ask you, do you actually hear that voice coming to you? Please don't misunderstand me. I have worked in the secular workplace and I know that God regards work as a valuable and important thing.

And I know we need good, keen Christians in every area of life. But I want you to think about what does God call you to? You see, God calls us to entire service of him wherever we are.

[19 : 34] But he particularly calls us to be proclaimers of him and of his word. Proclaimers of him and his living word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I want to ask you, have you met Jesus? Have you been forgiven by him? Have you been captivated by him?

Have you fallen before him and said, How can I be near you? Depart from me, for I'm a sinful person. Have you seen reality as God sees it?

Do you see his word for you this day? Has the penny dropped for you that this changes everything? Friends, if it changes everything, your life will never be the same again.

It will change. It will be fluid. It will be flexible. It will be filled with the dynamic and moving God who moves through the earth doing his work.

[20 : 34] It will be shaped by that God's concerns. And it will be dominated by his attitudes and his ministry. And that can go on at any time in life, in any place, in any way.

And it will take a multitude of shape and form. But that's what we're called to be. People who have given our lives, who have submitted before God, given our lives to him and said, shape me in the way that you will.

Let us pray. Father God, we thank you for this wonderful story of your calling this Apostle Peter.

Father God, we call us to be disciples, even as he was. Father, please help us to not run from your call upon our lives.

please help us to be disciples who make disciples and who grow disciples for the glory of God Father please equip us for this task and Father we pray these things in Jesus name Amen