

The Lesson on the Lake

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[0 : 00] I'm going to look this evening, with God's help, at verses 1 to 11, the incident as the second of our studies into the life of Simon Peter, where we find him here leaving his trade as a fisherman and coming to follow Jesus as his disciple.

Now the last study, the first study we saw in John's Gospel in chapter 1, and we saw how he came to know Jesus through being introduced by his brother Andrew, and how Jesus, as we saw, spoke to him and told him that he would now be called Cephas from then on, and that itself being an indication of the future that Jesus had for him as a disciple.

And it seems that since that incident some time elapsed between that and this particular instance where, incident where Jesus calls them to follow him, and where we read that they left everything and then followed Jesus from that point onwards.

It's difficult sometimes to have an exact matching together or correspondence between the Gospel of John and the other Gospels, the other three, but it seems that that's the best way of taking it that having been introduced to Jesus and having come to know Jesus, that then there's a period that elapses however long, probably not very long before Jesus again comes here to address them and call them and teach Peter here from what we'll call tonight the lesson on the lake.

It's an episode that was very much part of Peter's education. And as we mentioned last time, the more you look into the life of Peter and as we'll follow it, God willing, through the various events in which we find him with the Lord and taught by the Lord, every single one of them really is adding a layer to his education as to what it means to follow Christ and to be a disciple of Christ, or even you could say to be a Christian and what it means to be a Christian.

[2 : 04] And it's particularly for Simon's benefit, not just for his own life personally, but also for what Jesus here says to him. And as you find in verse 11, where they left everything, and verse 10, don't be afraid from now on, you will be catching men.

In other words, he is preparing him, and this is really the beginning of his preparation to be a spiritual fisherman who's going to be used by Jesus to bring other people into the kingdom of God. So what was he taught? What is the lesson on the lake? What did Peter come to understand from this episode with Jesus on the lake?

And what do we learn from this for ourselves? What is there here for us to know in terms of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, to be a follower of Christ, to be a Christian, to be savingly related to the Lord?

Well, two things. Firstly, more briefly, he learned that he must accept all of Christ's demands. He had to learn that he must accept all of Christ's demands.

[3 : 15] Secondly, and much more fully, we'll see that Peter learned that he must let Christ direct all aspects of his life. Let's look at the first of these in verses 1 to 3, that he must accept all of Christ's demands.

When the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear him, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. So he saw these two boats by the lake. They were empty. The fishermen had gone out of them, and they were doing what fishermen did, preparing for the next outing to see.

They were washing their nets. What does Jesus do? He doesn't go to Simon Peter and say, Simon, I'd like to borrow your boat. He just gets the boat and gets into it, and then asks Simon to put out a little from the land.

And Jesus just came and took possession of that boat that belonged to Simon. He didn't wait to be asked. He just gave orders to Simon, having taken over the boat for himself.

Now, we're not aware of what Simon's reaction was at that occasion, at that particular point in the episode. We know what it was like for him later on as he saw the miracle of the catch of fish.

[4 : 40] that Jesus had brought about. But just imagine, here is somebody that's coming to take possession of something very valuable to Peter, something indeed by which he needs for his ordinary, everyday life.

Just imagine if somebody came and appeared at your doorstep and said, look, I have to take your car and come and sit beside me in the car, and I'm going to tell you what to do with it.

And that's exactly what's happening with Simon Peter. Because what he's coming to realize here, or beginning to realize, as he will realize throughout the course of his own discipleship, is that actually everything he has already belongs to Jesus.

Jesus is Lord of all. Jesus can claim everything he has, including himself. And Jesus is demonstrating here that actually, yes, this is Simon's boat.

But in the ultimate sense, in the highest sense, it belongs to Jesus. He can actually use it for his own ministry here, for these moments that he's going to be preaching to the people by the lake to the crowd.

[5 : 52] And so that's what he actually shows. This is actually Jesus taking possession and showing that in himself he is the Lord of all things. He's the one who can requisition anything in the creation for his use at any time.

And there's an irony in how you see him actually coming to the cross before he's crucified, and how the cross is actually taken off his shoulder, and they have to compel Simon of Cyrene.

They have to force him into carrying this cross for Jesus, which gives you a clue that it wasn't just because Jesus had been so physically abused and was too tired to carry the cross.

We don't read that. It's just that even the last vestiges of dignity are removed from the Lord of the creation. even taking the privilege, if it is such, of carrying the cross, so that he couldn't say, having come to Golgotha, well, at least I managed to carry my cross as others who are crucified do before they crucified me.

They removed every aspect of his dignity, even to the very clothes that he wore as they hang him on the cross. And that's an irony when you think of here and elsewhere.

[7 : 18] The Lord of all the creation has a right to possession of all such things, even in the ordinary course of life, as belong to us. And that's telling us something tonight. It's that he actually demands every single thing about us, including ourselves.

He has the right to the use of it. He has the right that we give it over to him. And isn't it amazing that the Lord's kindness back in Israel, when you find that he required or demanded a tenth, a tithe of what they contributed to the upkeep of the Lord's cause, nine tenths were left for their own use.

But everything ultimately belonged to the Lord. The Lord could have said, you'll give me everything and then you'll depend on me to give something back to you. But in his kindness, though he had the right to say that, he just said, I need a tenth of it.

You give me a tenth, the rest of it you use for yourselves. It shows you the Lord is not demanding in the sense of just spoiling us of everything and demanding everything just to fleece us and leave us with nothing.

The Lord's demand is the demand of a very kind Lord, of a very considerate Lord, of a Lord who will demonstrate his care so wonderfully in Peter's life.

[8 : 46] Well, here is what he says. Now, this, of course, is not new. You find this all the way through the Old Testament. We're not going to spend too much time on this point because there's a lot to go through in the second point. But Israel, of course, this was something Israel knew right from the very outset when God delivered them from Egypt, from the bondage of Egypt.

And when he said to them that, you are now my people, you belong to me, I have made you my prized possession and I will be your God.

You see, there's the relationship, there's Israel having to accept that they actually belong to God, that everything ultimately they have belongs to God. And that's what made idolatry such a serious issue in the relationship between Israel and God.

And that's why idolatry is still such a serious issue because what idolatry does is take what properly belongs to God and give it to someone else or something else. And that's why Jesus tonight claims our entire persons, claims our offerings, claims our time, our talents, our gifts.

We are entirely his. That's how Paul, isn't it, he writes to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 6, verses 19 to 20, where he demonstrates that by the shedding of Christ's blood they have been bought, they have been purchased spiritually, they are God's possession.

[10:18] So he says, you are not your own, you are bought with a price. You are not your own, you are bought with a price. That's what Peter is beginning to learn.

He's not his own. He's not the champion of his own life. He doesn't determine what is or is not to be given to God. He doesn't actually work out and come to conclude what aspects of his life come under the Lordship of Christ and which do not.

He's not going to be the kind of Christian that says, well, yes, I have the Lord as a Savior, but I don't have him as a Lord. I don't need him as a Lord over every aspect of my life. There are some things that he leaves me to decide for myself.

No, he's saying, you belong to me. And because you belong to me, you need to accept by my grace all of my demands.

And that's what Peter will learn as his life goes on. Chapter 13 of John's Gospel. Read it again yourselves tonight if you have time in relation to this.

[11:23] And you'll find that Peter, as Jesus came to wash their feet when he came to Peter, he said, You shall never wash my feet. Are you, Lord, going to wash my feet?

And then when Jesus deals with him and says, if I don't wash you, Peter, you have no part with me. He then capitulates and then comes and says, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head. As if he's saying, well, here I am, Lord. Yes, I am yours. And you're right. I belong to you. And I have to accept your demands. Because they're always right and they're always just.

And they're always for my good. And that's what we have to learn, you and I tonight, that when Christ demands our time, the part of our time that we give to him worship, the part of our time that we give to him in other aspects of serving him, the part of our time that he leaves us to have recreation and rest, but it all belongs to him.

And we all have to give it to him, to dedicate it to him, to use it for his glory and for his praise. He must accept all of Christ's demands.

[12:39] Secondly, he must let Christ direct all of his life. Now, from verse 4 through to verse 11, that's what we're looking at in four or five points briefly.

Look at Christ's word for a start. Here is Christ saying to him to put out a little from the land. So he sat down, he taught the people from the boat, but then he goes further and he says, when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, you see, it's with Simon he's dealing all the time, put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.

And you notice he doesn't say to Simon, put out into the deep and let's see if we can catch anything. Jesus knows already what is going to happen before they ever go out into the deep. He's not saying to Simon in any way that something may or may not happen. He knows what's going to happen, so he wants and commands and requires Simon to do what he says.

And as we'll see, Simon is certainly surprised because he's been fishing there all night and he's caught nothing. But here is Jesus knowing the result already.

[13:50] Let's apply that point to ourselves before we move on to Simon's reaction. It's not for us to know the results or to worry about the results.

What Christ wants of you and of me is our obedience. Our obedient response to his word. Whatever it is through his word he's calling upon us to do for him, it's our responsibility and our privilege to actually respond obediently to that requirement.

Let's leave the results to himself. We don't have to worry about the results. Whether we're in pulpits or in pews or wherever we are in terms of our service for Christ, tonight what Christ wants of me in preaching the gospel is to be obedient to him, to preach that whole gospel.

Not to worry about people's response although it's important to us. Let him look after that. He's the one who converts. He's the one who sanctifies. He's the one who builds up his people.

He's the one who teaches. He's the one who leads. He's the one who does all of that. What we need to do, you and I, is to be obedient to his command, whatever it is.

[14:58] What he's saying to you tonight, whatever it is. Whether it's to believe in him and trust in him more, that's what you need to do. Whether it's to go and witness to your neighbor, whether it's something else other than that.

This is, in fact, what Christ requires. Leave the results to him. Leave the outcome to him. Leave the consequences to him. Just give your heart, your obedience, in response to his demand.

And the response of Simon, of course, is very understandable. Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing.

Now you see, this is the fisherman coming to the fore, the expert fisherman indeed, and of course that's what he is. And how, he's saying, you can just think in his mind, well, how does this Jesus know more about fishing than I do?

I fished there all night, and nighttime is the best and most successful time usually for fishing. Peter knows that in that context, in that place. And so you can maybe think of him in his mind, going over the wheels of his mind, just turning and saying, well, I know there's no fish in that place.

[16:08] I've spent all night fishing in that place. I've toiled all night with my fellow fishermen, and we caught fishermen, and we caught nothing. There is no fish there. And of course, Jesus is putting him to the test, whether he will be obedient or follow his own reasoning.

And that's so important, isn't it, for you and for me as well. Sometimes we may think we're having no success. Sometimes we may be tempted to think that, well, let's just do away with the preaching of the gospel, or let's do away with this aspect or that aspect of what we know the gospel itself requires of us, and let's try something else.

And the Lord is saying to us, maybe you didn't catch fish there last night, but I'm sending you back there. And I want you to go on fishing there. And I want you to continue witnessing for me there, and to live your life as a disciple for me there, where I put you, where I position you.

Leave the results to me. Leave the timing to me. Leave the outcome to me. But you go and do what I say. Isn't that what he's saying to us?

Isn't that how we should think of Christ directing all of our life? But then you see Peter says, but, and to give him his due, he says this instantly, Master, we have toiled all night, and we've caught nothing, but at your word, I will let down the nets.

[17:44] And what a difference these few words make. At your words. And isn't that how we ourselves, really what Peter is doing is, he's giving his own reasoning over to Christ's better judgment and better knowledge.

He is saying, Lord, my own reason tells me that there are no fish there. My previous experience this night, the previous night, tells me there's no fish there. But at your word, I will let down the nets.

You see, discipleship, it's not really about understanding everything about what we do for the Lord. It's not about our understanding how people come to be converted.

How God blesses his word to sanctify people under the sound of the gospel. It's not our business to attend to that. We can't understand everything about discipleship itself and our service for Christ and Christ's superior knowledge.

Again, you see, it's obedience that Peter is required to show and to act out. But at your word, I will let down the nets.

[19:00] Are you letting Christ direct all of your reasoning and your thoughts? Is your own reason delivered over to Christ tonight? There may be something in your life tonight that the Lord, by his word, is prompting you towards, prompting you to do.

And you're resistant to it as far as you're able. And you're trying to reason out yourself that really this is not the time and there's nothing there and it won't be productive.

Well, just put that aside. Let the Lord himself speak to you. Follow his word, however unreasonable it may seem, however contrary to previous experience.

say to him, Lord, at your word, because it's your word, help me to do it. Help me to be obedient.

And that obedience, of course, paid out for Peter because that night they caught, or that morning rather, they caught the best catch he had ever had in that particular locality.

[20:10] What is it that the Lord is laying on your heart to go and do for him tonight? Is it to begin following him? Is it to start the life of a disciple, the life of a Christian, a Christian life?

Is it to leave your own reasoning as to why you should not do certain things for him? Is he calling upon you to help with some work in this congregation? Is he putting into your mind something that you feel you could do, you could contribute, even if it's just making the tea or whatever, to any of the groups that meet here from time to time?

Is he calling you to help out, lead something like campaigners, or something of the work of younger children, whatever it is? Is the Lord prompting you towards that? Is the Lord putting that into your mind tonight, and even if you have your own reasons for saying, Master, we've toiled all night and caught nothing, I don't think I'm fitted out for this, leave that to him.

If it's on your heart to do it for him, leave the enabling to him, leave the outcome to him. What he wants is your obedience. What he's calling you to is obedience, and to follow him, and to let him

direct all of your life.

And then Simon's reaction, of course, next. There we are, 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.

[21 : 40] So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats until they began to sink. You have to dig in all the detail of that. Remember, this is against the previous night's experience of having caught nothing.

So they've gone from nothing to the kind of overwhelming catch of fish that's now threatening to sink the boats. And when Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

Does that surprise you? That Simon would actually make such a request, that he would have such a confession in the light of what he had just experienced?

Well, it shouldn't, because what Simon has come to realize at that very moment is that it's not fishing technique that's led to that great catch of fish.

It's not that Jesus is a better fisherman as such. What he's been witnessing, what he's experienced, is an act of God. And he realizes in that little boat that God is with him.

[22 : 52] That this person, Jesus, who has called him to be a disciple, is no less than God, no less than divine power, the Lord of creation, the Lord over all of the creation, not just this little part of it in Lake Gennesaret and this shoal of fish, big though it may be compared to the usual.

What Simon is convinced of is, this is the Holy God. God, and he's with me in this boat. And really, he's thinking, it's not appropriate for me, a sinful man, to be in the presence of this Holy God.

So he falls down at Jesus' knees. It's not just that he's taken up with the amazing catch. He is. They were all astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken.

But what he's really exclaiming is his sinfulness. He's not just surprised. He's utterly humbled. He's brought to the point where he sees himself as such a sinful man in the presence of this Holy Jesus. And people might say, well, he's a Christian, he's a believer. Now, by now, surely it's not appropriate for a believer to come to have that confession.

[24 : 18] What is he saying? Depart from me? Does he really want Jesus to leave him? Well, the answer to that is yes and no. Of course, deep down, Peter doesn't really want Jesus to leave him from now on.

But what he's really saying is the feeling of his heart at the moment is that it's not appropriate, that it's not right, it doesn't feel right for him to be in the presence of this Holy Jesus because he knows himself to be such a sinner.

How can Jesus have companionship with such a sinner? That's what he means by depart from me, Lord. It's not right that you should be in my presence, Lord, because you are holy and I'm sinful.

And it's not wrong for a disciple, for a believer at any stage of their life to have such a confession.

This fits in with what he saw this morning from Psalm 32 in David's confession of sin as he came to express his sin in the way he did to God.

And remember the three words that we saw with the comprehensiveness of sin, the whole of sin in these three words, sin and iniquity and transgression as he confessed it to God.

[25 : 34] He was a believer doing that. And so is Simon Peter here. You'll find Christians that you meet in life's journey that think that this kind of confession or this kind of outlook, if you like, is just particularly true of highland experience or island theology.

And that is something that you really try and get rid of from your Christian experience. That you move on and leave this sort of confession about sin. And why should we actually make a confession of sin in this type?

Why should we say, I am a sinful man in your presence, O Lord? We've left that behind, haven't we? No, we haven't. Because the more you look into the nature of sin as we saw this morning, and I don't mean that in terms of looking at it all the time and becoming morbid about it and looking at it in such a way as to leave you as a glum individual, somebody who goes about moping about your sins all day, that's not what we're saying.

But what we're saying is that don't think just because you know of sin in your life and sin as you see it in yourself in the presence of God, don't think that that means you're not a Christian.

Sin doesn't really bother people who are not concerned to be Christians. Sin is only a concern to someone who wants to be holy and someone who knows what the holiness of God is about even in a measure.

[27 : 14] And so it's appropriate in the right place and to the right degree that Peter comes here to fall down at the feet of Jesus and say depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

Never be ashamed of confessing your sinfulness to Jesus. Never be reluctant to respond to the holiness of God by shedding tears over your own sinfulness.

Even as a forgiven sinner, it's still important that we realize what sin is and that we realize how offensive it is to God and how we need His help in overcoming it.

And then Jesus comes to reassure him. Fourth point, Christ's word, Simon's response, then Simon's reaction to the catch of the fish, and then Christ's reassurance, because he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, so also were James and John the sons of Zebedee.

And Jesus said to Simon, you see, it's to Simon, he's focusing on Simon all the way through, do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men.

[28 : 39] Well, they were understandably afraid. It's not easy to be in the presence of such a demonstrable divine act as he had seen.

And Jesus reassures him in a way that will follow him into the rest of his ministry. His true lasting comfort is in Jesus himself.

It's in Jesus himself, not whatever means we might have that Jesus has given us, not even simply the word of God itself, not the companionship of other Christians, wonderful and important though these things are.

It's Jesus himself. He's the great comforter. He's the one who comes and lays his hand on us and says, don't be afraid, I'm in charge of your life.

I know what's going to be, and I know what's been in the past and I know what's in the present.

William Gornal, one of the great Christian authors of Puritan Times, who wrote one of the greatest books ever written, *The Christian in Complete Armor*.

[29 : 54] It's a big chunky volume like that, but you'll get some shortened versions of it as well, but the best one is the one that's got the whole book in it, but in that book he says the following, *The Christian's comfort increases or wanes depending on how his faith relates to the power of God*.

Let a man question that or his interest in it and his joy gushes out even as blood out of a broken vein. In other words, what he's saying is when we question the sufficiency of Christ's power to actually be our comfort, we hemorrhage spiritual life.

With the same faith, he goes on to say, with the same faith that you believe there is a God, believe also this God's almighty power to be your sure friend.

That's what Peter is learning. Not only does I have the powerful God, the Lord of the universe in the little boat with him, but that power is his friend. It's for his help, for his comfort.

That's why Jesus is there. That's why he must let Jesus direct all of his life, so that that power of Jesus will flow into his life in all the varying circumstances in which he will find himself throughout the course of his life.

[31 : 27] There are so many things in every individual life that have a tendency to make us afraid, aren't there? We're afraid what it might mean to follow Jesus.

We're afraid we might give up on him. We're afraid what others might think of us if we do that. We're afraid of the opinion of people around us. We're afraid of what our families might say.

We're afraid we might lose some friends. We're afraid of illness. serious illness. We're afraid when losses come our way.

They make us afraid. We feel so vulnerable in the presence of death. We're afraid of what the future might hold. How can we cope if such things as we might envisage happen to us?

how will we get on? So many things tonight that can make you afraid.

[32 : 35] If you had the opportunity of going to Peter to ask him what advice would you give me against all of these fears? Well you don't have to go far to listen to his answer because in first Peter that letter that Peter wrote you can see how well he absorbed the teaching of Jesus how much he had by that stage indeed come to accept all of Christ's demands on his life and how he had come to let Christ direct all of his life and come to know that that was for his own benefit this is what he would say to you this is what he wrote in 1st Peter 4 verses 12 and 13 beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange something out of place were happening to you but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed or go into chapter 5 and verses 6 and 7 humble

yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of

God so that at the proper time he may exalt you casting all your anxieties on him why because he cares for you that's this Lord that he had with him in the boat that's what he had learned from this and following incidents that's what's now conveyed to us through the pages of scripture that he came to accept all of Christ's demands upon his life that he let Christ direct all of his life submissive to his word responding to his holiness thankful for his reassurance where Christ was his comfort he had learned the lesson on the lake and surely you and I tonight will too and he was going to take him to a new type of fishing from now on you will be catching men

Peter the apostle spearheading the New Testament church as thousands were brought in under the gospel into the kingdom of God into the salvation that is in Christ and you know he had to leave the boat and those with him he had to leave that at the time of his best ever catch might there not have been a temptation for Peter to think well there are fish here after all let me just spend another day there Lord and then I'll come to follow you no they left all right then and they followed him that might be how your mind is working tonight and mine too to leave all and follow Jesus does not mean like Peter that you leave literally everything you possess just now everything you have in your way of life some people did that throughout the years and cloistered themselves and cells as monks that's not what the

Lord is requiring of you he doesn't want you to leave everything in that sense though for some it may come pretty close to it but you do need to leave everything that's preventing you accepting all of Christ's demands you do need to put that behind you and accept his will you do secondly need to put behind you everything that's preventing you from Christ directing all aspects of your life if you want to be his disciple as you surely do you do it on his terms you do it in a way that commits your will your preferences your reasoning to his you leave all that and you follow him and isn't that really the best thing there are no arguments in scripture that tell us it's best to delay nowhere will you find an argument that says let me fish where

I am just now and then I'll come to follow you tomorrow what Jesus is saying is this if we really are desirous to be his disciples now is the time now is the time that he requires us to do that we leave all the consequences the results the outcome to him what he requires of me and of you is our obedience to his will let's pray Lord our God we give thanks that you have made your will so clear in the word that we have already been considering this evening we thank you Lord that your claim upon us is a claim that affects every aspect of our thoughts and of our lives we pray for grace Lord for we know that in ourselves and in our own strength we are incapable of giving you that obedient response that you require so we look to you and we look to your spirit we pray that you would make us willing inwardly oh

[38 : 26] Lord to respond to your call to your claim upon us to your direction of our lives bless us now we pray and hear our prayer for Jesus sake amen let's conclude now in psalm 27 the same version of the psalm that we had previously psalm 27 in the sing psalms version on page 32 we sing the remaining verses of the psalm from verse 9b through to the end oh god my savior leave me not do not reject my plea my parents may forsake me lord but you will welcome me teach me oh lord how i should live and lead me in your way make straight my path because my foes oppress me every day and throw on so on through to the end of the psalm oh god my savior leave me not oh god my savior leave me not do not lis thanks to my friends uh

O Lord, how I should have found with me in your way.

Make straight my path, because my force oppress me every day.

Give me not over to the will of women denieries, for liar tries to slander me and breathe out cruelties.

Yet I am sure that in this life God's goodness I will see.

[41 : 05] Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart for him, wait patiently.

Amen. I'll go to the main doors now after the benediction. Lord, we pray that your blessing will follow us now into the fellowship, that you would bless the food provided for us and make us thankful for it. And again we commend to you those who will be speaking to us this evening. And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

Amen.