

Peters Calling

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[0 : 00] What I have to share with you this morning about the calling of Simon Peter is perhaps not what you would naturally think of as being a sort of missions text.

I firmly believe that service for the Lord is only effective when we have had such an encounter with God that we just feel a compulsion, a helplessness to be otherwise.

That out of the overflow of this encounter with the Lord Jesus, that his love, his word, his life flows out of us.

If we go in response out of duty, it's a very different sort of service that we do. But one that has an overwhelming sense of conviction of who Christ is, is the very heart of what a servant of God should be.

Thank you. The children's address that I did earlier was perhaps to highlight one of the big areas of our work in Latin America, the need for training, building up, encouraging, and resourcing the Latin American church.

[1 : 29] And during the sermon this morning, I'm going to tell you about another major part of our work through the means of a story. But I'll tell the story in bits.

This event of Peter's calling highlights to me three levels of relationship that he went through in coming to know the Lord.

And I'd like to suggest to us this morning that we can be one of any three of these relationships. And so as I present to you the three levels that Simon goes through in his awareness, in his obedience, and in his worship and surrender, I want you to ask yourselves, which level am I on? Make it a prayer that God would reveal to us that we would seek even more things of him to dig deeper. The first level is what I call the waiting level.

The scene opens here in chapter 5 that Simon is there at the side of the lake cleaning his nets whilst Jesus is teaching.

[2 : 45] It almost seems like it's chance that Simon is there. But as Bible-believing people, we don't believe in chance. It is the providence of God.

It was his appointment with destiny, his appointment to come to know the divineness of this man, Jesus Christ.

It's not Simon's first encounter. This is back in chapter 4. Jesus was teaching in Simon's local synagogue in Capernaum. And he delivers a man troubled by an evil spirit.

And then read what happens next in Luke chapter 4, verse 36. And they were all amazed at this deliverance of the man with the demon, and said to one another, What is this word?

For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits. And they come out, and reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. So we sense a real stirring in that community of curiosity, a mounting tension that here is a man that speaks with great authority, not only in teaching, but in commanding the works of darkness to come out of people's lives.

[4 : 14] And they're wondering and asking themselves, Who is this person, Jesus? And then in verse 38 of chapter 4, Jesus goes into Simon's house, and he heals Simon's mother-in-law.

And there's news about these healings going on, and soon there's a crowd that come with their sick, and with the demon-possessed, and the Lord meets with each one and heals them.

And then early the next morning, Jesus is out in a solitary place, and the people are searching for him, and they find him. And they want to keep him there in Capernaum.

Their curiosity is greatly aroused. But he says, No, I've got other towns to go to where the kingdom of God needs to be preached. So between chapters 4 and 5, we have this gap of time.

So Jesus' first visit to Capernaum has finished. And then he comes back in verse 5, after a period of time. And Simon has witnessed these healings, these deliverance from the demonic.

[5 : 28] He's heard teaching with great authority, and Simon is already there at the lakeshore with the other fishermen, cleaning his nets. His number one preoccupation seems to be more with his work, and with hearing the Lord's teaching.

And he is undoubtedly sympathetic. He doesn't mind the association with Jesus. But as yet, the evidence that we, the scant evidence that we have here in the scripture is that there hasn't been a significant spiritual enlightening of Simon Peter.

I want you to ask yourselves this morning, would that perhaps describe yourself? It's quite possible to be a churchgoer, to be considered part of the church, although only marginally, perhaps on the periphery, and still not be inwardly so transformed.

Consider what brings you to church this morning. Is it because coming to church is important for your spouse?

Or here you meet with a community of people who are friendly, and you are part of that? Or is church-going tradition just something that every respectable person does here in Stornaway?

[6 : 52] So at this level, if that is all that we could say about our understanding and our walk with Christ, there isn't much engagement with Jesus.

There's no real commitment. The light probably hasn't yet dawned. And yet, there may be times when God's word particularly illuminates.

It touches us. It shines into dark places, and then, it seems the light expires again. Maybe there is some sense of awe, some spirituality that is so deeply personal, that is so deeply private, that you don't share.

Maybe Simon Peter was at that very level at that time when he was on the lakeshore.

To use a football analogy, it is like you're part of the team, you wear the team strip, but you're on the reserve bench, you're a substitute.

[8 : 04] You're at the pitch, but you're not on the pitch. You're watching the action, but you're not part of the action. I want to start the story I said that I'd tell you about.

And it starts with a young girl whose name is Claudia, 18 years old. She's a student in La Paz, Bolivia. She's a Bolivian girl.

And she's on her way to university, leaves the family home. She's walking past the monument to the unknown soldier, which has quite a big square.

There's a garden around this monument in the center of La Paz. And as she walks past, she notices the gardener's angry. And he comes running along with a bucket of water.

And emerging from underneath the monument are some lads that have been sleeping there rough overnight. The big boys, they run away. But there's a wee lad of about four years old who gets this whole bucket of water thrown on him.

[9 : 09] You might think, well, it's no big deal. Maybe he's needing a wash. But in La Paz, at 12,500 feet, the temperatures go well below freezing at night.

Claudia is a Christian. She's a young Christian student. And she's got classes to go to, but she is in a predicament.

She's in this dilemma. She sees this young street child. And although she's seen street children every day of her life, there's something very special about this lad that the Lord wants her to take notice of him.

And something of a quiet revolution is going on in her heart. For the boy, he's been abandoned. He's been rejected, possibly abused. He's soaked freezing cold. And here is this young woman looking at him. And she is smiling. There is love in her eyes.

[10 : 12] And it feels wonderfully strange to him. It's quite captivating. He cannot move. And we'll come back to this story. Because this is sort of the, representing the sort of first level, this waiting level of being associated with Christ.

And yet, there's been no real radical action. Moving on to the second level, I call this level the level of being willing.

Willing to obey. Willing to follow. Jesus has a need. There's a large crowd about him. They're pressing in. And you can picture, you know, this crowd on a sort of level shoreline.

And he thinks, if I get in a boat and put at some distance between the crowd and myself, it would be much easier to teach the crowd from the boat. He sees Simon's boat.

He sees Simon there cleaning his nets. And he asks him to take him out just a little from the shore. This demands a response from Simon.

[11 : 22] He's, of course, he's willing to comply. If you go back to that football analogy, it is like, at this moment, you're the substitute that has been called.

Someone is coming off the pitch and you are being brought on to play. Are you willing to be involved? Open to being used? Willing to obey and follow where the Lord calls you? Are you willing to offer all that you have, your time, resources, a sense of commitment to dispose at the master's use?

To put it in local terms, maybe you've been invited to be part of a Bible study group and you've never done that before. Or to a friend says, come along to the prayer meeting. It would be good to have you being part of that. But maybe you've been putting that moment off until now. Maybe it is a discipleship course to understand what it is to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus.

[12 : 30] Maybe that is an opportunity that you've been putting off. And the Lord is sort of saying, come. Come and engage with me. Come and taste.

Come and see who I really am. Maybe it is, you know, stepping up a gear to be involved in some action in the community.

some evangelism, some social care program. Maybe even to consider mission. Whether it is here in Scotland or in some distant part of the world.

To go back to that story that I was telling you about the, of Claudia. Claudia responds to this overwhelming sense of love that Christ has put in her heart.

And she engages with the lad. she offers her hand to him and invites the boy back home. This is her engagement with, with the work of Christ.

[13 : 36] For the boy, he is strangely moved by this, the love that the stranger shows. For him, he's never known any love. And here's this hand being offered.

A hand of a smiling stranger. And he's asking himself, do I take this? Or do I just continue living wild? A sense of freedom.

All he's known of a home has been of abuse. And unkindness and rejection and great brokenness. As he prepared to take that risk and go with this young girl back to her home.

To the family home. Now the family are surprised when Claudia brings this young boy because he decides to go with her. And she turns up and soon Claudia in the following days and weeks is beginning to engage with lots of other street children as well.

This young lad becomes part of the family. And it's very dangerous to the sorts of places that Claudia as an 18 year old girl is going into. Places where she might be stoned.

[14 : 48] And her parents challenge her. Her parents are Christian but they're saying there are so many hundreds of children just sleeping rough on the streets of La Paz.

What are you going to do? You can't save them all. You can't rescue them all. And Claudia's reply is always really struck firmly with me. She said even if I touch the life of only one child I change the world.

If I touch the life of one child I change the world. She condensed her Christian responsibility into something manageable something responsive where she would walk in trust and in faithfulness with God to see him do a work in and through her.

return to the Bible the scene now develops on a simple level it seems that Jesus wants to repay Simon for his kindness and using the boat by providing a catch of fish but on a profound level Jesus wants to reveal to Simon Peter who he really is and make him into something more than a caster of nets.

In verses 4 and 5 we read when he had finished speaking he said to Simon put out into the deep let down your nets for a catch and Simon answered master we've toiled all night and took nothing but at your word I will let down the nets.

[16 : 24] Christ asks a fisherman to do something that doesn't make practical sense fishing by daylight in the bright sun of Palestine isn't the time to go fishing you fish at night to catch fish but all night they had been fishing and had caught nothing and it's interesting Simon's reaction that even though it goes contrary to his human reasoning his practical knowledge about his occupation there is something about the Lord Jesus that makes him say because it's your word because you say so I will do it.

I wonder how many times we felt perhaps a little prick of conscience a little prompting like Claudia had when she stopped before that wee lad in the square.

how often have we perhaps just kind of dismissed it and think it's just a figment of my imagination just something that I'm just being a bit silly about and just disregard it or have we been prepared to stick our neck out to put our reputation on the line and think I think this might be from the Lord I'm going to go with this prompting and trusting him to outwork his purpose that's what Claudia did she she responded in a way that that young lad had never known before and he took the hand that was offered her an extraordinary thing for someone to do you don't see that happening in the streets of La Paz quite contrary to human practice human reasoning so we need to be in touch with the still and quiet voice of God as he whispers that we won't be dismissive but be daring trusting maybe testing as well is it what I'm being asked to do contrary to what

God's word says if it isn't contrary then explore it further well Claudia she had many contacts with the street children and her uncle has an old dilapidated house in La Paz and hearing of a concern for the street children he offers this house and the children are overjoyed they can have a place of their own and they go out trying to earn what money they can from shining shoes cleaning windscreens of cars up at the red traffic light and just doing what they can to bring in a few Bolivianos that's their currency back to the home and although they're very hard working and out for long hours they can't bring in enough money to help run a home like this furthermore Claudia's parents who are quite well to do they're not very wealthy they'd reached the end of their resources and they said to

Claudia enough we cannot go on we've reached rock bottom you have to tell the children to leave the house and we're closing it up and they just have to go back at least they've had some love some compassion shown in their lives you've made a difference but Claudia didn't want that and yet when she looked at the situation it was very grim there was no funds coming in and at that moment she really cried out to the Lord in fact she was almost angry with God and she was saying you know you moved me to take this child you've moved me to reach out to the others have won their trust and it's come to a time like this that we're just going to tell them to go back on the street

[20 : 45] Lord we cannot do anything more unless you directly help us and she sort of left that ultimatum she'd already received the ultimatum from her parents that they've got to go out but she just held fire and said no another day and another day within a week of her praying like that an organisation had heard about Claudia's work and said that we would promise resources in terms of people and finance and to get alongside this work and so our organisation Latin Link got involved with the work of Claudia now I've strayed a lot from my notes just bear with me one moment I wonder what it is that maybe the Lord is challenging us with right now what are our natural objections lack of finances lack of training lack of ability to do these things or will our reaction be like

Simon says but because you say so I will that in spite of all the human rationale you have sensed this is of the Lord and even though I don't understand this calling this nudge from God I'm going to go with it is that our reaction because if we don't respond in that way we'll never reach probably this third level which Simon Peter comes to and this third level is a level of wonder we've seen this period of waiting sort of sitting on the sidelines of just being an observer not really being part of what it is to follow the Lord and then we've seen that second level of being willing to obey to put your resources at God's disposal willing to be used and then we get to this wonderful level of it's revelatory it is an encounter with the whole person of

Jesus Christ to go back to that football analogy it is like you've gone from the reserve bench you've been playing on the pitch and in the last minute it's been nil nil you score that last goal that final goal the one goal that has made all the difference now an encounter with Christ is far greater than that but it's just to try and help us engage with these different levels of where we're at because as Simon has responded there is such a huge catch of fish the nets are breaking there's the extra boat that is called to come in and help haul in these breaking nets and the two boats are literally beginning to sink with the quantity of fish and these are fish caught in the middle of the day and they've been fishing all night and it's a very human reaction that

Simon has saying don't choose me Lord you've got the wrong person I'm not gifted enough I'm not good enough I'm not holy enough and so we give our excuses to God when we went before the OMF mission committee for selection they gave us a hard time they left no stone unturned and we were asked to leave the room whilst they discussed and we thought that's it there's no way they will want us and we were called back into the room and I was just hoping for the whole thing to pass really quickly because I thought there's no way they want us they've known too much about us and they struck me what she said she said up until today I had a huge respect for the mission RMF but

now you've accepted us you know my attitude has changed because you're taking on people who are not superb high flying

Christians people who are not especially gifted people who are not experienced in mission work you're just getting the husband and I who are we compared to the likes of people that we've been praying for for years and years and we felt very unworthy and just thankful that you know this organization said we take you as you are you'll be the people that Christ wants you to be it's just a step of obedience of walking in humility so I encourage you today if you've been somebody that fails very low about your own self esteem don't let that get in the way of serving God he takes us as we are Jesus knew exactly what Simon was like he knew that you deny him three times because he's the all knowing God but we're chosen to show his extraordinary excellence through the very ordinariness of our own lives it is the jars of clay that

[28 : 21] Paul writes about outwardly we're just earthen vessels ordinary people men and women that make mistakes but inside there is a treasure the treasure of Christ that can shine out just as Claudia communicated with that child by the love that was shining through her the love of Christ so Jesus looks at Simon with compassion there's no doubt that he's a sinner he's going to let him down at some point but hear what Jesus says in the second part of verse 10 says Jesus said to Simon do not be afraid from now on you will be catching men just put those words sort of addressing yourself if you're in that place that Simon Peter felt is totally abased unworthy sinful and think

Lord you've got the wrong person the Lord knows what we're like and he says yeah I am choosing you and I've got a purpose for you I know what you're like he takes us as we are Paul writing in 1st Corinthians 1 says brothers think of what you were when you were called not many of you were wise by human standards not many were influential not many were of noble birth but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong he chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one can boast before him that the excellence of Christian ministry is from God and it is so obviously of God that it makes all the difference because people see beyond the human instrument to the divine person of Christ working in through the servant so if you're a person that has been excusing service in whatever capacity out of a sense of unworthiness you're in the same camp as everyone don't make it an excuse anymore just say

Lord just take me as I am are you ready to take the master at his word that he will use you are you prepared to trust him for the supply of all that you need whether it be finance wisdom spiritual gifts an ability to do the work that God is calling you to do verse 11 says and when they had brought their boats to land they left everything and followed him that's the appropriate response out of the abasement of our realization of who we are compared to the glory and the perfection the purity and holiness and the love of God in Christ our responses will follow a sense of blindly following but a sense that our trust is in one who is absolutely faithful the one who is all powerful all knowing he will not make mistakes and he's prepared to use us go back finally to that story in Bolivia with our partnership with

Claudia and other organizations hundreds of street children have been rescued many renewed in Christ and when I was in La Paz a couple of years back two of these street children had come through the project they were young men by this time part of a church in La Paz and they were two in a team of six that went to a closed Middle Eastern country they were taking 300 new testaments with them in the local language they knew what they were doing was against the strict Islamic laws of the country and yet they felt compelled with an urgency and the love of Christ to reach out a very risky sort of mission a daring exploit because of the penalty that could be incurred for illegally bringing Bibles into this fundamental Islamic country at the customs they were asked to empty their bags and there was no way they could hide 300 new testaments even though they tried to drape a few shirts and towels to minimize the bulk of Christian literature they were bringing in it was obvious that here was this group bringing this enormous quantity of literature in and the leader of the group was suddenly afraid he was thinking at the best we're going to be deported but at the worst we could be lashed put in prison and who knows we're just

Bolivians of no real consequence in the international arena we might just be executed it's within the law of the Islamic country to do that and he sent up this help prayer to God and he sent God saying to him when the customs officer asked you what these books are invite him to take one to look at it and that's exactly what happened so the leader of the group said well take one and take a look at it

when the customs officer put his hand on top of the pile all his great superiority and might that was invested in him as immigration officer seemed to be just swept away the man's face just drained white something of the fear of God just overwhelmed this individual he just all he could say was go take these books and do what you need to do with them it is an awesome thing to trust

[34 : 45] God even when it goes contrary to reason you see a new dimension a new level of wonder of the greatness of Christ a God who is the same yesterday today and forever that event happened in 2006 and I could keep you for hours and I'm not going to you'll be glad to hear of telling you of many encounters of this nature that I've personally witnessed on the mission field and I'm so glad of that step of obedience with God it is so exciting being out of your depth with God because we can no longer rely on our own human resources but we have to be so prayerfully dependent upon God and when we reach that position expect new horizons to open up and see the greater person of who

Christ is so what is your level that you're on let's pray as you go home today and ponder this message this afternoon that God would show to you exactly where you are are you still on the sidelines are you waiting not really involved have you reached that stage where you are willing you are engaging and even in spite of human rationale you are perhaps questioning I urge you if you are at a state where you're thinking should I do this but it doesn't make sense but I feel the sense that I should do test it does it live up to the rest of scripture what you've been prompted to do is it in accord with God's revelation and his words and if it is then pursue it go prayerfully forward with great humility but with a trust and a faith

God's voice is often the small and quiet voice that we can often dismiss as our own idle fancy it's rarely a crash of thunder so I just ask you to be a people that will be in tune ready to respond let us pray father you don't need us to confess that we are unworthy we thank you that you are a magnanimous god a god full of mercy a god so forgiving a god who chooses the weak things of this world the foolish things in order to show your incomparable power of the gospel help us to be a people that would move up a level and if we have been on that top level pray that you would continue to exercise us with a sense of wonder a sense of worship of who you are that our lives would be just an ongoing love story of walking obediently with you forgive us oh lord where we have quenched your spirit where we have rationalized and that's given up on opportunities that you were presenting to us but thank you that you are

God that gives many chances to help us to get in tune in hearing your still and quiet voice of your spirit in our lives that we may be a little bolder a little more discerning less dismissive that we can walk with you in newness of life that would be a people growing in trust growing in obedience and that obedience will be an expression of our love for you use as we pray father forgive our many sins renew us and speak to us we pray for your kingdom's sake and for the sake of the glory of Christ that he would shine in us that we would diminish and he increase and his be all the glory amen