

The Way of Progress

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Luke's Gospel, chapter 5. And reading again, well, it's verse 5, I want this to home in on, but we can read verse 4.

And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. Verse 5, And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing.

But at your word, I will let down the nets. But at your word, I will let down the nets. Now, I'm quite sure that the scene that we have before us of Jesus in the boat, teaching the crowd who are gathered around the shore, would be an artist's dream.

It's a kind of painting that an artist, I'm sure, would love to be able to paint. This great crowd gathered around the shore, and this boat pushed just a little bit out, with the water probably lapping gently around it, the sun shining.

And it's a sort of picture, I would well imagine, that an artist would love to paint. There were no cameras in these days, but I'm quite sure if people had cameras, people would be taking photos of it.

[1 : 28] It would have been a beautiful setting. Maybe it wasn't a beautiful day, but I would well imagine it was. When I read the like of this, I remember quite a number of years ago, being on a cycle around the Holy Land.

And I remember coming to the shores of Galilee, we had cycled from Nazareth down to Canaan, down to Capernaum, and such like. I remember coming to the shores of Galilee about midday, and we all went into the water.

It was a beautiful day. And then sat and had something to eat. There was about 120 cyclists. And this, the image that we have here before us, came so forcibly before my mind.

And I was thinking, I wonder if it was a day just like this. It was a beautiful day. And just thinking of a boat, here's this group of people by the shore, and Jesus out in the boat, teaching the crowd.

Anyway, Jesus, of course, when he comes down, and he had been, there was this great crowd. And as we know from the incident, he borrowed Simon's boat because the fishermen were cleaning their nets at that particular time.

[2 : 41] He borrowed Simon's boat, and he went out, just pushed a little from the shore, and he taught the people. Now, although Jesus had contact with these men earlier, it's very obvious that at this particular juncture, they had not gone into the full-time work of following Jesus and serving Jesus and ministering with Jesus.

Now, very interestingly, Luke doesn't give us any indication of what Jesus taught at that particular time. We hear, actually, when you think about how much he taught, how many sermons he preached, how many lectures he gave, how many times he sat down and spoke to people, we're actually given very little information about what Jesus actually said.

We're actually not told anything on this account at this time. However, when Jesus had finished teaching, and I would imagine the crowds had begun to disperse, and probably Jesus would have taken the boat back in, and Simon would no doubt be helping Jesus to come out of the boat and come ashore, Jesus turns to Peter, and Jesus says, Right, Peter, launch out or put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.

Now, straight away, there's protest from Peter. And we read these words because Peter says, Master, he said, we toiled all night and took nothing.

These men had been fishing for the whole night. They'd spent the whole night fishing. And they weren't out fishing just for fun, or what many of us may do, go out for an hour or a couple of hours to a loch, and just try our luck, see if there's anything doing.

[4 : 30] If we get something, it's great. It's a bonus. If we don't, well, it's no big deal. But it was a big deal for these men because this was their livelihood. This is what they did. They weren't out fishing for fun.

They were out fishing in order to make a living. And it must be one of the most frustrating and demoralizing things to spend a night working, spend a whole night fishing, and not to get a thing.

You know, it's quite interesting. When you watch fishing boats come back in, when they're coming close to the pier. Now, I know that seagulls will give the game away whether fishing boats have fish on board or not.

But, you know, even if there were no seagulls about, the very posture, the very stance, the very attitude, the very manner of the fishermen on board will indicate to you whether they've caught fish or not.

Because if they've spent hours and hours slaving away and they've got nothing, there's almost a stance of dejection. You can almost feel the gloom about the fishermen.

[5 : 40] There's just this spirit of, well, that's been hard going, and we've got nothing. And the reverse is through. You can see when there's been success, there seems to be an attitude of buoyancy, buoyancy, and there's this sense, well, we've got something after all.

And so, when Jesus said to Peter, right, Peter, turn the boat around, head straight back out, launch out into the deep, and let down, put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.

And that was really the last thing that Peter wanted to do. And Peter's reaction, actually, is very, very interesting. When Jesus wanted Peter's boat for preaching, Peter had absolutely no problem with that.

You can almost imagine when Jesus asked Peter for the boat, Peter rushing, and you can almost see him scrubbing it, might be a wee bit covered. Well, there weren't obviously scales from the last fishing because they hadn't got anything.

But maybe he was making everything just clean and making sure that everything was spot on for Jesus. Jesus had asked his boat for preaching and teaching. Yes, Lord, I'll give you no problem.

[6 : 52] But at this particular point, there is a problem for Peter. And the problem, Peter's problem, is really this. Peter is saying to himself, when Jesus asked me for that boat for preaching, well, Jesus is a man who knows all about the preaching and the teaching.

That's not my area. That's not my department. I'm more than happy to give him the boat. But when it comes to fishing, nobody can tell me because I'm the one who knows all about fishing.

You see, this is Peter's territory. And fishing is what Peter is all about. This was his life. And there wasn't much about fishing that Peter didn't know.

Peter knew the times. He knew the tides. He knew the winds. He knew the cycles. He knew the spots, where there was fish. He knew that sea like the back of his hand.

And right now, as far as Peter was concerned, it was futile. It was a waste of time to go out because he knew that at this particular point, they wouldn't catch any fish.

[8 : 07] But you know, when you see the attitude of Peter, we've got to take that spirit to our shelves as well. And I think we can be guilty of thinking in the very same way as Peter.

because we are more than happy to allow the Lord to be Lord of our life in what we term the spiritual things. For instance, in the church, whether it's in church or worship or prayer or Bible reading or in witnessing or in service or in whatever form of service we may be engaged in, we of course turn to the Lord and say, Lord, this is your work.

Please direct me and guide me and lead me and we commit everything to the Lord and we're, that's the way it is. And we say, this is the Lord's area. This is His department.

But when it comes to the everyday things in life, are we as ready to hand over to the Lord or is there something of the attitude of Peter within our spirit, within our own heart?

Do we hand over everything to the Lord? For instance, in running a business, in managing a home, do we hand over everything to the Lord in dealing with the issues and problems of life, in our leisure, in our friendship, in all 101 different things that life involves?

[9 : 35] or is it selective what we give to the Lord? Or do we just, in a kind of a blanket way, say, well, Lord, guide me this day. But do we really hand over our work to the Lord?

If we are here and we are working in whatever way or capacity, do we give that work to the Lord and ask that we might be faithful, loyal, diligent workers, and that we will, in our work, that we will work to and for him?

In the managing of our home, is that what we do? Because, you see, if we don't, we're kind of guilty of the same spirit and same attitude of Peter.

Because Peter was more than happy to give part to the Lord by saying to the Lord, this is my area. This is my department. I know all about the fishing. And our knowledge of certain things can sometimes be a danger because we think, I know all about this.

This is something I'm in charge of. This is something I can control. And we might be guilty of not handing these things to the Lord. And so we need to hand everything to the Lord.

[10 : 52] We need to hand our tongue to the Lord. Lord, control my speech. Be Lord of my tongue. And I think that's a prayer we all need to pray.

Lord, be in control. Be head of my eyes, my ears, my hands, in all the different things in life. Because so often we can be guilty of holding back certain things and saying, right, Lord, Lord there, but not here.

This is mine. And that, to a certain extent, is what Peter is showing us and Peter is teaching us here. So we need to have the Lord as Lord of all our life rather than of some of it.

But then I love what Peter says because while Peter objects, and you can almost think Peter saying, Lord, you can almost, I don't want to put words in Peter's mouth, but the way Peter is speaking and he's saying, Master, we've toiled all the night and taken nothing.

He's really saying, do you realize what you're asking us to do because it's a futile exercise.

[12 : 03] I don't really think there's any point going back out, but what I love about Peter is this, he submits to the word of God because he says, despite what I think, despite the frustration of the night that has just gone, at your word, I will let down the nets, at your word, Lord, I'll do just what you've said.

I'll turn this boat round and our crew will head out and we'll do exactly what you said. And that's what I love about Peter, despite his own hesitancy, his own inclination not to, his own sense of this is a waste of time, yet there's this willingness to do what the Lord says.

And you know, that is something that we've got to learn as well because Jesus was going to teach, and we're not going to look at that, it would be worth coming back to look at this passage again because it is so full of teaching.

But Jesus is going to teach Peter a vital lesson. And he's going to teach the disciples a vital lesson. And he's going to show them that he's going to take them away from fishing for fish to fishing for men.

And that the only way they can do that is in dependence upon the Lord and in obedience to God's command. And that's what Peter has to learn and Jesus is going to show this in a very illustrative way through what Peter is most familiar with himself.

[13:48] And you know, my friends, it's the same today. We must adhere to what the Lord says. But at your word, I will let down the nets.

Now, you know, there's many a time, I'm sure, in our own experience that we've maybe not as vivid or as powerful a way as Peter came to learn.

But I'm sure many of us could look back and say, you know, I wasn't for doing such and such a thing. But I believed from God's word it was right to do.

I found it difficult to do. And yet, having done it, I discovered it was right and God was the one who blessed it. You see, God's word is clear to us that we have to follow God's word whether we understand it or not.

And you know, there's lots of things we don't understand. And I don't believe that there's any student of God's word. And when I say a student of God's word, I don't mean somebody who is simply at the stage of learning.

[14:56] But I would go as far as to say all the great minds, all the great teachers, all the great learned people down throughout the centuries.

I don't believe there's one of them that is able to understand all that the Bible says. We can sometimes lay hold upon things at a surface level. Sometimes we can probe in and learn a little.

But there's a wealth, there's a depth of knowledge here. And there are times that we have to say such knowledge is too strange for me. It's too high to understand.

There's times we've got to admit that and accept that. And there will also be times where we don't understand God's ways and God's dealings. Because there will be times when it appears that God's word and God's providence are in conflict.

And there will be times that we're left confused. Because we don't understand the way God is working. It seems to be going against his love and his grace and his mercy.

[15:58] But it's not. It's never in conflict. It's just our understanding is so in the here and now. Our understanding is so limited.

And we need to pray for the vision. Even although we do have spiritual vision, we'll never be able to comprehend the fullness of it. But that we might be given the faith to submit to the Lord and to believe the Lord and accept the way the Lord is working.

God's word over and above everything else. Our own feelings, our own inclinations, our own desires.

I would even go as far as to say we have to believe and adhere and accept and follow God's word over and against what other people may say. Now of course a lot of what we do in life is we often find ourselves asking other people's advice and it's good also in the Christian life to ask older Christians, more mature Christians.

What do you think about this? It's a good thing and it doesn't say an awful lot for a person who will never ever ask anybody advice in their life. I think it's a good thing sometimes to bounce off.

[17:18] Sometimes it reaffirms what you yourself think but it's good to hear it from somebody else. Sometimes when you bounce something off a person they come back with something you had never thought of and it's a good thing to work like that.

It opens our minds. But you know the one we should always be going to is the Lord and saying Lord what will you have me to do?

And you know if we live with this dependence upon the Lord it's amazing how often the Lord will guide you and direct you daily. and how often you found it in your reading.

You go you have an issue you have a problem you have a difficulty and you're saying Lord I really I'm really at a crossroads here. I have a problem here. You go to your reading in the morning or the reading at night or something you pick up the word and it seems to be just answering it seems to be just what you wanted.

That's the Lord. and he gives you the faith to lay hold upon it. And when that happens you take that word because it is God's word to your soul and you're to live on that and depend on that and act on that because this is the way our faith will grow it will develop.

[18:36] And that is why sometimes there are problems because God calls us to do things that we don't want to do. God sometimes calls us to go to places that we don't want to go to.

But we've got to. If this is what the Lord is saying to us this is what we've got to do. Now of course God's timetable may be different to ours but the thing is we've got to go by faith on what the Lord is saying.

And of course again that is part of the great problem in God's word is the great conflict between the flesh and the spirit. The spirit is saying put to death mortify the deeds of the body.

The body is saying no don't take it easy take it easy I want to be pampered I want to give in to everything that I feel within me and straight away there's conflict.

This is the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. And so we find that these are battles. Let us not in any way underestimate and say oh it's no problem. It's a huge problem.

[19:53] But we need grace we need help we need strength in order to be delivered and in order to progress and to go forward in these things. But you know we've always got to do what the Lord says.

Sometimes as we say it doesn't make sense. Remember Philip. Philip was in the midst of a great ministry. the Lord pulled him out of that ministry and he said I want you to go out to the desert.

You'd say to yourself I'm sure Philip as he went away from ministering and seeing fruit for his labors and he finds himself and the Lord says I want you to get up from here and I want you to go away into the wilderness into the desert.

Philip as he's marching into the desert with nobody about must be saying to himself what on earth am I doing here? Well I would be saying that. But it was there it was for one man Philip was sent there.

Remember the Ethiopian eunuch? And Philip was used by the Lord to bring that man to saving faith in Jesus Christ. That traveler through the desert, through the wilderness.

[20:57] And the Lord will do that because that one soul was important to the Lord. He was going to save that Lord and save that man. And Philip, you're the man who's to save him.

So you've got to leave where you are and go down there. And that's the way God works. And that is why we must be receptive and we must be obedient to what God's word is saying because the Lord is going to challenge us all the time in this way.

So when this word calls us, we are to respond. And may I say to anybody in here today who does not know Christ as Savior, the word is calling you today to believe.

That's what God's word is saying. It's straight, it's forceful, it's powerful, and there's no beating about the bush. It's not saying I can believe a wee bit.

It's total belief. It's total acceptance. It is giving your heart, your life, your all to the Lord. That is the call of the gospel. And that is what we are required to do.

[22:03] There is no other way to be saved. And you know it's wonderful when we see the Lord fulfilling his word. And that's exactly what Peter learned.

That when he would become obedient to God, and that he would go in submission to what the Lord required, the Lord was going to even exceed what he expected.

Peter went out, he said, oh well, but he said, at your word, we will go out and let down the nets. And they had a catch the like of which they had never caught before.

They had to ask for help to come to pull in the nets. The nets were virtually bursting on them. And so the Lord was teaching Peter that this is a way of progress.

And you know, if we do what the Lord says, not, and this is a danger, we don't do, that we do what the Lord says simply to get the reward.

[23:09] You know, there's different ways of doing things. We've got to be careful. And we need the right spirit and attitude. We aren't to obey the Lord simply out of a legalistic way where we say, oh, I don't want to do this, but I suppose I better.

In a sense, Peter was like that, but it was faith that took him out. We're not to do it either in the sense where I'm saying, well, right, if I do this, then God owes me one.

You know, sometimes people have that attitude. If I do this, then God owes me. That's the way it works. That's the way I figure it out. If I do this, then God will do that.

That's not the way we're to do anything as well. We're to do it out of a heart of love. Out of a heart of wanting. And that's why we need God's grace. We need God's help.

So that every single day that we will have this focus of the Lord, of who He is, of His love to us, and to realize that this is life.

[24:19] You know, Satan will try and delude us. Our own heart will try and delude us and say it's not life, but it is. the greatest joy, the greatest peace, the greatest satisfaction in this world is found in having the Lord and being completely focused upon Him.

you look at the Apostle Paul. Paul was a man who was single-minded in his pursuit of the Lord. And there was nothing that gave him more joy and more satisfaction.

Paul was a man who was the envy of many in his community. He had made it as far as his world and the religious world was concerned. Paul threw it all away when he saw Jesus.

And you know, it's possible, my friends, to see Jesus and yet to be like Peter at one stage following Him afar off. But you know, when we follow, you know, let's say it's good to be even if we're following afar off, let us thank the Lord we're following.

But following afar off, we miss the joy, we miss the thrill, we miss the closeness, we miss the filling that the Lord delights to give His people.

[25:45] Let us seek then that we will depend upon this word, that we will live upon this word, and that this word will become our life. Let us pray.

O Lord, our God, we pray that this word, the word of God, may indeed shape us and mould us more and more where we will be conformed to the image of Christ.

Lord, we give thanks for Thy patience, because some of us must be very difficult to mould and to shape. We thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou art dealing with us not according to our deserving, but that that moulding and shaping is being done in love.

we pray that there might be a growing willingness within our heart to follow the Lord with all our heart. Deliver us, Lord, from the wrong views that we have, and help us to have a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

O bless us, we pray, and take us all home safely, doing us good, and forgive us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen.