

Luke 5:1-11

5:1 *One day Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee. The people crowded around him as they listened to God's word.*

As Jesus continued to spread the Gospel throughout the towns of Galilee, a crowd of people found Him standing on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He was not simply passing time along the seashore. He was preaching the Good News, and the people were drawn to Him because of what they saw during previous gatherings. A pattern had developed. The Galilean crowd would find Jesus wherever He was so that it could hear Him teach and receive healing from His hands.

The Sea of Galilee is north of the Jordan Valley, twenty-seven miles east of the Mediterranean Sea and sixty miles northeast of Jerusalem. It is twelve and a half miles long and four to seven and a half miles wide. Its surface is six hundred eighty-two feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. It abounds with fish and supports a healthy fishing industry.¹

5:2 *Jesus saw two boats on the shore. The fishermen had stepped out of them and were washing their nets.*

The size of the crowd grew quickly. Jesus searched for a way to keep some distance between Himself and the people so that He could properly address them. Not too far from His location, Jesus spotted two empty boats that were vacated by the owners while they washed their fishing nets.

5:3 *So Jesus got into the boat that belonged to Simon and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Then Jesus sat down and taught the crowd from the boat.*

Jesus picked one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to move offshore a comfortable distance in order to address the people. Simon was one of the first four disciples that Jesus called to follow him (*Mark 1:16-18*). As soon as the boat took up a position a little distance from the shore, Jesus sat down in the boat and began to tell the people the Good News. Jesus had to remove Himself from the press of the crowd so that He could address them together, much as a pastor addresses a congregation. Although Jesus often ministered to people on an individual basis, His message was the same to everyone. Consequently, this day He sought to remove Himself from individual demands so that He could speak to all the people at the same time.

5:4 *When he finished speaking, he told Simon, "Take the boat into deep water, and lower your nets to catch some fish."*

As soon as He finished teaching the people along the seashore, Jesus turned to Simon and told him to venture out farther into the sea and drop his net to catch some fish. Jesus' request may appear to be a call for some fun and recreation after an intense meeting with the Galilean crowd. It sounds as if Jesus said, "Let's go for some deep sea fishing now that we are done with these people."

However, subsequent verses tell a different story. Jesus wanted to teach Simon and those disciples who were with him a specific faith

lesson. Jesus told the crowd about the Good News of God's salvation. He told them that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

Jesus now wanted to give special instruction with one of His closest disciples. He personally called each of them to follow Him. Such commitment required more perseverance and a refinement of faith and conduct. Therefore, Jesus took them away from the crowd for some serious lessons that would have a profound impact on their awareness of Who He was.

5:5 *Simon answered, "Teacher, we worked hard all night and caught nothing. But if you say so, I'll lower the nets."*

Simon Peter was confused by Jesus' suggestion to go fishing because he had tried all night long without any success. Simon was an experienced fisherman. As far as Simon knew, Jesus was the son of a carpenter Who knew very little about fishing.

We do not know what crossed Simon's mind when Jesus suggested that they go deeper and catch some fish. Simon might have thought that this was the overconfident statement of someone who was not a fisherman. But then, Simon had seen what Jesus was capable of doing. He had heard Him speak God's truth with power and authority. He had watched Him heal the sick and drive demons out of people.

Simon Peter literally said that he knew that there were no fish to catch. However, he agreed to try again anyway because Jesus said to do so. Clearly, he doubted the value of such a seemingly futile exercise.

5:6 *After the men had done this, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to tear.*

Simon Peter's crew rowed the boat farther out from shore, dropped the nets, and caught a huge quantity of fish. What a complete surprise! Simon had to immediately put aside his doubt and mild resistance and get to work hauling the fish to shore. The volume of the fish they caught exceeded the capacity of the net they used.

Even though Simon and his companions did not realize the full revelation of Jesus' divine origins, they had just witnessed an event that proved that Jesus also exercised authority over the processes of the natural world.

As noted above, Simon felt certain that there were no fish to catch because he had not found any the night before. He did not hesitate to share his expert opinion with Jesus, Who was a powerful teacher and a healer, but not a fisherman. But now, Simon saw that Jesus was not merely a highly skilled teacher and healer. Now, Simon had to think more seriously about this Man Who exhibited such astounding control over even the fish of the sea.

5:7 *So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. Their partners came and filled both boats until the boats nearly sank.*

The net was too heavy for the people in Simon's boat to pull it on board, so they called their partners for help. Their partners had followed them as Simon took the boat into the deep water at Jesus' firm suggestion. Because they were close, Simon was able to catch their attention.

Their partners might have wondered what was going on because they had shared the same experience as Simon the night before. Nevertheless, like Simon, his partners were also surprised by the quantity of fish they saw when they came near Simon's boat. They filled both boats to capacity, and the load of fish weighed the boats down to dangerous levels. Simon had gone out with one boat simply to appease Jesus. However, they returned with two boats full of fish barely able to keep them afloat. Doubt was defeated and God was glorified.

5:8 *When Simon Peter saw this, he knelt in front of Jesus and said, "Leave me, Lord! I'm a sinful person!"*

For the first time in his narrative, Luke presented Simon by his name Peter. This was the name Jesus had given to Simon when Andrew, Simon's brother, brought him to Jesus. In fact, Luke told readers in 6:14 that Jesus had named him Peter (*John 1:42*). In contrast to the discouragement of the previous night, Simon Peter and his partners were now incredulous at the quantity of fish they had caught. Even though they may not have understood the full impact of their experience, they knew that their success depended on Jesus' presence. Simon Peter's reaction painted an even more telling picture of the impact of his unique experience with Jesus. This man, who was an expert fisherman, now realized that he had no business talking to the Creator of the sea about fishing. In fact, he learned that the truth Jesus wanted him to understand was not related to fishing. He understood that his doubt about Jesus exposed his sinful nature. In the presence of the One Who had come to deliver him from that condition, Simon Peter began to understand the true nature not only of his own heart, but also of the Man, Jesus of Nazareth. When Simon Peter finally realized the truth, he fell at Jesus' feet, overwhelmed by fear.

Amid the number of fish that nearly sank two boats, Simon Peter found himself in contempt of the Son of God Who cared enough to direct him to go fishing. Trembling with fear and desperation, Simon Peter begged Jesus to leave him alone because he felt worthless, knowing that he should not be anywhere near the Holy One of God.

As impressive as the number of fish was, Simon Peter was more impressed by his own doubt, wondering why he ever questioned this Jesus Who healed the sick and drove out demons. He had been present when Jesus healed his mother-in-law, yet Simon Peter still doubted Jesus when he told him to go deeper and drop his net to catch some fish. Simon Peter realized his doubt was an indication of his sinful condition; however, instead of seeking forgiveness, he wanted to separate himself from the presence of God's Holy Son because he recognized the gulf that separated him from Jesus. Simon Peter recognized his own sinfulness and Jesus' holiness, and he was profoundly aware that the two could not coexist.

5:9-10 *9Simon and everyone who was with him was amazed to see the large number of fish they had caught. 10James and John, who were Zebedee's sons and Simon's partners, were also amazed. Jesus told Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on you will catch people instead of fish."*

The unprecedented catch in the deeper waters of the Sea of Galilee overwhelmed Simon Peter, as well as his partners, James and John. It must have been an incredible experience even for the most experienced fishermen. Just the night before they had caught nothing in spite of their best efforts and expert knowledge.

But Simon Peter's experience went beyond the shock of disbelief. For the first time in his life, he became aware of his sinful condition and realized that he was completely unworthy to be in Jesus' presence. Simon Peter correctly assessed his condition and reached the right conclusion. However, Jesus gave him a better answer and a solution to his problem.

First, Jesus comforted Simon Peter and encouraged him to put away his fear. With reassuring words, Jesus preserved Simon Peter from being destroyed by the realization of his true spiritual condition as a sinner. Second, Jesus gave Simon Peter a worthwhile purpose for which to live. From that time on, Simon Peter would be fishing for men, bringing them into the Kingdom of God instead of catching fish to feed the hungry. Jesus reached out to Simon Peter and offered him a much better life than he had envisioned for himself. Jesus assured Simon Peter that he could be free from fear and live a worthwhile life by serving God's purpose.

5:11 *Simon and his partners brought the boats to shore, left everything, and followed Jesus.*

Andrew, James, and John were with Simon Peter when Jesus talked to him. They watched Simon Peter collapse at Jesus' feet under the weight of his hopeless condition. Although they did not express their reactions as Simon Peter did, Andrew and the two partners were just

as deeply affected by the experience. Consequently, all four of them left everything and followed Jesus.

The text states that Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John pulled the boats ashore, left everything there, and followed Jesus. Their experience completely convinced them about Jesus. Nothing else, even a prosperous harvest of fish, mattered anymore. They chose to follow the One Who made the abundance possible. These four became the founding members of the twelve disciples. They were not merely followers. They were disciples assigned to a new task compatible with what they did for a living. They had a new calling as fishers of men. Jesus redefined their trade in God-given terms, and the four overwhelmingly agreed. An earthly need for subsistence no longer served as their master. They had a new Master—One Who possessed the abundance of the whole earth at His command. They left everything and everyone else and followed Jesus.

Notes/Applications

Mark's gospel tells us that Simon Peter was one of the first four disciples Jesus called to follow Him (*Mark 1:16-18*). Simon's brother, Andrew, and his partners, James and John, became the first members of the Twelve who followed Jesus and served the cause of the Gospel and gave their lives for it. They went to Capernaum with Jesus as He entered the synagogue and demonstrated His power over sickness and evil spirits. They also went with Him to Simon Peter's house and watched Him raise Simon Peter's mother-in-law from her sickbed. Then they followed Jesus the next morning ahead of the crowd as He sought solitude for prayer.

After using Simon Peter's boat for preaching the Gospel, Jesus taught Simon Peter and his fishing partners an unforgettable lesson. By Jesus' unmatched authority, Simon Peter harvested a huge quantity of fish. Although Simon Peter doubted Jesus' directions, he surrendered his boat to the One Whom he had witnessed performing miracles even though he was not quite sure of the outcome.

The outcome was more astounding than Simon Peter could ever have imagined—and it wasn't because of the large quantity of fish. The most important outcome was his recognition of his own sinfulness. He finally recognized not only his condition but also the holiness of the Son of God. When the full impact of that recognition hit him, Simon Peter could only ask to be separated from Jesus. Simon Peter did not understand that such a wish would condemn him to a fatal separation from his Creator and Redeemer. However, Jesus healed Simon Peter from spiritual despondency and redirected him toward a new task that had eternal significance. Simon Peter was no longer a distraught fisherman but a delivered fisher of men.