

**Theme:** Jesus Calls Us To Fish For People

**Object:** Picture of a Rod and Reel and Fish

**Scripture:** Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." **11** And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:10-11)

Do you like to go fishing? If someone were to ask me that question, I guess I would have to say, "No." I like to catch fish, but I don't enjoy fishing unless I am catching fish. I have heard some people say that they don't care whether they catch any fish or not -- they just enjoy going fishing. Not me!

I remember one time when I went fishing with my daughter. She was about the age of some of you boys and girls. We went to the lake and had been fishing for about five minutes when she turned to me and said, "Dad, when are we going to catch something?" After about thirty minutes, she gave up and went to play with some other children. I sat there and fished all day. I never did catch a fish. I did not enjoy that day of not catching fish.

Fishing but not catching anything reminded me of a story in the Bible about some men who had a fishing experience a lot like mine -- until Jesus came along.

One day Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd of people started to gather around him. So, He climbed into a boat belonging to Peter and ask him to go out from the shore just a little way. Jesus sat in the boat teaching the people.

When he had finished teaching, Jesus said to Peter, "Put the boat further out into

the deep water and let down your nets to catch some fish."

Peter answered, "We've been fishing all night long and haven't caught a thing, but if you say so, we will let down the nets one more time."

An amazing thing happened! When they started pulling the nets up, there were so many fish that the nets began to break. As they pulled the fish into the boat, there were so many fish that the boat was beginning to sink.

This morning we will study John with Peter fishing again three years after the story in Luke. Jesus wants Peter and the other disciples to understand they are not to fish for fish, but Jesus has called them to fish for men.

When you get home after church I want you to ask your dad and mom what Jesus means when He told Peter and the disciples and all the grownups here that we are to be fishers of men.

Dear Jesus, help us to be good fishers for people -- faithful to go, patiently waiting, and trusting You to bring in the catch. Amen.

John 21:1-14

### **It's Jesus!**

John ended chapter 20 with Thomas declaring, “My Lord and my God!” (v.28) and the last two verses explaining why John wrote his gospel account “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (v.31) The only thing we might think was important enough to add in closing was Jesus’ ascension. However, John does not record this incredible event. So what is the purpose of this last chapter, often referred to as the epilogue of John’s gospel account?

The key to understanding chapter 21 is found in John chapter 1 in the first 14 verses. Here we find the pre-incarnate activity of Jesus the Christ and our Lord summarized. **1** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...**12** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:1, 12-13) These first 14 verses are referred as the prologue. These lay the foundation for what John will spend 20 chapters writing about. Now in chapter 21 the emphasis is on the post-resurrection ministry of Jesus. Death and Satan are defeated, Jesus will now rule over His newly founded Church and believers are directed to live lives of spiritual growth and service.

We begin our study of John’s epilogue where we read that some of the disciples are together and their focus is on something other than Christ, we learn that without Christ nothing can be accomplished. It reveals what happens when the

Lord intervenes and it ends with the disciple's wonderful discovery.

This passage illustrates two contrasting dependencies from which the disciples could choose and from which you and I must choose. The disciples could depend on their former trade of fishing and pick up life as it was before Jesus called them. Or, they could live in obedience to Jesus, continue in the gospel ministry and be dependent upon Christ's power. These two options lay before the disciples and they lay before us. This decision is made both as individuals and together as a fellowship of believers.

### **Together in Jesus**

Jesus had left the disciples at Jerusalem and verse 1 of chapter 21 reads, [“After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way.”](#) Unfortunately, this last chapter of John reveals some less than flattering facts concerning the disciples. We, as believers, need to learn from this narrative and work to do some things differently from the disciples.

The positive thing we find is that 7 of the disciples are together. Remember that after the crucifixion many believers began to scatter and return to their homes. Apparently the disciples also scatter after Jesus' resurrection. They had seen Christ at least 2 times over a period of 8 days and then they leave Jerusalem. The disciples journey over 4 to 5 days to reach the north shore of the Sea of Tiberias or Sea of Galilee. So we are now at day 13 or later of Jesus' last 40 days on earth. Matthew and Mark record that Jesus told the disciples to go to Galilee and wait for Him. The angel reminded Mary to [“go, tell his Jesus' disciples and Peter that](#)

he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

(Mark 16:7) Obediently the disciples travel to their home where before following Jesus they had had a fishing business.

Here we see another parallel between chapters 1 and 21 of John. The disciples Jesus called at the beginning of His earthly ministry are still His disciples here in chapter 21. Peter is often mentioned first and had a leadership position among the disciples. Thomas is listed second, possibly because of his declaration a few verses earlier saying to Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” Also mentioned here are Nathanael (*which we know little about*), John (*the unnamed disciple whom Jesus loved*). We know James and John were the sons of Zebedee and partners with Peter in the fishing business from Luke, chapter 5, verse 10. The 2 unnamed disciples are most likely Andrew and Philip. Then at least 5 men mentioned in chapter 1 are found here in chapter 21. Thus, this teaches and reinforces the testimony of God and His preservation of those whom He calls as His own. Jesus had told the disciples earlier, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. **28** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. **29** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

(John 10:27-29) We know that these disciples will remain faithful in the coming trials as they preach the gospel of Christ, plant local churches and minister in the name of Jesus until the time that most suffer and are martyred. This confirms that once Jesus has called you, even if life becomes one of suffering or martyrdom, He will not allow anyone to snatch you from the hand of God. Jesus will give you the strength and courage to live a life of faith. Those that fail, like Judas, may have been used to further God’s plan, but they were never His. You

and I, as true believers, will not fail!

### Jesus or Nothing

The second point that these verses teach and that you and I need to pay attention to comes from Peter. “Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ The *others* said to him, ‘We will go with you.’ They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.” Peter is impatient, which is his normal way of acting. Waiting upon the Lord was not Peter’s strong trait. One has to wonder if they had arrived on the north shore a few hours or a few days ago? Whatever the answer, Peter has lost his patience. So instead of waiting upon the Lord, Peter decides to use the time more productively, from the world’s view, by fishing. This idea seemed good to the others, so they all jump into the boat and spent the night fishing. This is not a story of Peter’s disobedience, but rather, it teaches us what happens when we try to accomplish spiritual things by our own power and by our own direction and not wait on Jesus.

The first thing I want us to remember this morning is that fishing symbolizes evangelism. Admittedly, this was not Peter’s focus or line of thought. But let me take you back almost 3 years earlier, please turn in your bibles to Luke chapter 5. Read with me beginning in verse 1, “On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on ~~him~~ Jesus to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret (ghen·nay·sar·et) meaning *harp, also called Sea of Galilee or Tiberias*), **2** and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. **3** Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. **4** And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon,

**'Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.'** **5** And Simon answered, 'Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.' **6** And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. **7** They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. **8** But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' **9** For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, **10** and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, **'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.'** **11** And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him." (Luke 5:1-11) From this time on, Jesus used this phrase **"catching men"** or as Matthew and Mark recorded **"fishers of men"** to refer to evangelism. (Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17) This means the disciples and you and me are to be **"fishers of men"** or evangelists preaching the Gospel of Christ to the lost. In the Luke account the nets are breaking and the boats are sinking. In John the nets do not break, even though the harvest is great. In both Luke and John's gospel accounts, Peter catches nothing until Jesus directs. These stories illustrate that no matter how hard we work to bring about spiritual fruit, if Jesus does not direct it, it will be worthless. Just a couple of weeks ago Jesus was teaching the disciples in the upper room both the positive and negative aspects of abiding in Him. Because God included it in the Bible, it is important, so then Jesus is also teaching us and we need to take heed, He said, **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."** (John 15:5) Jesus uses an absolute **"apart from me you can do**

nothing.” He did not say through hard work you can do some things, but not as much as when I am working through you. It means apart from Jesus, in the efforts of the flesh, our efforts to serve God will result in empty nets. This is why it is so important the when we pray we do not do all the talking, but spend time listening to God. Turn to Christ alone, seek His guidance and blessing – if you seek Him, He will give you guidance and blessing. Jesus now intervenes with the disciples.

### **Jesus Intervenes**

The third lesson from this passage comes from Peter and the disciples fishing efforts. “They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, “Children, do you have any fish?” They answered him, “No.” 6 He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.” They caught nothing after laboring all night and they were tired and discouraged. Mostly likely they wanted something to eat and then go to bed to sleep. They were not seeking Jesus, but He was seeking them. Jesus seeks us even when we do not realize our need for He. Without the Holy Spirit we are unaware of our desperate need for Christ. The disciples had not received the Holy Spirit yet and Christ intervenes directly. Has not God thought of everything? If spiritual blessing and wisdom depended upon our seeking the Lord with our efforts, quite simply there would be no blessing. Blessings always come from the Lord and often to those who are not even aware of the Lord as He begins opening the heart of their souls.



What is the first thing Jesus does? He asks a question, “Children, do you have any fish?” The question is designed to show the disciples that they have a need. Have you ever noticed as you read the Bible how often God asks questions. After Adam sinned God asked, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9) A short time later God asks, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” (v.11) Not to leave Eve out, God asks, “What is this you have done?” (v.13) Years later when God was displeased with Cain’s offering, God asks, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?” (Gen. 4:6-7) God asked through the prophet Nathan to King David, “Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?” (2 Samuel 12:9) To bring Isaiah to realize he is to serve God, the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Isaiah responds, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8) Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do you say I am.” (Matthew 16:15) Jesus continues this pattern of asking questions throughout the New Testament to point out people’s needs. God the Father and God the Son did not ask because they did not know the answer. He asks questions in order to get us to face whom we are and to recognize our need and who God is and that without Him our needs will remain.

Jesus asks the disciples, “Children, do you have any fish?” They had to reply “No!” They had failed by their own efforts. Jesus asks so they realize they have failed and they have need. Jesus asks you and me, “Have you caught anything? Have you been successful? Are you satisfied?” Without Christ the answer is “No.”

After having asked His question to prompt the disciples and you and me to realize the answer is “No” for we are lacking, Jesus gives a command in verse 6, “Cast the

net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” Why on the right side? The answer is because Jesus said so and it is obviously the right side is where He commanded the fish to be. The point is not where the work is done or even how. The point is – is the work must be done under the direction of Christ. Are we being obedient to Him or are we working under our wisdom and energy?

Having been saved and having the gift of God to guide us, through the Bible, we know what to do, but often we do not do it. Even though we are saved we fight the sinful fallen nature and desire to be our own masters and be in charge of our lives. All of us need to repent of this sin of disobedience and consciously work at letting God through the Holy Spirit direct our lives. The answer for Peter and the disciples is the answer for us; let go of ourselves and let God be our Master.

Jesus asked a question and then He gave a command. In response to the disciple’s obedience He then sends a blessing. The catch is so large they have to drag the net ashore because they cannot lift it into the boat. That many fish; 153 were not just for the 7, but for the people that the 7 would give the Lord’s blessing to. When we receive God’s blessings we are to bless others in His name. God told Abraham, “I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:2) This is a principle woven throughout the scriptures. We are not to horde God’s blessings. They are meant to fill us to overflowing so we bless others in the name of Christ. Is this how your life is being lived?

Let me say, the blessings our Lord gives are not always the blessings we desire. I fought with God for 2 years about giving up my career and serving Him. I remember when I finally submitted and I told the Lord I would do anything as long as I did not have to go to some third-world country as a missionary. God’s

blessing for Joyce and my life was not what I would have chosen, to become missionaries, but nevertheless it was God's blessing that changed us forever. I praise Him that He helped Joyce and me to be obedient. When the world is beating on you and life is hard, it is the blessings of God that remain. Your ambitions may fail, material wealth may shift through your fingers, but with God you can deal with these worldly set backs and prosper spiritually in the Lord and this will remain all the days of your life and into eternity. The Father and Son hold you secure. Believe in what Jesus spoke of your life and my life and every believer's life, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. **28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.**" (John 10:27-29) When we believe and when we are obedient then we receive the blessing of seeing, knowing and experiencing God's promises.

### Seeing Jesus

Because these 7 disciples were obedient to Jesus' command and cast their net on the right side, not only did they catch fish, but also their eyes were opened. Reading verse 7, "That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea." When Jesus first appeared on shore none of the disciples recognized Him. They now recognize because they were obedient and Jesus made Himself known to them.

Have you discovered how to see Jesus? If you have not, I can tell you how to discover Jesus. You will discover Him when you begin to obey His

commandments. It is natural for Jesus to seem distant and unreal. This is because sin separates us from God. But if we will repent and begin to obey, Jesus will begin to work in our lives and bring about change. You will grow closer to Him, just as the disciples did. You may be asking, "What does God want me to do? What does Jesus command? How do I receive His blessings in my life?" The answers are found in studying and meditating on the teachings in the Bible. The answer is found in prayer; seeking God, pouring out your heart to God and listening to Him. The answer is found right here in the fellowship of Jesus' Church we call Canyon Bible and godly wisdom is received as a blessing from godly people. Do not hold back thinking you can fool God. Jesus will bless us, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) Once we have done this and seek Him we are able to "Call to me Jesus and I He will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." (Jeremiah 33:3)

There is no discovery greater than knowing God through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Living for Christ may mean a life of influence by position and wealth to share Christ with the lost. Living for Christ may also mean a life of poverty and hardship and even suffering or martyrdom. Either path means living faithful to your Lord and Savior, who is God beyond our imagination and knowing Jesus is also our constant Companion and Friend.

Yesterday is gone and cannot be retrieved. We have seen this morning in God's Word found in John chapter 21 that without Christ nothing can be accomplished, and we have seen what happens when the Lord intervenes, and we saw the disciple's greatest discovery as they were obedient. This is our greatest discovery

also. Today is here before you. Whom will you chose. By the power of God that dwells within me I pray I will live to serve the only holy God. I pray this for you as well. Joshua said to the people of the exodus and I say to you this glorious morning, “choose this day whom you will serve...as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15)

My beloved let us serve this day and every day that remains of our earthly lives the only true God!