

Jesus' Call of Simon Peter to Catch Men

Luke 5:1-11

Key verse 5:10b "And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.'"

My opening question is "What do you seek after in your life? Is it success, happiness, freedom, security? Meaning? We need to also ask a more important question. What is Jesus' purpose in calling his people, including you and me?"

In today's passage, Jesus called Simon Peter. We want to hear Jesus' purpose in calling him, and in calling you and me. Through this message, we will also hear Simon's response to Jesus' call and how Jesus helped him through a series of 3 challenges, to go into the deep, into a deeper relationship with Christ, and into a life commitment to Jesus. I pray that each of us will hear Jesus' calling newly, respond in obedience, and grow in deeper knowledge of Jesus, his grace and his hope.

Part I. "Put out into the deep..." (1-7)

One day, while Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the sick, needy, and hungry people crowded around him and pressed him to the water's edge. What did Jesus do for them? Look at verses 2-3. "... and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 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." Jesus taught the crowd the word of God.

In these verses, we see Jesus' intervening in Simon's life. How? First, he got into Simon's boat. Of course, Jesus needed his boat to teach the crowd without being pushed into the lake. However, Jesus had another reason in doing so! But let's do a quick review of Jesus' relationship with Simon. In the previous chapter, after Jesus healed a man possessed by a demon in the synagogue, he went to Simon's house. There, he healed his mother-in-law. Afterwards, from Simon's house, from sunset, Jesus healed all kinds of sick people. All of these facts imply that Simon had some relationship with Jesus. Simon knew that Jesus had power over demons and over the sick. Surely, Jesus was a man of God with great power. But that was it.

After his experiences with Jesus on the Sabbath, what was Simon doing now? He went back to work, as a fisherman. He went fishing all night, as he had done every night for his entire adult life; and in the morning, he was washing his nets, as he did every morning, while Jesus was teaching the crowd at the same seashore. Why was he just washing his nets instead of participating in Jesus' teaching? Because that's what a fisherman did after a night of fishing! Later, we learn that Simon had worked very hard the night before and had caught nothing. Rather than going home in despair he got his nets ready for the next catch. No matter what was going on around him, Simon was focused, single-minded, and hard-working. Perhaps, Simon had two mortgages to pay, one for his house and the other for his boat. In brief, Jesus did his thing, and Simon did his thing for himself and for his family.

Some of us may live like Simon, working hard as a bread-winner and supporting his/her church's work as much as we can. However, we may feel something is missing. Sometimes we feel we are running

on a hamster wheel every day and go to church on Sundays without much joy. Humanly Simon was a good man, responsible and faithful. He was kind and helpful to Jesus. But that was it.

While Simon kept washing his nets, minding his own business, Jesus was not indifferent to him. He wanted to deepen his relationship with Simon. So, Jesus got into his boat and asked him gently, the first of three challenges, “Simon, would you put out a little from the land? I need your help!” What was Simon's response? He simply did it. “It’s not a big deal. He healed my mother-in-law.”

When Jesus finished teaching from Simon’s boat, what did he do? Let's 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.’” After a long and hard night's work, Simon must have planned to go home and reward himself with a big breakfast and a long nap. But Jesus said to him, “Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.” Why did Jesus bother exhausted Simon?

It was because Jesus wanted to “catch Simon” and guide him into the deep. Jesus knew Simon. He knew his situation: his nets were empty despite his hard work. Simon had failed as a fisherman. But Jesus had compassion on him. Jesus wanted to restore his failure. Most importantly, Jesus wanted to lead him into something deeper than financial success. So Jesus challenged him again, challenge #2: ‘Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.’ Jesus was commanding him to put out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch all over again. Jesus was challenging Simon to obey Jesus, over his control of his life, his plans, his experience and his ideas as a veteran fisherman.

Here what does the deep imply? Of course, the deep is literally deeper water. As a fisherman, Simon knew where and when to catch fish. From his experience, it was at night and in the shallows of the lake. But Jesus commanded him to go in the morning and put down his nets, not around the shore, but into the deep. As a fisherman, the place and time Jesus told him to go and put down his nets was nonsense. Thus, the deep implies something unknown, unfamiliar and unconventional.

How did Simon respond to Jesus' challenge? Let's read verse 5. “And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.’” The first part of Simon's answer, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!” shows a considerable amount of reluctance and struggle in obeying Jesus. He had worked hard. He had done his best employing all his skills as a veteran fisherman. However, he caught nothing. What difference would it make to go out fishing once again, listening to a carpenter? In this bright morning, fish would see his nets! In fact, he would just have to wash his nets all over again. A sense of failure and futility pressed down on him.

On the other hand, there was a voice that spoke into his heart irresistibly: How sweet and beautiful are his teachings! What authority and power his words have! After a brief but intense struggle, Simon made a willful decision to obey Jesus and his words. “But *at your* word I will let down the nets.” In deciding to obey Jesus’ words, not only was he putting out his nets into deep water, he was also putting himself out into the deep as well. He was stepping out from himself, his familiar routines of life, and his human reasoning. He was choosing to obey Jesus over himself. Obeying Jesus was frightening but exhilarating as well.

What happened when he chose to obey Jesus' words? Look at verses 6-7. "And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 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." When Simon obeyed Jesus, he experienced the greatest catch of his life, in such over-abundance that both his boat and his partners' boat began to sink! When he obeyed Jesus' words, he experienced such overwhelming blessing that it was clear that this was a supernatural power beyond his imagination. Jesus more than restored all of his failures as a fisherman.

Sometimes we think, if we experience Jesus' power and blessing and restoration of failure first, then we will obey. However, it rarely works that way. Do you want to experience his power and restoration of failure? Yes? Then even when his words make no sense and are hard to obey, and hard to believe that anything good will happen-- just obey Jesus' words. Obey his words, "Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch." Obey his words to come out of our comfort zones and into the unknown. And when we obey his words in the midst of the unknown, when we have failed, when it makes no sense, when we are tired after trying all night, we will experience that indeed his words are true. We will know Jesus indeed is Almighty God, who blesses us and restores all our failures. So let's decide to obey his words to us today, in whatever struggles we have today.

Part II. Simon Peter's deeper understanding of Jesus and himself (8-11).

How did Simon Peter respond? Did he suggest that Jesus open a fishing business together? No. Instead, Simon Peter made a startling confession to Jesus. Look at verse 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.'"

Firstly, Simon Peter came to have a deeper understanding of who Jesus truly was. Jesus was no ordinary teacher or even a great man of God. Simon Peter was standing in the presence of the Creator God, the master of the universe, who commanded a large number of fish to rush into Simon's net. The fish in the sea obeyed! When he obeyed Jesus and his words, he experienced personally and powerfully that Jesus, standing before him, is the Creator and Ruler and Commander of the heavens and the earth in the form of a man.

Secondly, Simon Peter came to have a deeper knowledge of who he truly was. He fell down at Jesus' knees and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." When he saw the holy God in Jesus standing before him, he saw himself as a sinful man. Though he may not have lived an overtly immoral life, he found nothing good in him. He was a self-reliant sinner. The motto of his life was, "I take care of myself and my family. I am the captain of my life." When he realized he was standing before the presence of God himself, Simon could not but fall down at Jesus' feet and cry out in holy fear and trembling, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

How did Jesus respond? Let's read verse 10b. "And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.'" Jesus, the Almighty Creator God, who is holy, holy, holy-- didn't turn away from him or destroy him. Instead, Jesus said to him, "Simon, 'Do not be afraid.'" He embraced him with comfort and forgiveness of sins. In fact, Holy Almighty Jesus came to Peter first- he stepped into his fishing boat, and he redeemed his failures. Holy Almighty Jesus wanted to have a deep personal relationship

with sinful Simon Peter saying, “Simon, ‘Do not be afraid!’” Jesus forgave his sins. Jesus’ love and mercy melted Simon Peter's heart. The Holy Almighty Jesus also says to you and me, “Do not be afraid.” He wants to catch us out of the sea of failure, sin, fear, shame, guilt and death. He wants to have a real and deep personal relationship with you and me, even though we are sinners. This is Jesus’ first purpose in calling you and me. Thank you Lord Jesus!

More surprisingly, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “From now on you will be catching men.” Here comes Jesus' third challenge! Jesus' third challenge was the hardest challenge for Simon. Simon must now see himself with Jesus' given identity and purpose. Jesus had an amazing vision and promise for sinful Peter. From now on, Jesus changed him. He changed his identity. He changed his purpose and direction of life. Once he was Simon- “sand.” But now, Jesus was changing his name to “Simon Peter,” the rock. Without Jesus’ intervention, he would have lived and died as a Galilean fisherman and a devout Jew, just like his father and the generations before and after him. In his own situation, his only hope was his fishing that night would be successful and he could live as a devout Jew. However Simon Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:18-19, “knowing that you were ransomed from your futile ways inherited from your forefathers.” Despite Simon’s best efforts to live a good life, he later realized it was a futile life. However, Jesus led him to live a truly meaningful and fruitful life.

Like him, most of us want to live an ordinary life-- possibly attend a good college, get a job, marry, raise our kids in a lovely home, save enough for a comfortable retirement, and attend church on Sundays.... But Jesus’ call is a call out of our futile ways of life handed down to us from our forefathers. He is changing our identity from a man who catches fish, into one who catches men, who fishes for people. The old NIV translation says, “I will make you a fisher of man.” Jesus didn’t say, “You have to go fishing for people.” He said, “I will make you a fisher of man.” In the same way that Jesus sent a large number of fish into his nets, Jesus was saying to Simon Peter, “Don’t you see and touch these fish? Does this miracle amaze you? This is nothing, Peter! You shall see and do greater things than this. From now on you will be catching men! When you simply obey me and learn from me, I will bring numerous people into your care. I will entrust to you my sheep whom I bought with my blood! I will make you a source of blessing for all people of all nations. You will make disciples of all nations, and be the rock on which I will build my church. I am calling you into myself and my work on earth so that you can become like me.” This is the second purpose of Jesus in calling Peter. What a challenge and vision Jesus had for Peter!

When Simon Peter heard Jesus' hope and promise for him, what did he do? Peter didn't go home saying, “Jesus! I’m not qualified! I have several people to support!” When he saw the glimpse of Jesus' vision for himself, he held onto it, not looking at himself and his own inadequacies and inabilities. He put his trust in Jesus who could make him into a fisher of men because Jesus is the Creator God. The one who brought the fish into his nets is the same God who would bring the people into heavenly nets. Therefore, he made an immediate and joyful decision. Verse 11 says. “And when they had brought their boats to land, *they left everything and followed him.*” Peter surrendered himself and future into the Lord Jesus' hands to follow him unreservedly. He left behind everything. This is true and deep repentance. He turned away and left behind his old way of life, his old occupation, and his identity as a fisherman living only for himself and his family. He left it all behind and followed Jesus, who would make him into one who catches men.

In what way is taking care of Jesus' sheep a deep thing? It is because people are deep, complicated, selfish and sinful; but Jesus still loves them. Jesus is calling you and me to catch men, not to hurt them, but to take care of them just as Jesus has taken care of sinners. It is a life worthy to live because Jesus came to live such a life. Now Jesus calls his disciples to live such a deep life. In obedience and joy, Peter lived as a shepherd for the first century suffering Christians. And he asked his fellow Christians in 1 Peter 5:2-3, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you...being examples to the flock." Shepherding others is not easy; it requires suffering, rejection, misunderstanding and patience. But Jesus promised, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt 28:28:20b) We feed his sheep together with Jesus and as we do so, we become like Him, a shepherd for God's flock for whom we lay our life. That is not all. Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 5:4, "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." This is our living hope!

For the last 28 years in America, I have tried to be faithful to Jesus' call by taking care of God's flock. However, I feel I have often failed. Loving my angelic wife and children, not to mention other church members, seems to be difficult most of the time, because of my selfishness. But today, my Lord Jesus Christ says to me, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." Our Lord Jesus Christ renews his forgiveness of sins for me. He encourages me not to give up catching men. What a privilege it is to live like our Lord Jesus Christ by taking care of others. The reason I feel I have failed in taking care of others is that I have relied on my own will-power and goodness. I often served God's people, not in obedience to Christ but for my own reputation. However, Jesus' promise to me from this passage is "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." At each moment in taking care of others, Jesus promises me that he will do it with me. So I repent newly. Lord, I turn away from depending on myself, and living for my own honor and recognition. Rather, I turn to you. I want to depend on you. I will follow you and learn your shepherd heart. I surrender myself into your hands to live as a fisher of men. I look forward to your reward: the unfading crown of glory in heaven. Amen.

Through this message, we heard how Jesus called Simon Peter, a sinful and ordinary man. However, when he obeyed Jesus' words, Jesus transformed him. Like Peter, Jesus is calling each of us to become a man and woman of depth by challenging us. Do you hear Jesus' challenge, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch?" Do you hear his voice of vision also, "Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching men"? If so, let's respond to his words in obedience to his words and to Christ, not to other people or situations. Let's respond with repentance, turning from our ways and our old purpose of lives to follow Jesus, his purpose and his plan for our lives. As we obey our Lord's voice, surely we will come to know Jesus, the Creator God all the more. Surely we will know more deeply Jesus' forgiveness of our sins. And surely we will experience his life-changing power that changes us into his likeness and as a fisher of men, and shepherd for the flock of God. Amen!