

Called to Significance

Bible Background • Luke 5:1-11

Printed Text • Luke 5:1-11 | Devotional Reading • Luke 9:57-62

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONTEMPLATE a miraculous catch of fish, REFLECT on Simon's changing attitude toward Jesus, and HEAR Jesus' instructions and eagerly obey them.

In Focus

Marilyn always heard that if you find a career you love, it will never feel like work. She had the career, but work never felt fulfilling. Marilyn knew this was where God wanted her, but also felt she could do more to minister.

She found that ministry when her mother's friend, Miss Sandra, yet again invited her to serve at the Neighbor-to-Neighbor Breakfast at her church. Miss Sandra's invitations were nothing if not persistent. Even though Marilyn always said she didn't have the time, Miss Sandra invited her every week. Finally, Marilyn cleared her schedule to go.

That morning, Marilyn entered the Fellowship Hall, not knowing what to expect. She found rows and rows of tables with homeless people—whom Miss Sandra always called “our unhoused neighbors”—chattering among themselves while waiting to be fed. She looked for Miss Sandra and found her at the front of the room, near the kitchen. As Marilyn threaded her way through the crowd, Miss Sandra called for quiet. Everyone gave Miss Sandra their full focus as she prayed before the volunteers started serving.

After the prayer, Marilyn spent the next hour moving from the kitchen to the tables, with trays full of plates of scrambled eggs, turkey bacon, and fruit salad. In the corner of her eye, she could see Miss Sandra doing the same while joking and laughing with the neighbors, offering a friendly word or a warm touch—or, best of all, a bit of hope. That hope touched Marilyn's heart. She said a prayer of thanks that Miss Sandra had invited her to serve, and she knew she would come back to serve again.

Are we humble enough to accept the blessing of being in service to others? Are we humble enough to accept the blessing of being in service to others?

Keep in Mind

“Jesus replied to Simon, ‘Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!’” (from Luke 5:10, NLT)

Words You Should Know

- A. **Master** (Luke 5:5) epistates (Gk.)—Teacher, emphasizing the teacher's position of respect
- B. **Beckoned** (v. 7) kataneuo (Gk.)—To signal by nodding one's head

Say It Correctly

Gennesaret. geh-NESS-are-ett.

Draught. DRAFT.

Chinneroth. CHI-ner-oth.

KJV

Luke 5:1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,
2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.
3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.
4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.
5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.
6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.
7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.
8 When Simon saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.
9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:
10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.
11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

NLT

Luke 5:1 One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God.
2 He noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets.
3 Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.
4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."
5 "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again."
6 And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear!
7 A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.
8 When Simon realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man."
9 For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. 10 His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed. Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!" 11 And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.

The People, Places, and Times

The Lake of Gennesaret is also known as the Sea of Galilee. It is called Gennesaret because the fertile Plain of Gennesaret lies on the northwest side of the lake (Matthew 14:34). The Old Testament calls it the Sea of Chinnereth because of the shape of it (Hebrew "harpshaped," Numbers 34:11) and "Chinneroth" (Joshua 12:3) from the town so named on its shore. Gennesaret is probably the corruption of the name Chinneroth. The Sea of Tiberias is another designation (John 6:1; 21:1), associated with the capital of Herod Antipas. All of the names of this single body of water were derived from places on the western shore. The lake is located some 60 miles north of Jerusalem.

The Sea of Galilee was the focus of Galilee's wealth. Nine cities with a population of 15,000 or more stood on its shores. To the northwest was Capernaum, the home of Simon and Andrew (Mark 1:29) and where Matthew sat at custom (Matthew 9:9). It was also the scene of much of Jesus' Galilean ministry.

Background

Previously in Luke, the Lord Jesus was in Capernaum (Luke 4:31) healing many people who came to Him after the Sabbath (vv. 40-41). After these many mighty works, Jesus slipped away to pray in a deserted place near the city. His disciples found Him and reported how many people wanted Jesus to stay there among them. But Jesus told them that He had to go to the other cities and preach the kingdom of God, for that is what He was sent to do (v. 43). His mission was not to call others from a single place but to go to people throughout Judea—where they worked, where they lived, where they studied—and call them as they were, where they were. Jesus left Capernaum to preach in other cities of the Decapolis (see Matthew 4:25). His first stop was Lake Gennesaret (i.e., the Sea of Galilee) where He makes contact with a crowd of people and with some of the men whom He would call to be His Disciples.

At-A-Glance

1. The Teaching (Luke 5:1-3)
2. The Miracle (vv. 4-7)
3. The Commitment (vv. 8-11)

In Depth

1. The Teaching (Luke 5:1-3) On a certain morning Jesus was on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, near Capernaum. As a result of His fame at that time, a great multitude had already collected around Him there early in the morning to listen to His teaching. In order to be able to address the multitude more effectively, the Lord entered into Simon's ship—one of two that were standing by the shore of the lake. He then asked Simon to push the boat out a little further from land and from there He taught the multitude out of the ship. Jesus used an unusual setting from which to teach. It was not in a synagogue, but in a boat (v. 3). In other words, Jesus taught where the people were. The Bible tells us to "Go ye into all the world" (from Mark 16:15); it does not tell the world to come to us. Wherever the opportunity, be ready and committed to do what you can to share the Good News of God!

When have you shown a willingness to share about God in unexpected places?

2. The Miracle (vv. 4-7) After He finished teaching, Jesus commanded Simon to launch out from the shore into the deep part of the lake and fish there. They were going to have to launch out further in the deeper part of the lake (v. 4). Simon then objects that they had toiled all night to catch fish but had caught nothing. They had already washed their nets, apparently to put them away until another day (v. 5:2). After all, the best time for fishing with nets was during the night. Everything appears to be so unfavorable for fishing and Simon and his friends were probably exhausted and frustrated from their night's work, nevertheless, at Jesus' words, they obeyed His command. Jesus rewards their faith. They catch so many fish in their nets that they have to call their partners in another boat to come and help them out. And even then both boats become so full of fish that they could not hold the catch.

We need "nevertheless" kind of faith in our lives today. "Nevertheless" faith means that, no matter what the obstacles are, we are going to move forward at Jesus' Words. Do you have "nevertheless" faith?

3. The Commitment (vv. 8-11) The Lord’s revelation of power in the field of Simon’s particular calling makes a powerful impression on him. He falls before the Savior, overwhelmed by His divine glory and with a deep realization of his utter sinfulness. When we come into the presence of the Lord, we too must confess that we are sinful and need to be made whole. Jesus understands Simon’s state of mind and speaks reassuringly to him. Unexpectedly, Simon receives a divine calling to evangelism. Simon, James, and John committed to the Lord Jesus Christ that they were going to follow Him to the end. They have no idea what they were going to be involved in, only that they would “catch men” (v. 10). Still, they dropped what they were doing and followed Him. We should have that kind of commitment today. We should be willing to forsake all and follow Jesus.

What have you forsaken for the sake of Christ? What do you still cling to?

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Jesus’ command to Simon? How did Simon respond to Jesus’ command (Luke 5:3–5)?
2. Why did Simon tell Jesus to depart from Him (v. 8)?
3. What did Jesus mean when He said: “thou shalt catch men” (v. 10)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does it mean to “forsake all” and follow Jesus today? What kind of commitment does it take to follow Jesus? Is following Jesus difficult? Give reasons for your answers.
2. Should all ministers work for the kingdom full-time or is there space for bi-vocational ministers?

Liberating Lesson

Today, as in Jesus’ day, thinking of walking away from your job to pursue full-time ministry is frightening. However, Jesus did not call His disciples to leave everything they knew. They would pivot from fishing for fish to fishing for people. Some of the same skills and natural talents would be applied differently. What natural talents do you use in your occupation that can be used to spread the Gospel? While the fishermen left their nets to follow Jesus, the men also had a network of support that freed them to focus on full-time ministry. How can your Bible study group or church lend background support so others are financially able to devote themselves to the ministry?

Application for Activation

Think about the commitment you’ve made to Jesus. Are you still excited about it? If not, ask Him to give you a new excitement this week so you can become “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). Encourage each student to write out a prayer to the Lord giving over their life, particularly in those areas where He is not fully Lord. Encourage honesty. Suggest that students pray to be willing to do this, if necessary.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Luke 5:1-11 1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret.

This event took place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, a body of water that goes by many names. This is the only verse in which the lake is called by the Greek name of the town located on the northwest shore of the lake, Gennesaret. Usually, the Gospel writers call it after the larger Jewish district to the west of the lake, Galilee. The same water body is also called by the name of the sea of Chinneroth in the Old Testament and Tiberias (the name of a town on its southwest shore) two times in John. Whereas Luke uses the word “lake,” the other evangelists follow the pattern of the Old Testament and call it a sea. The Sea of Galilee measures 13 miles north to south and 7 miles east to west. After Jesus’ baptism and temptation in the wilderness, He started His ministry in Galilee. He became known all over Galilee (4:14). His preaching ministry, backed with the signs and wonders, gathered crowds around Him (4:42). The people wanted to listen to the word coming from God; not just a message about Him, but a revelation from Him. The people of the area were “amazed” by the grace and authority of His words (4:22, 32). This explains the pressure of the crowds on Him by the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

After each day of fishing, the equipment was readied for the next expedition by cleaning and repairing if needed. The boats were pulled out of the water to prevent them from drifting away or into the shallow water close to land. Fishing boats normally worked in pairs dragging a net between them. An average fishing boat would be about twenty to thirty feet long.

These two boats were empty because their work had been fruitless. It implies a lot for people who live by fishing to spend an entire night on their venture and achieve nothing. Many Americans today could not handle the financial shock of missing just one payday. It was likely a little different for these fishermen to miss one day’s worth of fish. They were probably planning other fishing expeditions with equally uncertain results. This sounds much like what many people go through in life, running their affairs with a kind of monotony regulated by failure and success.

3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

Jesus chose one of the boats and requested that its owner should move away from the shore. Jesus had an earlier encounter with Simon when he healed Simon’s mother-in-law from fever (Luke 4:38). There was likely an acquaintance between them that is why Jesus could step in his boat before making the request. The fact that Simon heeds Jesus’ request means that he was available, selfless, but also respectful of Jesus’ character due to the past event he witnessed. He did not just base his response on his physical condition of exhaustion, even though he must have been after a long night’s work. It is a real convenience for Jesus to teach from the boat because it lessens the pressure of the crowd on Him. The position also helps make His voice clear for all to hear and not be drowned out by the crowd. The crowd itself cannot get closer without getting wet. This is perhaps not the only time Jesus instructed his disciples to make available a boat for Him in case He was crowded (Mark 3:9). The people think they just need to touch Jesus to be healed, but Jesus wants their focus to be on His teaching at the moment, so He avoids their touch.

4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

After Jesus completes His preaching, He focuses on Simon and says to go where it is deeper. The word “Launch out” is singular and then the order to “let down” the nets is plural. This suggests that Jesus addresses Simon as

the captain of the boat to take his fishing team out with him and work as a team to put down the nets, which required two to four men to deploy. The Greek word used for net is diktuon (DEEK-too-on). In context with the nets, Jesus' use of the word "draught" (Amer. spelling: draft) refers to things that are drawn or pulled, implying these are a type of dragnet. These nets were made of linen, which would be visible to fish during the day. Further, cooler water can hold more oxygen for the fish to breathe, so they will be more active when the water of the Lake is cooler, as at nighttime. That is why Simon's crew fished at night. Therefore for the nets to be able to catch fish in broad daylight was a real miracle.

5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

Simon demonstrates respect. Although Simon is a professional fisher, he does not despise the instruction of Jesus. Simon was probably brought up in this trade, as children inherited the trade of their parents and began learning it at an early age. Simon could convincingly state that there was no need trying again. However, Simon has already seen Jesus' supernatural intervention when He healed Simon's mother-in-law. It is worth following Jesus' suggestion. As his own experience could not yield any result for him, he acts upon the utterance of Lord. As Christians we would be better off if only we respond faithfully to the Lord's guidance, even in spite of our skills, experience, or frustrations.

Simon also demonstrates selflessness. Though tired and probably worried about last night's failure, he avails not only himself but also his ship and crew to be used by Lord. He exemplifies the one who cares about others more than himself. Above all, we should care about God's kingdom and His work more than ours. And the result will be a tremendous blessing. The Greek word used for "master" is epistates (eh-peese-TAH-tace). In the New Testament, the word only appears in Luke and is used when addressing Jesus, replacing the title of rabbi and teacher that are used in the other Gospels. It essentially still means "teacher" and is used to address a person of high status, particularly regarding his role in leadership. It implies an authority of any kind, not just that of a teacher. The word emphasizes the "master" and the speaker's respectful and intimate relationship, as we can hypothesize since the word is used primarily by disciples.

6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. 7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

What a contrast from the beginning of the passage! The two empty boats were now full of fish and about to sink. Acting upon Jesus' command brought the unexpected. Both types of instruments they used were overflowed by their catch. First, their nets were about to tear when they transferred their catch from the nets to the boats, then the boats were on the verge of sinking. The Greek word used for "beckoned" is kataneuo (ka-ta-NEW-oh). It literally means "to signal by nodding one's head," suggesting that Simon's company could not wave to their partners in other boats. Indeed, they made such a tremendous catch, their hands were busy pulling the nets out of the water. The partners from the other boats responded to Simon's nod.

8 When Simon saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

Simon has never witnessed such a thing before. He becomes suddenly aware that this man has divine potential in Him. Unlike earlier when he used the title "master" for Jesus (v. 5), here he uses Lord (Gk. kurios, KOU-ree-oc). The word can be used for expressing politeness, however, it is also used to address God. Simon's awareness of the person he is dealing with is heightened.

Simon's requesting Jesus to leave him suggests his sense of unworthiness in comparison to Christ's greatness and holiness. When Simon sees Jesus as the Anointed One of God who has not only healed his mother-in-law (Luke 4:38) but also has power over this situation, he is immediately brought under the conviction that indeed he is a sinful man. Many people in the Bible, when they face the divine presence, reacted like Simon. Isaiah saw the Lord and realized that his lips are unclean and needed to be purified (Isaiah 6:5). Manoah, Samson's father,

also encountered the angel of Lord and feared for his life (Judges 13:22). None of us can come before God in our own selves. We need the cleansing power that only Jesus can provide for us. He is ready to cleanse us and make us whole today.

Even though Simon correctly assesses the condition of his heart and the glory of Christ, his reaction is not salvific. Simon still has spiritual growth to achieve, because his understanding of God and his place in His heart is incomplete. Jesus has just miraculously and freely gifted Simon with a greater income than he has ever dreamed of earning. He gives this freely to the fisherman. But Simon's immediate response is to ask Jesus to go away. Instead of wanting to be cleaned and united with God's glory so that he may enjoy God's presence, Simon cowers in fear. Simon can only admit that he is a sinner. He understands God is powerful and pure, but he does not yet realize that God is also a loving Father, longing to bless His children and live in relationship with them.

9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: 10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

The magnitude of the catch is portrayed by not only Simon's amazement but also that of his other colleagues. But Jesus calms Simon's fear. He now changes the destiny of Simon and his fishing colleagues to henceforth become fishers of men. Jesus' commission of Simon, who readily admits he is a sinner, lays the groundwork for Jesus' ministry of forgiveness and the growing reputation of Jesus as a friend of sinners.

Jesus is not looking for perfect people to serve Him. Rather He is after those who are aware of their own shortcomings and unworthiness, but who are still willing to boldly respond to the challenge by faith. This experience sets a break with the past for Simon and his colleagues. Henceforth, they will have a changed mindset and a new vocation. Simon exhibits a willingness to learn. He knows he is lacking and sinful but obeys the Master's voice to see what God can do. May we be so curious! Jesus called working men in amid their labor to a life of labor of a different sort. The objective of their first career of fishing was to feed their families and make money. However, when Jesus called them to become "fishers of men" He called them to labor that was not about making money but about remaking the world. Jesus invited them to invest their lives not in man-centered careers but a God-centered one.

11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

When they reach the dry land, they decide to leave their past behind to follow Jesus. These men are so convinced that Jesus will meet all their needs from here on out that they were willing to entrust themselves to His providential care. Jesus states that whoever wants to follow Him must forsake himself. In Jesus, James, John, and Simon have found a more fulfilling life than fishing.

Even before this encounter, they knew of Jesus as a teacher and healer. After establishing this groundwork, Jesus calls them to His service. The immediacy of their reaction is expected in their society, given the Jewish religious education system. All Jewish boys went to school to learn the Torah. If a student showed promise, he was invited to keep studying the Prophets, but if not, he went to learn the family trade. If a student showed promise in studying the Prophets, he was invited to the honor of further study of the poetic Writings of the Hebrew Bible. If the boy did not seem bright enough to keep studying, he would be sent back home to learn the family trade. If a student showed promise after learning the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, a rabbi would tell him simply, "Follow me." The student would never turn down the great honor of studying under a rabbi. Simon and his companions were going about their family trade the day Jesus performed this miracle. This means at some point in their education, they were told they were not gifted enough to continue. No rabbi would want them. What a blessing that this rabbi, Jesus, came to them and invited them to be His students! Jesus does not care what the world says about a person, or how the world has evaluated them. He knows our hearts and calls those who will to just follow Him.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Called to Lead Israelites from Egypt
(Exodus 3:1–12)

TUESDAY

Called to Deliver Israelites from Midianites
(Judges 6:11–16)

WEDNESDAY

Called and Cleansed for Ministry
(Isaiah 6:1–8)

THURSDAY

Single-Mindedness Required to Follow Jesus
(Luke 9:57–62)

FRIDAY

Repentance, Goal of God's Kindness
(Romans 2:1–11)

SATURDAY

Jesus Calls Peter to Ministry
(John 21:15–19)

SUNDAY

Don't Be Afraid to Catch People
(Luke 5:1–11)

SUNDAY

Jesus' Mandate for Ministry Announced
(Luke 4:14–22)