

Prayer

Deliver us, O Lord, from everything that clouds our understanding of You. We know we cannot see you in Your glory and Your majesty until the end of time; but may we never be satisfied until we have explored every means to know You more and know You better. Give us a thirst for You and for Your will that is never quenched until we see You in glory either on this earth or in the heavens. We praise You, Glorious Lord. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Ask the Lord to give you a better understanding of how you treat others. Seek His help to grow in love.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for Christian Aid agencies** *Pray for any agencies you support. Look up some of the work they do and any prayer guides they give*
- *Pray urgently for the country of Chile after the earthquake there*
- *Pray about food distribution, and pray for those who starve*

Meditation

Let us allow the Lord to change us for the better;
Let us yield everything to Him and be His servants.

Let us repent before Him of every unworthy thought;
Let us deal with the issues that divide us without delay;
Let us forgive those who have hurt us unconditionally;
Let us give Satan no opportunity to control our feelings.

Let us listen to each other and abandon all selfishness;
Let us accept that Christ loves us showing no partiality;
Let us put love into action as we face life's challenges;
Let us find peace where the world cannot see it, in You.

Let us be happy in our faith and radiate the Spirit's joy!
Let us rejoice that He is coming again, for He is!

Bible passage – Luke 5:1-11

¹ It so happened that while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret with the crowd pressing in on Him to hear the word of God, ² He saw two boats moored at the water's edge. The fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put the boat out a small way from the shore. Then He sat down and began to teach the crowds from the boat.

⁴ When He had finished speaking, Jesus said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' ⁵ Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked hard all night and taken nothing, but if you say so, I will let down the nets.' ⁶ When they had done this, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break ⁷ and they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come to their assistance. They came and filled both boats, to the point of sinking! ⁸ When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down on his knees before Jesus and said, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed 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.

Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' ¹¹
When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed Him.

Bible Study

Review

In this wonderful and enigmatic story, the stage is set for all that is to come in Jesus' ministry in Galilee. So far in Luke, we have read about Jesus' teaching (4:14-19), His miracles of healing and deliverance (4:35,39-41), and the crowds who followed Him and sought His ministry (4:40,42f.). Here, we encounter some of Jesus' first disciples, and they complete the general picture of Jesus' early ministry around Galilee. All the coming stories in Luke feature teaching, miracles, the disciples and the crowds. Everything becomes more complex when the Pharisees appear, and the picture changes completely when Jesus heads for Jerusalem, but this is for the future.

It is not clear when the incident in this passage took place, but it was certainly early in Jesus' ministry. There are similar stories found in Matthew (4:18-22) and Mark (1:16-20), and John tells us a similar story about what happened when Jesus found the disciples after His resurrection (John 21:4-8), but each story is different. We will look at this later in the study when 'going deeper', but because Jesus' early ministry took place largely around the shores of Lake Galilee, the various Gospel stories clearly reflect different people's recollections of treasured, wonderful times with Jesus. Luke's purpose in telling this story is to describe Jesus' authority and power, and explain how this contributed towards the call of Peter, James and John. These three consistently appear in the Gospels as Jesus' 'inner circle' of friends.

The beginning of the story is unspecific ('*It so happened ...*', 5:1). Luke does not say that it took place immediately after the Sabbath day in Luke 4, so it may have been some time later. Nevertheless, people certainly knew about Jesus, and they had gathered expectantly to hear Him teach (5:1). Jesus also knew the fishermen well enough to ask to be taken out from the shore to teach, and He knew Simon from when He had healed his mother-in-law (4:38,39). This is significant, because after teaching the crowd, the spotlight turned on Simon Peter and his fellow fishermen, James and John (5:10). Jesus called them with the famous words '*from now on you will be catching people*' (5:10), and they left everything to follow Him (5:11). In this powerful story, Jesus reveals something very important about His own ministry and that of those who follow Him. His stated intent is to change people's lives, and the rest of Luke's Gospel fleshes out what this means.

This miracle highlights Jesus authority and power. In contrast to the pressure previously placed on Him by the crowds (see 4:42-44), Jesus is now in command of the situation, and without fuss, He finds a way to teach the crowd without placing Himself, or anyone else, in danger. Yet this is only a prelude to what was to come. Jesus' real interest lay in individual people, and he challenged Simon, a hardened fisherman, to go and catch fish. Simon's reply (5:5) was polite but not enthusiastic, because he was faced with a dilemma. Should he trust his own judgement, or place his trust in the man who had earlier healed his mother-in-law? Should he let Jesus have power and authority over his life and his work? Simon Peter then demonstrated something of the true faith that Jesus was looking for, when he opted, however begrudgingly, for obedience to Jesus' authority rather than his own judgement. Peter let down the nets once again (5:6), and miraculously, he succeeded in catching a large haul of fish, and from this point onwards, Jesus was able to build on Simon Peter's faith. The miracle was life changing, as are all miracles for those to whom they happen.

When Peter brought his great catch to shore, the miracle had done its job and drawn Peter's attention to the authority of the one who commanded it, and he fell down before Jesus in worship. Jesus began as Peter's '*master*' (5:5), someone whose authority was respected, but He ended up as Peter's '*Lord*' (5:8), whose authority was welcomed and accepted. This is how Simon Peter and his partners began their journey of faith, it changed their lives, and it eventually changed the world.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- How does this passage connect with similar stories in the other Gospels?
- Why does Jesus perform this miracle and what purpose does it serve?
- What does this story tell us about Peter, his call and his commission?

Notes on the text and translation

Important words

V3 'began to teach'

This is only a small point, but in Greek, the form of the word used here means 'he taught', but in the sense of beginning an activity that continued. In the context of the Gospel as a whole, it is reasonable to translate '*he began to teach*'.

V5 'Simon Peter'

This is the only place in Luke where this disciple is called 'Simon Peter'. Before this, it is Simon, and after this it is Peter (except in Luke 22:31). It seems that this verse marks a turning point for him, but this is not spelt out.

V5 'taken nothing'

Most translations have 'caught nothing', which is logical because Luke was talking about fishing! However, the Greek does say 'taking' here, and this contrasts with the use of a word for 'catching' found later in verse 10, where Jesus famously tells Peter '*you will be catching men*'. In this second instance, the Greek word means 'catch alive'.

Significant phrases

V8 'fell down on his knees before Jesus'

Other translations:

'he fell at Jesus' knees' (NIV)

'he fell down at Jesus' feet' (New American Standard)

Most translations say 'fell down at Jesus' knees', which sounds a little odd. The New American Standard version simply changes 'knees' to 'feet', in order to make this sound better. However, there is grammatical precedent for saying that the knees belonged to Simon Peter, and he fell 'before' Jesus (grammatical dative). Frankly, this sounds more sensible to me.

V10 'Do not be afraid'

Other translations:

'Don't be afraid' (NIV)

The English 'do not be afraid' is a correct translation of the Greek, but the original means 'stop being afraid', and not 'do not become afraid'. In other words, it is a command to cease, not a suggestion about behaviour!

V10 'from now on you will be catching people'

Other translations:

'from henceforth thou shalt catch men' (Authorised Version)

'from now on you will be catching people' (NRSV)

The famous phrase 'fishers of men' occurs in the Authorised Version in Matthew's version of this story (Matthew 4:19). The Greek word for 'men' means people in general, hence the translation of the NRSV, and it is a matter of preference whether translators use 'people' or 'men' in such circumstances. It is worth noting that in Greek, the tense of the verb is 'continuous', and this tells us that 'catching' is something that has begun and will go on.

Going Deeper

How does this passage connect with similar stories in the other Gospels?

When we read this story, we see quite naturally that it is similar to the story of Simon Peter's call as recorded in both Matthew (4:18-22) and Mark (1:16-20). In these two Gospels, Jesus calls Peter, together with Andrew, James and John, immediately after the 'temptations' and prior to the commencement of His ministry. They also tell us that the disciples were called from their fishing nets through Jesus' authoritative words '*follow me*', but by no other means. They say nothing of fishing or catching a miraculous haul.

There are several key differences between these two and our reading from Luke. The first is that where Matthew and Mark mention four disciples, Simon Peter, John, James and Andrew, Luke omits Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The reason for this may be that Luke wrote several decades later, and he reflects the

conventional view that Jesus had an inner circle of only three disciples, Peter, James and John, and he does not therefore consider it worth mentioning Andrew.

The other key difference is this; in Matthew and Mark, Peter and the others are called by the authority of Jesus' word alone, but in Luke, Peter responds to a miracle of power. This is a major difference. Are these stories all of the same incident, or different events that took place at different times? I suggest that all of them are different recollections of one event, and while some Gospels emphasise the authority of Jesus' word, Luke emphasises the authority of Jesus' deeds. Of course, we need to read in the Bible about both. Surely, we must think of Jesus as acting authoritatively to call people both by His word, and also through miraculous power. This is an example of our need to understand the whole of Scripture, and not just isolated stories from within the Gospels.

We should also remember the story told by John (21:4-8) in which the risen Christ appeared to the disciples as they were fishing. He called to the disciples to change where they were fishing, which resulted in a significantly large catch. There are many similarities between this and the story in Luke, but also a large number of significant differences. I suggest that the stories are so different in detail they are unlikely to be different recollections of the same event, and it seems far more likely that the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples in this special way to remind Simon Peter of his original call. This explanation makes much more sense in the context of John's Gospel, where Jesus goes on to share a meal of fish with the disciples and challenged Peter about his call, and commissioned him as the future leader of God's people (John 21:9-19).

Why does Jesus perform this miracle and what purpose does it serve?

Jesus seems to have known all along who he wanted to be the leader of his disciples. We do not know when he first saw Simon Peter, though Luke's Gospel implies it was when his mother-in-law was healed (4:38,39). So when at a later time Jesus sought a place from which to teach, he headed purposefully for Peter's boat (5:3), and issued instructions about where to place the boat so that he could teach (5:3). This may have been an early test. The disciples were in the middle of the work necessary after a hard night's fishing, and may well have wanted to go home and rest. Jesus' request placed extra burdens on them.

Jesus then sat down to teach in Simon Peter's boat, and although this seems strange to us today, it was normal for a teacher to sit whilst those who were listening stood. Immediately he finished teaching, however, he turned towards Simon Peter and issued his challenge to go out and fish again. We would love to know what Jesus was teaching, but Luke continues by focussing on Peter and ignoring the crowd. We do not hear about them again until the story of the healing of the paralytic, later on in Luke 5 (5:17-26).

Once He had Simon Peter's attention, Jesus issued His challenge, and Peter's response was pragmatic. Peter respected Jesus and he had been willing to accommodate Him, but as we have seen, Jesus faced him with a dilemma between personal experience and obedience. Should Peter trust his own professional judgement or the word of Jesus? At the crucial moment, Peter responded obediently by going out and doing what Jesus asked, and as a result, he was given the miracle of an amazing catch of fish. Those who have difficulties with miracles have always classed this one as less than convincing and have offered a considerable range of explanations about what could have happened, but this is not the point. Peter perceived the miracle as a demonstration of God's power, and responded accordingly.

The reason we call this event a miracle is not just because what happened is not explainable by natural reasons (some would even suggest that it is); it is a miracle of God's power because it caused Peter to be impressed with Jesus. If Peter had been more impressed by the miracle than by Jesus, he would have been thinking about the benefits of the catch and financial gain, but once drawn to Jesus, the fish were irrelevant. He came to Jesus and said '*get away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man*' (5:8). People were already wondering whether Jesus was the Messiah (4:21f. 40,41), so when Peter called Him '*Lord*', and confessed his sin, there is no reason for us to mistake what he meant. Peter was the first person to make an elementary statement of faith that Jesus was the Messiah.

Peter had much more to learn about Jesus, but he passed his first test of faith. He preferred being obedient to God to his own opinion, and he recognised the power of God at work. He then confessed both his own sin, and Jesus as his Lord.

What does this story tell us about Peter, his call and his commission?

The consequences of all this are highly significant. Of course, we know that Peter went on to become the leader of the disciples, but here, we gain some clues about what lay in store for Peter and his work-mates. To begin with, it seems that Peter was already the leader of a small group of fishermen, as Luke reports; '*for he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish they had taken*' (5:9). Then, after this, the passage adds, '*and so also were James and John ...*' (5:10). When you read the passage through, it certainly seems that although Simon Peter, James and John are mentioned by name, others were present who also responded to Jesus' miracle. It is worth noting that at the end of the story, after Jesus completed His conversation with Peter (5:10), Luke says '*... they left everything and followed Him*' (5:11), but without

making it clear who 'they' are. Grammatically, this could include these other people who were amazed at the catch, but mentioned earlier (5:9).

Before the miracle, Peter's faith was shown in trust and obedience, and when Peter fell down before Jesus, his faith increased and was shown in worship. This leaves one last important feature of active faith still to come, and this is service, which is the theme of the last paragraph. Jesus said to Simon '*Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people*' (5:10), which is a commission to service based on Peter's trust, obedience and worship. Peter's faith was not an addendum to his life, and now that he had worshipped Jesus, his faith was completed by this all consuming call to service. Catching men was not something that could be done if Simon Peter continued doing what he had done previously, and Jesus made it clear that everything had to change. When Peter and those with him '*left everything and followed Him*', they accepted the call to service. Of course, this was their response to the power and authority of God, but we should not forget that it was also the faithful response of people who were willing to serve.

Peter and the other disciples had much to learn in the years to come, but their future life was to be built on faith, as shown in trust, obedience, worship and service. This is a useful summary of what we might call the 'teaching' of this passage.

Application

The end result of this story in Luke is that Jesus gathered the first of His disciples and told them to 'catch people'. This is a Kingdom task, because it is God's will to save people and bring them out of the kingdoms of this world and into His Kingdom of light. We can say this with confidence because here, right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, this is Jesus' clear priority as he calls Peter, the first of His disciples. Jesus' power and authority is always directed towards this task, and we are unwise to ignore it.

There are many features of this story worth our consideration, and some of them will have become obvious in the course of the study. As far as miracles are concerned, the details of the large catch of fish are hardly worth debating, because the miracle itself does not contain significant spiritual information, it only draws people's attention to Jesus. This should warn us that we should not always want to see signs and miracles for the sake of seeing works of power; our desire is to see God at work in Jesus within the world. Miracles are a normal part of this, and people will perceive miracles in different things and in different ways. Their sole purpose is to point to Jesus and to the Father. They are a 'means' not an 'end', and we should always expect them yet never glory in them.

Here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry we receive a firm indication that Jesus' priority is to change people so that they are drawn into the kingdom of God and into a relationship with Jesus. Jesus wanted Peter to catch other people in the same way that He had caught Peter. How many times can we read this Scripture and understand this point without difficulty, yet fail to notice that our Lord wants us to be 'catchers of people'? Some in the church see the task of evangelism for example as one option or spiritual gift within the life of the church amongst others, including pouring tea and welcoming people at the door. When will we see that the spiritual gifts mentioned by Paul are not tasks, and that Jesus has given all disciples the same task of passing on to others the same benefit of salvation they have received from God? None of us can escape this call, but we can expect that God will enable us to fulfil it in our own unique way according to our own gifts and graces.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage tell us about the call of a Christian today?
2. In your group, share any experiences you may have of miraculous events that have drawn you towards God and aided your faith.
3. Why does Jesus say '*do not be afraid*' to Simon, and what might Simon fear? Are we afraid to meet with God, and if so, why?

Topics covered by this text

- *The call of a disciple to follow Jesus*
- *Faith and obedience, worship and service*
- *The importance of miracles to inspire faith*

- *Changing people*

Personal comments by author

As you will have seen in reading this study, I have been taken by the idea that our response to God contains belief in God, obedience, worship and service. It seems to me that many Christians are quite content to operate their lives on the basis of the first three, but many have difficulty with the third. This, of course, requires action and in most cases dedication. People have difficulty in giving this because they feel that their lives are full enough. However, we must all place our lives in His hands, and the options are clear:

1. *Firstly, we can let Him change what we do completely.*
2. *Secondly, we need Him to show us what else we must do to fulfil our call.*
3. *Thirdly, we must see if he will transform the normal things of our lives into His service.*

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Consider the three options I have listed above and ask which of them applies to you, or are there any other options of Christian service? Pray about this and talk with people about it. The Lord will show you the way.*
- *In the course of your everyday life, pray regularly for one person who is not already a Christian. Pray that God will lead him or her into the Kingdom.*

Final Prayer

Gracious Lord, lead each of us who own Your name on to greater things. May we perceive Your vision of what can be done in this world and submit ourselves to the leading and the power of Your Spirit to fulfil this call. May we become those who 'catch' people for Your Kingdom, and are content to do Your will alone.
AMEN
