

Fishers of Men

Andrew Kneeland, February 6, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who likes to fish?

Many of us have probably gone fishing at some point in our lives, maybe you've gone fishing quite a bit. But I think I can guarantee you that you haven't gone fishing more than Peter.

Peter was a fisherman. Fishing was his profession; he had spent years in his boat, throwing thousands of nets into the Sea of Galilee and praying to God that a few fish would be caught so he could feed his family.

I'm sure Peter had good days of fishing, and I'm sure he'd had some bad days. This was one of his bad days.

If we went fishing today and didn't catch anything, it wouldn't be the end of the world. We might be disappointed, but we would come home and not worry too much about it. When Peter had a bad day of fishing, he couldn't NOT worry about it. He *depended* on fishing; he *needed* to catch fish.

Fishing was his livelihood. It was how he provided for his family.

What would Peter's bad day of fishing look like for you? What would it look like if *your* security was threatened? If *you* were suddenly faced with not having food to put on the table, not having money to pay the bills?

But then look at verse 4! Peter had a bad day of fishing and Jesus tells him to go back out onto the water and try again. Now, how would you feel if someone told you that? Peter's response in verse five is just fascinating to me, there's so much going on in verse five.

He first tells Jesus: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!" He's a little defensive, isn't he? He's thinking, *I'm the fisherman here, not you*. But then Peter remembered who he was talking to.

He had met this same strange, homeless teacher yesterday. Jesus healed his mother-in-law from a life-threatening fever; not with any magical ointment or medicine, but just by speaking. The mere *words* of this Jesus character had

healed his mother-in-law.

So when Jesus told him to go out and try again, Peter said: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!” But then he immediately adds: “**But at your word** I will let down the nets.”

He knew the *word* of Jesus was special, and it was worth following. So he called his team and his friends and they all went back out to the lake to try again, even after a long night of fishing. And what happened? They caught so many fish their nets were breaking.

It didn’t matter that they hadn’t caught any all night. It didn’t matter that it was now daylight, not a very good time for fishing. The word of Jesus had made a miracle.

Peter was joined by James and John and they were overwhelmed by the power of this strange, homeless rabbi. Peter said: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Peter had prayed thousands of prayers; he had asked God to fill his nets and give him provision and blessing thousands of times. But now he knew: THIS person was who he had been praying to. This person was the Lord. And that was a terrifying thing for Peter to realize.

But then I love what Jesus says in verse 10. You can picture him lovingly taking Peter by the arm and standing him back up and saying: “Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men.”

And so Peter, James, and John left their prized fishing boats and expensive fishing equipment, and followed Jesus. They had new jobs, now. This was the start of Jesus’ ministry.

Just a few verses before this account in Luke 5, Jesus revealed his mission statement. He said in Luke 4:43: “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”

Peter, James, and John—and soon the nine other disciples—would now join Jesus on this mission. They became fishers of men.

Peter, James, and John would follow Jesus for years. They would see him

perform miracles of healing, miracles of raising the dead, miracles of feeding thousands of people. They would be with Jesus for years, watching him spend time with the dirtiest and most sinful people. They heard Jesus tell the poorest and least-deserving people about the Kingdom of God. They learned that Jesus had a special relationship with the God of Heaven, and that Jesus had been sent with a special purpose; to tell people that there was now a bridge between sinful humanity and sinless divinity.

Did Peter, James, and John know that they would experience all of these things when they left their fishing boats here in Luke 5? Did they know what was coming? No, they didn't.

Peter, James, and John would be with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, where they would see Jesus take off the cloak of his humanity and reveal himself as the Son of the one, true God.

Peter, James, and John would be with Jesus in the upper room when Jesus shared his last supper. They would be with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and would see him betrayed by their friend, tortured by illegitimate authorities, and killed without a just cause.

Here in Luke 5, Peter, James, and John didn't know this would happen. They didn't know *what* would happen. But they trusted this strange, homeless rabbi enough to leave their employment, their security and future, and their families, and follow Christ.

Jesus said to Peter in verse 10: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."

That's exactly what Peter did. On that first Easter Sunday Peter learned that this strange rabbi he had been following for three years was alive again! Fifty days after Christ's Resurrection, Peter preached a sermon in Jerusalem that led to three thousand people believing and being baptized.

I don't know how many fish Peter, James, and John caught in Luke 5, but it was surely the best catch they'd ever seen, the catch of a lifetime. But Peter's Pentecost sermon was an infinitely greater "catch."

Now, many of us might read that last verse and feel convicted that we need to

sacrifice something for Jesus. Have you seen those stickers that say: “He sacrificed everything; what will you sacrifice?”

That’s not the point of this passage. Jesus doesn’t want you all to drop everything, leave your families, and go to be missionaries. I don’t think that’s the calling of any of us here this morning.

We’re not all called to emulate verse 11. But we ARE all called—all of us, every one of us here—we ARE called to emulate verse 8. “But when Simon Peter saw (the miracle), he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’”

When we hear the Word of God and see the power of the Word of God, we should be overwhelmed. We should immediately be overwhelmed by the difference between sinful us and sinless God. A contrast that is startling, terrifying, and overwhelming.

This is the same experience Isaiah had in Isaiah 6. He saw a vision of the Lord in the heavenly temple, surrounded by angels and glory and the majesty of God Himself. And Isaiah’s response sounds just like Peter’s. He said: “It’s all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man!”

He heard the Word of God and he saw the power of the Word of God, and he was overwhelmed. He was immediately overwhelmed by the difference between his sin and God’s perfection.

Because there IS a massive difference. There is a massive, monumental problem. The Bible says that God’s eyes are “too pure to see evil” and that he “cannot look at wrong.”

We’re filled with evil, aren’t we? We’re filled with “wrong,” and we’re reminded of it every single day. Our bodies hurt and ache, our minds are filled with selfish and arrogant thoughts. We are filled with evil, brokenness, and sin.

Peter and Isaiah knew this, too. Their natural response to God was fear, and it should be ours, too. When we read these stories and these instructions in the Bible we should immediately see that we DON’T measure up. We should be afraid because we see the difference between OUR sin and God’s perfection.

But fear isn't where God leaves us. It isn't where he left Isaiah, and it isn't where he left Peter. In Isaiah 6, God responds to Isaiah's fear NOT by telling him that there wasn't anything to fear, but that *Isaiah* didn't have to be afraid. Verse 7: "Your guilt is removed and your sins are forgiven."

He said the same thing to Peter. He didn't tell Peter that there wasn't anything to be afraid of, but Jesus said that *Peter* didn't have to be afraid. Luke 5 verse 10: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."

There IS a reason to be afraid. But for those of us who believe that Jesus took on our sin and took on our guilt... we don't have to be afraid anymore. If you don't trust Jesus this morning, you should be afraid, you should be very afraid. But praise God, He's made a way for the sinful to be reconciled with the sinless. He made a way to solve that massive, monumental problem of our sin.

Jesus Christ became our sin, nailing it on the cross and allowing it to kill him as the necessary punishment. But the Son of God didn't stay dead... he rose from the grave, defeating death, sin, and the devil once and for all.

Peter, James, and John and the other disciples would see all of this happen. And they would joyfully follow Christ even after he ascended to heaven, continuing to tell everyone they could about this offer of forgiveness. This offer of provision and blessing.

They took this message to the entire world. Peter took this good news to Rome, where he was killed by Emperor Nero. James was executed by Herod Agrippa. It's believed that Andrew went to Syria, Bartholomew and Thomas went to India, Phillip went to North Africa, Matthew went to Ethiopia, Thaddeaus went to Armenia, Simon went to Egypt.

These disciples remained "spiritual fishermen" until most of them died as martyrs just a few years later. But the people they told about Jesus, told others about Jesus. And those people told others, those people told others... and you and I here today are hearing about this same Jesus and this same Kingdom of God and this same offer of forgiveness, provision, and blessing.

We are also fishers of men. And this is the greatest catch of all time. Amen.