

From Now on You Will Be Catching Men

Introduction

The Text

¹ On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret [the Sea of Galilee], 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)

Far as the Curse Is Found

- A. I want to start with some Christmas trivia. Who can shout out or even sing out the third stanza to the carol Joy to the World? "No more let sins and sorrows grow, / Nor thorns infest the ground; / He comes to make His blessings flow / Far as the curse is found, / Far as the curse is found, / Far as, far as, the curse is found."
1. That's what this text, and all of Luke up to this point, has been about! Jesus has come to reverse the effects of the fall and remove the curse that rests upon all mankind because of our sin. He has come "to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found."
- B. Well, how far is the curse found?
1. The curse touched childbirth and made it a painful thing. So this gospel begins with barren wombs bursting forth with life (Luke 1:13).
 2. The curse touched the bodies of men and women, making us subject to sickness and death—we're all on this slippery slope back to the dust from which we were created. So we watch as Christ lays His hands on the sick and dying and heals them all (Luke 4:40).
 3. The curse touched our vocations, the work of our hands: " ¹⁷ [C]ursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the

sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Gen 3:17–19a). So now, at this point in Luke’s gospel, Jesus is making His blessings flow even here.

- a. These fishermen had labored through the night and come back to the shore with nothing. But with a word from Jesus’ mouth the nets are breaking and the boats are sinking from the catch!
- C. This morning, I am going to organize my thoughts under two main heading: (1) Jesus Intrudes on Our Vocation (vv. 1-7); and (2) Jesus Includes Us in His Mission (vv. 8-11).

(1) Jesus Intrudes on Our Vocation (vv. 1-7)

- A. Though we desperately need Jesus to renew and speak into our work, our vocation, we often exclude Him from it.
 - 1. We assume His word has authority and power on Sabbath days, or Sunday mornings—like that’s when Jesus does the redemption stuff—but we don’t think He has much to say to our 9-5, as we engage in our vocations—engineers, businessmen, mothers, homemakers, students, etc.
 - a. As a result when Jesus first presses into our vocations, it almost feels like He’s intruding. But He’s not come to intrude, He’s come to redeem!

The Boat and the Pulpit

- A. We begin in our text with the crowds “pressing in on Him to hear the word of God” (v. 1). We read back in 4:37 that “reports about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.” So there’s this groundswell of excitement rising up in the region of Galilee. “Who is this man?!” And now people are pressing in on Him wanting to hear and see for themselves.
 - 1. In fact, it seems things are getting so crazy here that Jesus actually gets into a boat just to keep Himself at a safe distance from these people: “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” (v. 3).
- B. Christ’s move into the fishing boat is the first hint in our narrative at this intrusion I am talking about.
 - 1. Jesus takes the same posture He took in the synagogue back in Nazareth (4:20)—sitting down to teach—only now He is not in a place of religious devotion and worship, He is in a boat, a place of labor and sweat.
 - a. In our text, the boat has become the pulpit; the place of work has become the place of the Word. In other words: Jesus intrudes on our vocation and shows that He has something to say to us even there.

- C. And, what begins in the narrative as a mere hint, becomes blatantly obvious in what follows. For, as the grand finale to His sermon, Jesus, a carpenter and rabbi, begins to instruct professional fishermen in the ways of fishing: “And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch” (v. 4).
1. Jesus knows these fishermen had toiled through the night and caught nothing. And He here puts them to the test: “Does my word have authority and power for you, not just on Sabbath days, but on workdays as well?”
- D. And Peter both fails and passes the test, does he not? He begins with a slight objection: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!” (v. 5a). Peter is not willing to go to the task of obedience without first letting Jesus know that he finds the command a bit illogical and upsetting.
1. Let me illustrate what I think Peter may be feeling at this point. I am a pastor. I study the Bible, I preach the Bible, I know the Bible. But I don't know anything about microchips, like some of you do. The only chips I'm familiar with are those that end in “-itos”—Cheetos, Doritos, Tostitos, Fritos. Some of you guys have tried talking to me about your work with semi-conductors. I thought: “Okay, I know what a conductor is. It's a dude who drives a train. So a semi-conductor must be a guy who only partially or semi-drives a train.” I don't know anything about this stuff.
 - a. But now imagine I come into your office and I start telling you how to design a microchip. That would be ridiculous right? I can do the Bible thing and the ministry thing. But I'll leave the Cheeto, train-driving thing to you.
- E. So I think Peter might feel something like this here: “Why are You, a carpenter, a rabbi, telling me how to fish? You're intruding on my vocation. Fishing is what I do. You do Your Sabbath and synagogue thing, Your teaching and healing thing. Leave the fishing to me.”
1. But, in the end, to Peter's credit, he obeys. And, as a result, he is totally blown away!

Throwing Open the Bolted Door

- A. Let me read to you how one commentator sums up this whole scene: “Religion is a curse!—when, that is, it means the admitting of God into one department of life, while every other door is labeled ‘Secular’ and bolted against him. Such religion Jesus now repudiates
- As long as Simon's boat is being used for a pulpit, the owner has no objection to Jesus' saying in it what he likes. But when it reverts to being a fishing-boat, it is Simon's once more, and Jesus no longer has a say in how it is to be used. Fishing is Simon's job. In the same way, people will listen to Jesus, will consider what he says, and will even ask him to ‘make them better’ when they are sick; but for him . . . to interfere in their job, their home, their leisure, that is another thing altogether. Those matters have nothing, surely, to do with ‘religion’.
- So Jesus, the carpenter turned preacher, tells Simon, the fisherman, how to fish. We may guess the tone of Simon's answer, and imagine the expression on his face! . . . Yet the word of power shows that Jesus knows even more about Simon's job than Simon does himself . . .

Many would have to admit that it is at this point that the word of Jesus comes home to them—literally, because it invades the privacy of their own [workday] life, instead of staying respectably in a Sunday church service where it belongs. To learn from Jesus that they should be acknowledging his Father’s daily gifts of sun and rain, food and clothing, life and breath; his own lordship over all creation; and his Holy Spirit’s work of sanctifying every part of their being—this is a new and convicting thought, and perhaps the beginning of the gospel’s effective entrance into their hearts. And for us to whom it is no new thought, but a reminder, it may sometimes be equally necessary and equally convicting” (Michael Wilcock).

- B. We must pause at this point and ask: Do we do this? Do we slam and bolt the door that this commentator mentions here? “You can have Sundays, but all of this throughout the week is mine!”
 - 1. Or are we ever conversing, ever praying, ever listening for His direction and guidance, whether we are in the church or the office? Is the door always open to Him? Are we aware that in whatever we are doing it is God alone who gives the growth (1 Cor 3:6).
 - a. Jesus wants you to talk with Him about your board meeting, about that annual review with your supervisor, about that math homework that is dogging you, about the baby that still won’t sleep through the night. Don’t shut Him out from these things. Let Him intrude. He has something to say to us even there. He wants to help.
- C. We learn from this text that the decisive factor in our success is not our effort—for these fishermen toiled through the night. It is God’s word, and our humble reliance on it.

(2) Jesus Includes Us in His Mission (vv. 8-11)

A Surprising Response

- A. Peter surprises us a bit with his response to this miraculous showing, does he not? He does not fall at Jesus’ feet and say: “Thank You, now I shall make a wonderful profit in the marketplace!” Nor does he say: “Wow! Now I know that You are God’s Anointed and I will give my life to following You.”
 - 1. No, he says something quite different: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (v. 8).
- B. Certainly there is something winsome, something alluring, something gracious, something merciful about Jesus. But there is also something utterly dreadful about Him as well! When mere mortals come to face such raw authority and power it is a trembling thing, even when that authority and power is used for their good.
 - 1. So Peter’s response is not to say, “Cool Jesus! Thanks for the fish!” and to give Jesus a high-five or whatever.

- a. His response is quite consistent with those of other men when they have come to face God's glory. He falls on his face and says: "I'm not worthy of this. I am a sinner. Depart from me, lest I perish in Your holy presence!"
- C. When is the last time you fell under deep conviction of sin? We think we must be better off that we have not felt such a thing for quite some time. But I actually fear we are the worse for it. I am a sinner every day of my life. Even my righteous deeds are shot through with sinful corruptions. Why don't I feel that more? Where's the conviction?
 - 1. A Christian should not be moving on from conviction and contrition, but pressing deeper into it. As you get closer to the Light, you're going to see more of your junk.
- D. We should not be afraid when God raises our sensitivity to the sin still so prevalent within our hearts. We should rejoice that we have been given eyes to see it. And we should brace ourselves, for it often means a tidal wave of grace is about to break upon us from heaven.

An Even More Surprising Response

- A. And this is precisely what we see as we carry on in the narrative, is it not? One might think that this is the end of Peter. He's begging Jesus to go. He feels like such a loser.
 - 1. But this is not Peter's end. This is his beginning: *"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men"* (v. 10b).
- B. Before God can begin to make anything of us, He must bring us to the end of ourselves. So long as Peter thinks of himself as righteous and gifted and an asset to the kingdom of God, he is truly a liability. But when once Peter feels undone, he is ready to be remade!
 - 1. God lowers and then lifts, breaks and then builds, confounds and then calls. He intrudes on our vocation so that He can include us in His mission.

Healing the Hearts of Men

- A. There is something profoundly healing in all of this for those of us who are prone to wrap our identities all up in our vocations, our work.
 - 1. I was talking with my dad last week about men in particular, how we don't often share our feelings, our struggles, our emotional baggage. We have the same kind of wounds that women have, but we often feel like we can't talk about them, break out the tissues, and cry.
 - a. So we stiffen our lip, but the problems don't go away. They just evidence themselves in other ways.
- B. Take the man whose dad never validated and always tore him down as a kid. He's grown up just never feeling good enough. That wound cuts deep. It's there but he can never talk about it. "What are you a baby? Just get over it. Be a man."

1. So instead he just lives with this profound insecurity. And he sets out to prove his dad wrong—to prove to himself that he is worth something after all. He’s going to get that career, and make that money, and own that house, and drive that car. He becomes a workaholic—doing more and more, climbing ladder after ladder.
 - a. But it’s never enough. Because His heart’s broken. And deep down He needs to know that he’s loved.
- C. And Jesus is coming to these guys on the banks of the lake here and reworking all of this kind of stuff that can get tangled up in the heart of a man:
 1. “Take your work, take your identity, and wrap it up in Me. I already love you. You don’t have to prove yourself to Me. I know you’re a sinner. I know you’re broken. I will heal you, I will restore you, I will make you into something more. I am including you in My mission. ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men’ (v. 10b).”

Catching Men

- A. Jesus includes broken people in His mission of seeking and saving the lost. I love what He does with His words here: “you will be catching men”.
 1. He takes the language of Peter’s vocation (catching fish) and connects it to His greater mission (catching men). He uses the work Peter is familiar with to speak of a work Peter has to this point known nothing about. “You know how to catch fish. I will teach you how to catch men.”
- B. There is a profound truth wrapped up in this exchange.
 1. For these men, the move from catching fish to catching men meant that they were to actually leave their current vocation in light of Christ’s mission.
 2. But I do not think it must mean this for all of us. Often we fulfill this call not so much by changing our jobs but by changing our hearts. We come to that same old job, that same old vocation, with a new sense of purpose. Our vocation is now wonderfully intertwined with His mission of saving souls.
 - a. Whether we are fishermen, engineers, businessmen, mothers, students—in it all we are “catching men”. We are aware of a more fundamental mission, the mission that that involves drawing people up out of the depths of sin and suffering and bringing them into the kingdom of Christ.
 - i. There’s just no ordinary day at the office. God is using us to reach people for Him!

They Left Everything and Followed Him

- A. As we read this text you may have found yourself thinking: “Oh, I like this story. All I have to do is turn to Jesus and He can make my nets break and my ships sink. That’d be good for my bottom line. I’ll invite Jesus into my work any day.”
 - 1. But I wonder if you noticed [v. 11](#): “[And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.](#)”
- B. They leave it all to follow Him! What began all about fish, ends all about Jesus.
 - 1. Leon Morris writes: “[They left the greatest catch they had seen in all their lives. That catch was not as important as what it showed them about Jesus, so they followed him.](#)”
 - a. It’s no longer about their bottom line, it’s about Jesus!

Conclusion

- A. In the end, the only way Jesus will cause blessing to flow as far as the curse is found is by becoming a curse for us. These fishermen will follow Christ all the way to the cross. And they will watch there as the One who filled their nets with fish, will Himself be caught in the net laid out for Him by wicked men. God’s wrath against our sin would be poured out on Him.
 - 1. And by the third day it all becomes clear:
 - a. Here’s how Jesus was able to draw near to sinful men instead of depart from them. Here’s how Jesus was able to take broken men and make them fruitful.
 - i. He would take the sin, the curse, the brokenness on Himself. And He would do away with it once and for all.
- B. Brothers and sisters, let Him intrude on your vocation this week; let Him include you in His mission; let Him be the treasure of your heart. He died and rose for you!