

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XXX: THE CALLING OF PETER, ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
4:18-22	1:16-20	5:1-11		

Lesson Overview

○ Having returned into Galilee from Judea, Jesus visits His home town of Nazareth in which the towns people reject Him. Jesus departs for Capernaum which becomes His “hometown” during His earthly ministry. Capernaum is the home of the brothers Peter and Andrew (Mt 8:14; Mk 1:29; Lk 4:38), and the brothers James and John. The town is located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Peter and Andrew had resided in Bethsaida (Jn 1:44) which was only a few miles to the east of Capernaum. They either moved or had multiple residences due to their fishing occupation.

○ “Up to this time Jesus has been preaching, accompanied by a few friends, but without forming about Him a circle of permanent disciples. As His work grows, He feels it necessary to give it a more definite form. The time has arrived when He deems it wise to attach to Himself, as regular disciples, those whom the Father has given Him.” [Godet, *Luke*]

○ “That the call of the four apostles belongs here, in accordance with Mark’s order, is obvious; since they were present with Jesus at the healing of the demoniac and of Peter’s wife’s mother. The three accounts all probably relate to the same transaction, though many writers prefer to take what is narrated in Luke 5:1-11, as a wholly distinct and later event.” [Davies, *Harmony*] While Hendriksen and Morris considers the Luke account to be unique, all three of the Harmonies I am using considers all three incidences to be the same event and I am following their format. “The call related here by Luke is certainly the same as that which is related, in a more abridged form, by Matthew and Mark. For can anyone suppose that Jesus twice addressed the same persons in these terms, ‘I will make you fishers of men,’ and that they could have twice left all in order to follow Him? If the miraculous draught of fishes is omitted in Matthew and Mark, it is because ... in the traditional narratives, the whole interest was centered in the word of Jesus, which was the soul of every incident. Mark has given completeness to these narratives wherever he could avail himself of Peter’s accounts. But here this was not the case, because as many facts go to prove, Peter avoided giving the prominence to himself in his own narrations.” [Godet, *Luke*]

Mt 4:18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

Mk 1:16 Now as He walked by the sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

Lk 5:1,2 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, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

The crowd was so large and pressing that they were crowding Him. He sees two empty boats along the shore with their owners beside them, preparing their nets for the next fishing trip.

Gennesaret (meaning “princely garden” ?) is the very fertile land the south of Capernaum. “Luke always calls this sheet of water a lake, whereas the other Evangelists follow the Old Testament in calling it a sea. It measures roughly 13 miles by 7 miles and is situated about 700 feet below sea level. This is the only place where it is called Gennesaret, the usual name being Galilee (Chinneroth in the Old Testament; Tiberias twice in John).” [Morris, *Luke*] “Lake: an illustration of the more classical style of Luke as compared with Matthew and Mark. They and John also use *sea*.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

What is taking place is a “successful service”: the Preacher is proclaiming not men’s words but God’s word, and the people is eagerly listening. “There was a glorious prospect of a plentiful harvest, but how few of these blades came to full corn in the ear! To hear with diligence and affection is well; but a preacher of the Gospel may expect that, out of crowds of hearers, only a few, comparatively, will fully receive the truth, and hold out to the end.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Two ships: Two vessels, It is highly improper to term these ships. They appear to have been only such small boats as are used to manage nets on flat smooth beaches: one end of the net is attached to the shore; the fishermen row out, and drop the net as they go, making a kind of semicircle from the shore; they return, and bring the rope attached to the other end with them, and then the net is hauled on shore; and, as it was sunk with weights to the bottom, and floated with corks at the top, all the fish in that compass were included, and drawn to shore.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Lk 5:3 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 enters one of Peter’s empty boats and asked Peter to push Him out away from the shore a short ways. There Jesus sits (the normal position for teaching) and continued to teach the people. Note the practical methods Jesus uses in reaching the people: sometimes it was in a very formal manner in the synagogues or the temple. But within reason Jesus would use anything that could serve as His pulpit: sometimes in a mountain (Mt 5:1), or a house

(Lk 5:17), or a desert (Mk 8:1,4), or even in a cemetery (Jn 11:38).

Lk 5:4,5 Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. 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. : After having taught the people, Jesus asks Peter to go out where the water was deep. With the help of Peter's workers (while talking to Peter, He says 'drop *your* - plural - nets), Jesus says to cast out the nets. "Peter was an experienced fisherman who knew the habits of fish. Fishing was normally done at night, for it was then that the fish rose from the depths to feed at the surface of the water.... Those in the fishing trade knew it was useless to attempt to fish in the daylight hours." [Pentecost, *Words of Jesus*] "Humanly speaking, the order which Jesus issued — 'Launch out into the deep,' etc. — was strange. A carpenter telling an experienced fisherman how to catch fish! He was ordering him to fish at an unlikely place and time, that is, in deep water and in bright daylight.... Accordingly, when Simon receives this order, faith and doubt, trust and misgiving, are battling it out. His fisherman's expertise raises a doubt and whispers to him that he must not obey Jesus. His conscience, illuminated by faith, tells him that he must obey. Faith conquers, though still tempered with some misgiving." [Hendriksen, *Luke*]

God requires of us faith to obey Christ when everything says it is contrary to nature.

We are again confronted with the paradox of Jesus' humanity and divinity, as Jesus knew the place of the fish (perhaps even controlling nature to bring the fish to that place). It is this divinity that shines forth and humbles Peter later.

"In reply Peter addresses Jesus as *Master* (*epistata*), a word found in this Gospel only in the New Testament. In all seven of its occurrences it is used in addressing Jesus. The term is not specific like 'Rabbi' (which Luke never uses), but denotes anyone in authority." [Morris, *Luke*] "He calls Jesus ἐπιστάτης [*epistatās*], properly *Overseer, Master*. This word frequently occurs in Luke; it is more general than ῥαββί [*rabbi*] or δδάσκαλος [*didaskalos* = teacher]; it refers to any kind of oversight." [Godet, *Luke*] "This is the first place where this word occurs; it is used by none of the inspired penmen but Luke, and he applies it only to our blessed Lord. It properly signifies a prefect, or one who is set over certain affairs or persons: it is used also for an instructor, or teacher. Peter considered Christ, from what he had heard, as teacher of a Divine doctrine, and as having authority to command, etc. He seems to comprise both ideas in this appellation; he listened attentively to his teaching, and readily obeyed his orders. To hear attentively, and obey cheerfully, are duties we owe, not only to the sovereign Master of the world, but also to ourselves. No man ever took Jesus profitably for his teacher, who did not at the same time receive him as his Lord." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

"Thrust out: Rev., *put out*. The special nautical word for putting out to sea." [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

"We have toiled all the night: They had cast the net several times in the course of the night, and drew it to shore without success, and were now greatly disheartened. I have seen several laborious draughts of this kind made without fruit. All labor must be fruitless where the blessing of God is not; but especially that of the ministry. It is the presence and influence of Christ, in a congregation, that cause souls to be gathered unto himself: without these, whatever the preacher's eloquence or abilities may be, all will be night, and fruitless labor." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Lk 5:6,7 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. 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. : So large was the haul that small cords in the net began to snap, one here and one there (the net did not rip apart else the fish would have swam away). Hearing the nets begin to give away, they signaled to their partners to help. Help arrives, but the haul was still so great that both boats were barely above the level of the water to keep the boats afloat.

"Brake: the AV fails to give the force of the imperfect, *were breaking*, as Rev.; or even better, possible, *began to break*. Trench suggests *were at the point to break*." [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Beckoned: note they didn't shout, either because the other boat was too far away (either out at sea with them but at a distance, or the other boat was still along the shore while their boat was in deep water) or just due to their occupation, the fisherman communicated with signals. "The word originally means *to nod assent*, and so, generally, *to make a sign*. They made signs because of the distance of the other boat; hardly, as has been suggested, because they were too much amazed to speak." [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Wuest: "And they made signs to their partners in the other boat to come and lend them a hand."

The partners: two different words are used here, one meaning "comrades" (*metochois*, here) and possibly meant the hired help. The other word used means specifically "partners" (*koinōnoi*, v10) and refers to James and John who were business partners with Peter and Andrew. Most I'm aware of make these two groups the same however, merely using different words to describe the same people, James and John. "In vs 7 the word rendered *partners* is *metochoi*; from *meta*, *with*, and *echō*, *to have*. The word *partners* (*koinōnoi*) in vs 10 denotes a closer association, a common interest. The kindred noun, *koinōnia*, *fellowship*, is used of the fellowship of believers with Christ (1 Cor 1:9); the *communion* of the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16); the *communion* of the Holy Ghost (2 Cor 13:14). The persons referred to in verse 7 might have been only hired workmen (Mark 1:20), temporarily associated with the principals." [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Lk 5:8-10a When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. : Peter recognizes his own unworthiness as the awesome display of the power of Jesus. With his partners, they realize they were in the presence of God (again and again in the OT the word "Lord" is equivalent to "God"). "The address, *Lord*, replaces 'Master' of verse 5 and this is probably connected with this heightened apprehension. While it can be used as no more than a form of polite address (like our 'sir'), the word is also used

consistently of God in the Septuagint, and is common in many religions in referring to deity.” [Morris, *Luke*] Wuest: “Now Simon Peter, having seen this, fell down at Jesus’ knees, say, Depart from me at once because I am a man, a sinner, Master. For amazement took possession of him and of all who were with him because of the catch of fish which they took.” **“When one is confronted with Jesus, it is impossible to remain neutral. His enemies react to His miracles with hatred and reviling; His true disciples, with homage and reverence. They stoop and worship.”** [Hendriksen, *Luke*]

Peter falling at the knees of Jesus is an unusual saying, which some suggest should be that Peter fell on his knees before Jesus. The difficulty is removed if we picture Jesus as still sitting and Peter falling in humility in front of Jesus.

“Depart from me; for I am a sinful man: Go out from me, i.e. from my boat. Peter was fully convinced that this draught of fish was a miraculous one; and that God himself had particularly interfered in this matter, whose presence and power he revered in the person of Jesus. But as he felt himself a sinner, he was afraid the Divine purity of Christ could not possibly endure him; therefore he wished for a separation from that power, which he was afraid might break forth and consume him. It seems to have been a received maxim among the Jews, that whoever had seen a particular manifestation of God should speedily die. Hence Jacob seemed astonished that his life should have been preserved, when he had seen God face to face, Genesis 32:30. So the nobles of Israel saw God, and yet did eat and drink; for on them he had laid not his hand, i.e. to destroy them, though it appears to have been expected by them, in consequence of this discovery which he made of himself. See Exodus 24:10, 11, and the notes there. This supposition of the Jews seems to have been founded on the authority of God himself, Exodus 33:20: There shall no man see my FACE and LIVE. So Moses, Deuteronomy 5:26: Who is there of all flesh that hath heard the voice of the living God, speaking out of the midst of the fire as we have, and LIVED? So Gideon expected to be immediately slain, because he had seen an angel of the Lord, and a miracle performed by him. See Judges 6:21-23. So likewise Manoah and his wife, Judges 13:22: We shall surely DIE, for we have SEEN GOD. These different passages sufficiently show in what sense these words of Peter are to be understood.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Mt 4:19,20 And He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him.

Mk 1:17,18 And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed Him.

Lk 5:10b,11 And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed Him.

Kind Shepherd as He is, Jesus takes note of Peter’s alarmed feeling and puts his mind to rest. “He reveals to him that this is a critical moment, a turning point, in Peter’s life. From this moment on the disciple’s main vocation will change. Simon has been catching *fish*. He is going to be catching *men*. He has been catching in order *to kill*. He will be catching in order to impart life, that is, to be an instrument in God’s hand in doing this. All this may well be implied in the words used in the original, which can also be rendered, ‘From now on you will be catching men alive,’ implying ‘and for life.’” [Hendriksen, *Luke*] Wuest: “From this moment as characterized by what has just taken place, you shall be catching men alive.”

Time had been spent with Jesus loosely as they had been with John the Baptist, left John to follow Jesus, and perhaps had traveled with Jesus for some time (when they left to return to their occupation is not given). But now a definite call is given for them to forsake all in the message given to Peter. What was left? To us it seems to be a few boats and some nets. To them it was all they were and had: their families, their occupations, their possessions, everything they were and had was given up to follow Jesus (note Lk 18:28-30). “The fact that James and John were partners with their father and had a number of hired servants as well as many boats and nets indicates that these brothers were partners in a very lucrative fishing enterprise.” [Pentecost, *Words of Jesus*]

Several lessons could be gleaned from their actions:

- When did they forsake all? When it was evident to them that **all they had came through the providential hands of God, and that all they had was temporarily “loaned” to them as stewards of God’s riches.**
- What happened to the fish? Would the Lord allow them to catch a load like that to rot? Possibly this was further evidence that **as Sovereign, the disciples could safely leave their families (including elderly parents) to the watch care of Him who can provide all.**
- The cost of following Christ is the same for all, rich or poor. “Both pairs of brothers found obedience to the call of Christ costly; it meant abandonment of all that they held dear, and all earthly security, in simple committal to Christ. Nor can we say that those who left father and hired servants left more than those who left their nets alone, inasmuch as **each left all that he had; that is always the minimum requirement for the Christian** (Lk 14:33).” [Cole, *Mark*]
- **This calling is lifelong.** “The analytical from *esā zōgrōn, thou shalt be catching*, expresses the permanence of this mission; and the words, *from henceforth*, its altogether new character. Just as the fisherman, by his superior intelligence, makes the fish fall into his snares, so the believer, restored to God and to himself, may seize hold of the natural man, and lift it up with himself to God.” [Godet, *Luke*] “Thou shalt catch: Lit., *thou shalt be catching*, the participle and finite verb denoting that this is to be his habitual calling.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]
- God chooses the weak things of the world to confuse the wise. “Why did not Jesus Christ call some of the eminent Scribes or Pharisees to publish his Gospel, and not poor unlearned fishermen, without credit or authority? Because it was

the kingdom of heaven they were to preach, and their teaching must come from above: besides, the conversion of sinners, though it be effected instrumentally by the preaching of the Gospel, yet the grand agent in it is the Spirit of God. As the instruments were comparatively mean, and, the work which was accomplished by them was grand and glorious, the excellency of the power at once appeared to be of GOD, and not of man; and thus the glory, due alone to his name, was secured, and the great Operator of all good had the deserved praise. Seminaries of learning, in the order of God's providence and grace, have great and important uses; and, in reference to such uses, they should be treated with great respect: but to make preachers of the Gospel is a matter to which they are utterly inadequate; it is a prerogative that God never did, and never will, delegate to man.

Where the seed of the kingdom of God is sowed, and a dispensation of the Gospel is committed to a man, a good education may be of great and general use: but it no more follows, because a man has had a good education, that therefore he is qualified to preach the Gospel, than it does, that because he has not had that, therefore he is unqualified; for there may be much ignorance of Divine things where there is much human learning; and a man may be well taught in the things of God, and be able to teach others, who has not had the advantages of a liberal education.

Men-made ministers have almost ruined the heritage of God. To prevent this, our Church requires that a man be inwardly moved to take upon himself this ministry, before he can be ordained to it. And he who cannot say, that he trusts (has rational and Scriptural conviction) that he is moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon himself this office, is an intruder into the heritage of God, and his ordination vitiated and of none effect. See the truly apostolic Ordination Service of the Church of England.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Mt 4:21,22 And going on from thence, He saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed Him.

Mk 1:19,20 And when He had gone a little farther thence, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway He called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after Him.

“But why should these be called to leave their employment and their father, probably now aged? To this I answer, that to be obedient to, provide for, and comfort our parents, is the highest duty we owe or can discharge, except that to God. But, when God calls to the work of the ministry, father and mother and all must be left. Were we necessary to their comfort and support before? Then God, if he call us into another work or state, will take care to supply to them our lack of service some other way; and, if this be not done, it is a proof we have mistaken our call. Again, were our parents necessary to us, and in leaving them for the sake of the Gospel, or in obedience to a Divine command, do we deprive ourselves of the comforts of life? No matter: we should prefer the honor of serving the Most High, even in poverty and humility, to all the comforts of a father's house. But what an honor was the vocation of James and John, to old Zebedee their father! His sons are called to be heralds of the God of heaven! Allowing him to have been a pious man, this must have given him unutterable delight.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Note Mark alone, the writer that emphasizes the servanthood of Christ, makes reference to the servants of Zebedee.

Mending: not necessarily *repairing*; the word means *to adjust*, to *put to rights*. It may mean here *preparing* the nets for the next fishing. Wuest: “And having gone on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, getting their nets ready for use.”