

## **Luke 5:1-11**

### **The Cost of a Fishing License**

We all have dreams. We all want something. Some of the great choices in life revolve around what we will sacrifice to get them. Do we sacrifice time with family to get ahead in our career? What if getting ahead means we can provide for them better? Or eventually be in a place where we can spend even more time with family? Each of us has only so many resources. We have limited amounts of money, talent, intelligence and time. The great question is how we use them. What will we sacrifice for what potential gains? The same is true of spiritual matters. We all want to do great things for God. Or at least we all ought to want to do great things for God. It is easy to want to do them, the challenge is in accepting that we must sacrifice to do them.

In this passage, Luke continues the story of Jesus as He preaches His way through Galilee. Here we see Jesus as both man and God. He walked and talked like a man, and indeed was seen as a man by those around Him. He was just another traveling rabbi teaching in the synagogues on the Sabbath. Yet He also performed miracles that only God could do.

After the events in Nazareth and Capernaum, it is not surprising that great crowds began to follow Jesus. Whether to genuinely hear what He had to say or, perhaps more likely, just to see the miracles He could at any moment perform, we cannot know. There was no mass media, obviously, so public speakers were often seen as bright spots in an otherwise dreary and repetitive existence. When Jesus came to town, people came out to see if what they had heard was true.

#### **The Setting**

“Now it happened” (v.1) does not indicate any specific amount of time. We do know that Jesus is still in Galilee, that the disciples are still in the process of being ‘called,’ and that Matthew has not yet joined the group (Luke 5:27-32). It is also true that Andrew, Peter, James, and John have already begun their relationship with Jesus (Matthew 4:18-22).

Some basic geography may help us picture things better. The “lake of Gennesaret” (v. 1) is a reference to the Sea of Galilee. Gennesaret was the area to the northwest of the sea and was often used to identify the sea itself. The Sea of Galilee is about thirteen miles from north to south and seven miles from east to west. It is about seven hundred feet below sea level and is about one hundred forty feet at its greatest depth. In the OT it was called the Sea of Chinneroth (Joshua 11:2) and after the time of Jesus it was known as the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1) after the Roman emperor. The Jordan River flows into it from the north and exits at the southern end. Capernaum is located on the northwest part of the sea, though we cannot be certain that this is the area where Jesus was preaching at this time. Josephus claims that as many as two hundred boats worked the sea, fishing for tilapia among other fish.

The people were “listening to the word of God” (v. 1). Quite literally, in fact. Jesus was no doubt preaching His usual subject of the kingdom of God and salvation, continuing the themes He had made clear when He spoke in the synagogues at Nazareth and Capernaum. No doubt the news of the poor entering the kingdom of God resonated with common fishermen and their families.



### **The Boat**

Scripture offers no description of the boat, but in 1986 a wooden boat from the first century was discovered near the lake's northwestern shore. Studies have shown that the wood used in construction was cedar and oak, and the boat was about 27 feet long, 7 feet wide, and 3 ½ feet high. It is estimated that the boat would hold about fifteen people. A boat like this would clearly have been large enough to hold Jesus and His disciples (Matthew 8:23).

The boats Jesus saw were “lying at the edge of the lake” since the “fishermen had

gotten out of them and were washing their nets” (v. 2). Fishing on the Sea of Galilee was a nighttime activity, and the weary men were cleaning up after a very unproductive night. They were repairing damage to the nets, cleaning the boat, and generally preparing everything to go try again the next evening.

As Jesus taught, those listening were so many that “the crowd was pressing around Him” (v. 1). So Jesus, ever practical, “got into one of the boats” (v. 3) and had Peter push the boat out away from shore that He might have room to speak and be heard. He sat down (not unusual for a teacher in this culture, although again quite practical since the boat was no doubt moving about in the water) and continued teaching. Though the Son of God, Jesus was not above teaching in a floating boat, in a home (Luke 5:17-19), in the desert (Mark 8:1, 4), or even in a cemetery (John 11:38). What mattered to Jesus was not the size of the audience or the quality of the acoustics, but the message.

One lesson we may apply from this is that we all have something to offer Christ. It may be money or time or talent. In this case, what Jesus needed was a boat, and Peter responded with his. Another point to keep in mind is that not many of us are called to leadership directly. First we must prove ourselves worthy of a little responsibility. “For to everyone who has, more shall be given” (Matthew 25:29). Before he could be handed the keys to the kingdom, Peter had to offer a boat.

### **The Command**

Fisherman will tell you that the great challenge in fishing is finding the fish. Today there are any number of GPS devices, sonar systems, and other fish-finders on the market. With none of that technology available in the first century, we here find a carpenter telling a fisherman where to fish! Jesus said to Peter, “put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch” (v.4). We can only imagine the eye-rolling from the other fisherman within earshot. After all, the deep water is not where fish are generally found. Since Peter was being addressed, I presume he held his composure facially, but still he responded “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets” (v. 5). Scripture does not relate the tone of his voice, and Jesus does not rebuke him, still it is

difficult to be convinced that Peter had very high expectations of the result. The fact that Peter uses the word *epistates* meaning “one who is set over” which is not an address one would make to a deity, indicates he did not, at least at this moment, expect a miracle.

We must remember that not every command of God will seem sensible. The wisdom of God may not always be evident to us. “My thoughts are not your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8) God reminds us. Nor should we be surprised if our non-Christian co-workers and friends find our obedience to the commands of God puzzling at best, and madness at worst. After all, “a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Neither is God under the requirement to explain Himself when He asks us to do something. Nor is He required to make obedience convenient. We should follow the command and simply “trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5)

“I will do as you say” (v. 5) is the only sensible response to the commands of God. After all, at God’s word, creation was born. At God’s word, rulers and nations rise and fall. How much better our lives would be if we heeded this admonition and aligned our actions with the word of God.

Regardless of the enthusiasm with which Peter obeyed, the consequence of his obedience was remarkable. Upon casting their nets into the sea, “they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break” (v. 6). The potential for disaster was so great that “they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them” (v. 7). Apparently they had to signal because they had moved so far out into the lake that they could not be heard by shouting. These partners were probably James and John, but scripture is not specific. In any event, this only served to make matter worse, since both boats became so laden with fish that “they began to sink” (v. 7).

How did Jesus perform this miracle? There are two options. One is that He could have used His divine attribute of omniscience to know where the fish would be. He would demonstrate this power again when He told Peter to “go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me” (Matthew 17:27). Jesus also knew where to tell His disciples to meet a man who would allow them to use a room for Passover (Mark 14:13) and He knew Nathaniel had been under a fig tree (John 1:47-49). He could even know what people were thinking (Luke 5:22). While in His human nature Jesus was limited, He could exercise His divine attribute of omniscience in accordance with the will of His Father. Scripture reminds us that “there is no creature hidden from His sight” (Hebrews 4:13) so ultimately we must simply acknowledge along with Peter “Lord, You know all things” (John 21:17).

A second option is that Jesus could have used His divine attribute of omnipotence to compel the fish to come to where they were fishing. God gave man dominion over all creation, and though this was compromised with the Fall, in Christ this is restored since “all things have been handed over to Me by My Father” (Matthew 11:27). In either case, Jesus certainly demonstrated a power over nature that could not be replicated by a mere human. This was an act of God.

We must also mark the generosity of Jesus. The catch of fish was not just enough for a meal, or even to feed Peter’s family for a week. To try to make sense of this, think of it like this. If the boat resembled the

one found in 1986, it was about 27 feet long and 7 feet wide and about 3 ½ feet in height. This means the capacity of the boat was approximately 660 cubic feet. The weight of water is about 62 pounds per cubic foot. That means it would displace just over 41,000 pounds of fresh water. Subtracting the actual weight of the boat itself as well as the people on board, various supplies and fishing tackle, clearly there is room for a huge quantity of fish before the boat would begin to sink!

As it says in Nehemiah 9:6,

“You alone are the LORD.  
You have made the heavens,  
The heaven of heavens with all their host,  
The earth and all that is on it,  
The seas and all that is in them.  
You give life to all of them  
And the heavenly host bows down before You.”

### **The Response**

This was an act of God, and the response of Peter is no less moving for its predictability. Upon witnessing the amazing miracle, he “fell down at Jesus’ feet” and cried out “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man” (v. 8). This time Peter does not refer to Jesus as *epistates* but rather he uses the term *kurios*, which means “lord.” This word, when combined with the falling at Jesus’ knees indicates an act of worship, which every Jew understood to be offered to God alone.

Peter had heard Jesus teach, seen Him cast out a demon, heal his mother-in-law, and now produce a miraculous catch of fish. There was no other conclusion to draw. Peter’s response is typical of those who recognize themselves to be in the presence of God. Abraham (Genesis 18:27), Job (Job 42:5-6), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:28), and John (Revelation 1:17) all had the same response. This, too, is why we often fear to pray the prayer of Psalm 139:23, “search me, O God, and know my heart.” We know we cannot bear the presence of the holy God. The presence of Christ makes man feel his sinfulness. We ought to cultivate this. We very rarely have too low an opinion of ourselves.

This miracle had to be especially significant to Peter since he was a fisherman. After all, he knew how to catch fish. Because of our sinful egos, we often do not like people who are better than we are at something we consider ourselves good at. But if we can put that aside, only an expert can truly appreciate another expert.

The irony in Peter’s response is that as Peter calls Jesus to leave him alone, Jesus is, in fact, choosing to draw Peter closer. The more we are aware of our sinfulness, the closer we are to God. The words from Jesus to Peter are simple and to the point, “do not fear” (v. 10). Despite his sinfulness, there was no need for Peter to be afraid. Jesus had come to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). Think of the recent teachings of Jesus.

He had been sent by the Father

“to proclaim release to the captives,  
and recovery of sight to the blind,

to set free those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

What was required was a decision. In John’s gospel, the narrative of the first calling of Andrew and Peter is related. In Matthew chapter 4 and Mark chapter 1, the further step of joining Jesus in His local ministry was offered. But this was more. This was a final calling to full-time ministry. No longer could they be helpers of Jesus in their spare time from running their local fishing business. No longer would their ministry be confined to the local area where they lived and worked. This was a call to leave everything.

Though the statement was made by Jesus to Peter, the invitation was accepted by others. They did leave everything. Peter later said “behold, we have left our own homes and followed You” (Luke 18:28). They left their homes, families, and businesses, and they left them at a time of perhaps their greatest prosperity. Peter and his companions had been called into service by the Lord. So compelling was Jesus, that after what must have been a huge boon to their fishing business, they “left everything and followed Him” (v. 11).

Each of us who is a child of God has a calling, a spiritual gift. What are we willing to give up to make the most use of that gift for the kingdom of God?

What about the fish? No doubt they were not left to rot. If Peter and his partners did not enjoy the harvest, it can reasonably be assumed that all nearby ate well that night.

### **Take Aways**

The cost of following Christ is great. The cost of not following Him is greater.