
But at Your Word...I will

Luke 5:1-11

(This message was largely inspired and shaped by a message preached 9/29/02 from Dr. John Piper)

Introduction We want to continue in our May series called “An Outreach Focused Life”. Our focus has been to open up the topic of missions and evangelism with an eye toward strengthening our desire for and efforts in these two ministries. Our purpose in this series has been to answer a searching question “What would keep us from becoming an outward-looking, outward-moving community of Christ Jesus?”.

Last week we thought our way through the book of Jonah and noticed something that might keep us from increasing in world-wide missions. Our hearts must be engaged in the Great Commission if we are to see advancements in reaching the nations through our local efforts. Do our values reflect a desire to see a biblical local church for every people group in the world?

We said from the book of Jonah that *we are to be like God who is empathetic for the nations; not like Jonah who was apathetic over the nations*. We know that victory in missions is secure because God in missions is sovereign. We know that His precepts carry His power to accomplish His purpose. But we also noticed that He works out this salvation to the ends of the Earth through His people. To get the Word out to the World we saw how God recaptured his prophet. For us to strengthen our efforts in the Great Commission our hearts must be engaged or reengaged in world-wide missions. The message last Sunday was preached to expose hearts with hope that repentance where needed would be granted and our missions efforts will increase.

We are growing...

Tonight my aim is to preach and pray in such a way that fresh initiatives and a new fruitfulness in evangelism will be seen and enjoyed at the Chapel. So I would like to begin by making two observations. As a Church, I’m delighted to say that we are growing in our understanding of the Bible. We are growing in the way we think about ministry. We are growing in clarity and conviction in children’s and youth ministries. We are growing in our care for the burdened. We are growing in giving of finances. We are growing in our vision of missions. We are growing in our counseling ministry. We are growing in the way we do personal ministry at Flock level. We are growing in membership. Beloved, we are growing.

We are not growing...

But strangely we have not been growing in seeing people *turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God...*(Acts 26:18) by means of God’s Word through God’s people (Acts 14:1). And it is my counsel that we need to be roused to this fact. We need to notice where we need change. And we need to change. Tonight I set out to preach and pray in such a way that this will happen; not overnight but over time.

To do this I have chosen Luke 5:1-11. In this scene we will listen to and watch Jesus make a point that we all must believe. To the degree that we believe this point, we will grow in witness and love for the lost. And to the degree we doubt this point, we will slow up and eventually stop in our efforts to see people in our neighborhoods converted to Christ.

Now Jesus makes his point by way of showing us something about how he means for us to catch unbelievers and gather them into the faith. What is his point & how does it apply to us is what this message is about. <pray & read text>

The Principle

It seems that Jesus' message and miracle point to a parable of sorts. Embedded in this miracle we notice an overpowering and empowering principle. Reduced to one sentence this story is saying *by Jesus multitudes will come to saving faith through followers of Jesus*. Let me repeat it. By Jesus multitudes will come to saving faith through followers of Jesus. This measured sentence might just yield measureless harvest if we will simply believe it. So, for us to believe cogently we must see clearly this principle. To notice His point in an obedient way let's break the principle down into its three primary phrases.

The Parts of the Principle

By Jesus

The first part of this principle is the phrase "by Jesus". Luke is drawing our attention to Jesus Christ. Amid all the people and the boats and the fish and the thrills stands Jesus Christ. He is the One spotlighted.

All power and authority

We see this in vv.1-3. People pressing in on him to hear from him demonstrates the centrality of Christ in evangelism. We notice Him commanding Peter and Peter following the command in v.4. We see in v.5 how Peter views Jesus. He calls him Master. We pick up a theme from Luke seen in 4:32 & 36 that Jesus has authority and power. Finally, we are taken in by an astounding miracle. From where did all these fish come? The answer is Jesus commanded a large number of fish to get into the net and stay. Every fish that Jesus told to get into the net obeyed! Not one of them veered off and got away.

What is all this about? What are these details underscoring? It is quite clear isn't it? Jesus rules. He reigns. All power and authority have been given to Him (cf. Matt.28:18). For us to grow in our evangelistic efforts we must start with the authority and power of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is frightening when we start with us. Evangelism is freeing when we start with Christ. Notice how Luke portrays Jesus just in chapter five alone.

- Jesus cleanses a leper in 5:13. "And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him saying "I will; be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him".
- Jesus heals a paralytic in 5:24. "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins he said to the man who was paralyzed 'I

say to you rise, pick up your bed and go home'. And immediately he rose up..."

- Jesus calls Levi in 5:27. "...He said to him, 'Follow me'. And leaving everything, [Levi] rose and followed him.

Is it not clear from this chapter that Luke is making his case that Jesus is supreme? Is it not significant in light of our topic for tonight that Jesus has all authority and power?

Is this not gospel logic that we see in the great commission? "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples..."

O beloved much of our resistance to and fear in evangelism weakens simply by believing that Jesus Christ has all authority and power.

The point Jesus makes in our text for tonight starts with him. He is the point. He is the power. Jesus Christ has all authority.

The principle develops as we notice the next phrase.

Multitudes will come to saving faith

The second part of this principle is the phrase "*multitudes will come to saving faith*".

Try to picture with me what actually happened on this occasion. The disciples fished all night. They caught nothing. They were washing their nets and calling it quits. Then Jesus tells Peter to put out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch. What we see next is remarkable. "When they had done this they enclosed a large number of fish". This was such a large number of fish that Luke details what happened to their nets and boats. They were breaking and sinking! When Jesus makes clear the meaning of the miracle in v.10 he makes clear the extent of evangelism. When he said to Peter, "from now on you will be catching men" he meant not only successful evangelism (i.e. "you will be"). He also meant exceeding evangelism. This is borne out by noticing the beginning influences of this promise seen in the book of Acts.

- The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (2:47)
- The disciples were increasing in number (6:1)
- The word of God continued to increase and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly (6:7)
- The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord (11:21)
- The word of God increased and multiplied (12:24)
- The churches...increased in number daily (16:5)
- All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord (19:10)
- The word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily (19:20)

Would you agree with me that John Calvin knew his Bible? Calvin knew his Bible as a great missionary book in a way that few moderns do. For him it was largely a book of promises centering on Christ's conquest of the nations through the gospel. Commenting on Isaiah 2:3 he says that men out of "all nations will be conquered by the doctrines of the gospel and stream to Christ".

Somewhere between Calvin, Luther, Edwards, Whitefield, Davies, Alexander, Spurgeon and Loyd-Jones – somewhere between them and us confidence in the promise and power of the gospel dropped. We no longer hear Master Jesus say to us what he said to Paul, “Do not be afraid but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I have many in this city who are my people”. What was to encourage and motivate the apostle Paul to keep on speaking was the fact that many of God’s elect not yet born again needed to hear the gospel in Corinth.

And also many of God’s elect not yet born from above need to hear afresh the gospel in Springboro, Mason, Dayton, Middletown, Franklin, Germantown, Waynesville, Kettering, Beavercreek, Centerville, Miamisburg, Xenia, Spring Valley, Monroe, Bellbrook, Lebanon, Hamilton.

This miracle in Lk.5 is for the church down through the ages. This passage is for us. We must hear with hope the words “multitudes will come to saving faith”. We mustn’t succumb to a “remnant theology” that says the Church must be tiny if it is to be true. We need to recapture the passion and perspective of C.H. Spurgeon who said, “I myself believe that King Jesus will reign, and the idols be utterly abolished but I expect the same power which turned the world upside down once will still continue to do it”.

Is King Jesus speaking to Clearcreek Chapel about our boats and nets? Does he want them to begin sinking and breaking under the weight of gospel-produced growth? Oh, let’s dream together. Let’s pray together. Let’s pursue his promise together.

Up to this point we’ve seen through Jesus’ miracle a parable of sorts. This principle we are noticing spotlights Jesus Christ as possessing all authority. From this authority, we heard that his sights are set high. His commanding voice *turning people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God...* (Acts 26:18) extends to multitudes. His work on the cross guaranteed the promise to Abraham that “I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore...” (Gen.22:17). God said “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”. His all-powerful grace will cause fish to jump into the boat and stay.

Now we come to the end of the principle and the completion of this message. Here we look at the third and final phrase to Jesus’ principle.

Through followers of Jesus

The third and final part to this principle is the phrase “by followers of Jesus.

By Jesus multitudes will come to saving faith through followers of Jesus.

The last phrase emphasizes how Jesus accomplishes what He sets out to do. Here in this phrase we look at the means by which Jesus fulfills His word. “through followers of Jesus” Jesus saves the lost. That is the weight of this message. The accent falls on Him. But he does so through those who are following him.

I desire to rally us to fresh initiatives and fruitfulness in evangelism by noticing the characteristics of “followers of Jesus”. If the point of the miracle in Luke 5 includes followers of Jesus then I want to know what a follower of Jesus looks like. I want to know

who he uses in his effective evangelistic efforts. The marks of a follower of Jesus through whom Jesus saves His people are as follows.

Speaks the Word plainly

Vv.1-3

The first mark of a “follower of Jesus” is that (s)he speaks the Word plainly. We notice this by observing what the crowds desired from Jesus and how he responded to the crowd. “the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God...[Jesus] sat down and taught the people [the word of God] (vv.1-3). Jesus is modeling for His followers how to bring people into submission to Himself. He spoke the word of God plainly. Truth; not technique, is the bait for the fish. If we are to see new fruitfulness in evangelism we must speak the truth in love. There are vast contexts in which the Word can be clearly taught (as illustrated in our text for tonight = shoreline and boat). But what Luke wants the church to understand is that the word of God causes crowds to press in on Christ.

So we see that Jesus will bring to Himself multitudes through His followers who speak the Word plainly.

Obeys the Master faithfully

vv.4-7

Another characteristic of a follower through whom Jesus evangelizes is seen in vv.4-7. “he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch’. And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night and took nothing. But at your word I will...’”.

Jesus issues a call to Clearcreek Chapel to become *Peter-like People!* Look at the type of person on whom Jesus builds his church. Peter is tired. Peter is somewhat skeptical. But Peter said to his Master, “at your word I will”. This is the second characteristic of a follower of Jesus through whom Jesus evangelizes. (S)he *obeys the Master faithfully*.. Peter illustrates the importance of “not leaning upon our own understanding but in all our ways acknowledging Him” (Pr.3:5,6). Peter was the expert in fishing. He knew that fish were caught in shallow waters; not the deep. He knew that night fishing was more effective than daytime fishing. He was tired and thought that his bed was better than another round of fishing. BUT he died to self. He listened to Jesus. He obeyed...not without struggle. Not perfectly. But he did obey. And when he did...boats began to sink and nets began to break!

Jesus brings to Himself multitudes through His followers who obey Him faithfully.

Needs His grace repeatedly

vv.8-10

The third characteristic we come across of a follower of Jesus through whom He evangelizes is observed in vv.8-10. Peter and company bring into their boats a world’s record catch. And Peter was floored. His first response was not happy. It was helpless. He did not dance initially. He was down immediately. We can understand his response by looking at v.8. “When he saw it (referring to the catch) he fell to the feet of Jesus. The power and authority of Master Jesus overwhelmed him. He trembled at the sight of Jesus’ authority. He saw a glimpse of Christ’s Supremacy. He quickly sensed the infinite gap between him (sinful) and Jesus (Supreme).

Jesus relieved him by saying “Do not be afraid...”. This phrase is equivalent to “you are forgiven”. Peter was utterly broken over his sin. Humbled by Jesus Peter heard words of hope from Jesus. This is the balance we need as we move out in evangelism. Humbled by our sin and yet hopeful by our Savior we move out in an obedient way. We grow in evangelism by falling down at Jesus’ feet. When we see miracles through ministry, we never take credit. We, instead, fall down at Jesus’ feet. We become aware of our own need for Jesus. We go to the Cross again (and again) for fresh sights of justification and forgiveness.

The characteristic of a follower of Jesus through whom He evangelizes is simply (s)he needs grace repeatedly!

The last mark of a follower of Jesus through whom Jesus delights to catch people is found in the last verse of this scene; v.11.

Cherishes His glory supremely

v.11

With the wealth of fish at their feet they depart cherishing Jesus. Turning from something in order to turn toward something demonstrates what we treasure. The Bible says, “they left everything and followed him”. This is a sure sign of people who are awestruck over Jesus. And this is a primary characteristic of followers of Jesus through whom Jesus wins the lost.

Stack up houses and families and finances and lands and health; all earthly treasures and measure them against the infinite and breathtaking glory of Jesus Christ and what do we see? Beloved, cherish Jesus above all earthly joys.

Conclusion What would keep us from becoming an outward-looking, outward-moving community of Christ Jesus? Two obstacles are seen in this passage. Both of them need to be taken away.

The first obstacle that would keep us from advancing in outreach is seen in v.5.

1. *Natural calculations* (v.5). Here we need to believe that our Master can bring success where our own efforts failed (vv.4-7). Here in v.5 we see that we are to “trust in the LORD with all our hearts and lean not on our own understanding”.

The second obstacle that would keep us from advancing in outreach is seen in v.8

2. *Guilty consciences* (v.8). Here we need to believe that our Master brings a new beginning to the sinful. Here in v.8 we must come to terms with the power of the gospel to purify our consciences and empower our wills to reach out to the lost.

Let me wrap up this message by pointing us to Christ.

Beloved in light of Jesus Christ

- Let us fall down in humility under His splendor.
- Let us grow up in confidence in His power.
- Let us well up in affection over His glory.
- Let us move out in simple efforts to reach the lost.

For the sake of His name,

Amen

