

**CHURCH IMPROVEMENT: BUILDING A CHURCH
THAT HONORS GOD AND LOVES PEOPLE
THROUGH CASTING THE NET OF GOD'S WORD
INTO THE WORLD
Luke 5: 1-11**

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

How would you answer this question: "If heaven and hell are real and Jesus is the only Savior and God has commanded us as Christians to tell others about Jesus, then why shouldn't every Christian drop out of school, quit their jobs, sell their houses and spend all their time sharing the gospel with lost people?"

While the logic in this question seems incontrovertible, yet it is based on two false presuppositions. First, it is based upon the idea that the most important thing to God is the salvation of sinners. While this is very important (Jesus said, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."), it is not God's ultimate or highest purpose in the world. God's highest goal is the glory of his own name (Isaiah 48:9-11). The ultimate goal of Jesus was the glory of his Father (John 12: 27-28 & 17:4). Second, both Jesus and the apostles view the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18-20) as a corporate responsibility. The entire church bears witness to Christ as each member works according to the particular call and gifting of God (Acts 1:8 (Plural "you"), Eph. 3: 10-11, 4: 12-16, 1 Peter 4: 10-11 and many more.)

In Luke 5: 1-11 Jesus graphically illustrates and then explains how it is that the church, as his body, seeks lost sinners and brings them safely to heaven. Our method will be to go through the story as it is written and then come back to apply what we see here to the task of evangelism.

STUDY

1. According to Luke 4: 31-32 & 42-44, what was the majority of Jesus' time spent doing?

Teaching God's word. Preaching the good news of the kingdom.

2. Describe the scene on the beach of the Lake of Gennesaret that is found in Luke 5:1-3. Note the location.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of people from the town and region of Capernaum have come out to the shore of the lake to hear Jesus teach and probably to receive or see miracles. There are so many people and they are so eager that Jesus is being pushed into the water and cannot speak so that all can hear. So he tells Peter, whose house he is staying at, most likely, to row his boat out into the water so that he can use the amplifying effect of water to speak to all the people. Peter and his partners, John and James were washing their nets after a night of fishing when Jesus asked him to row out. So Peter and some other men man the boat while Jesus speaks through the morning to the crowds.

3. After Jesus finishes speaking what does Jesus command Peter and the other men in the boat to do? How do Peter and the other men probably feel physically and emotionally? What does Peter's response in v. 5 tell us about how he is feeling?

It's probably close to noon and they had fished all night without catching anything. They have now been listening to Jesus teach while sitting in the gently rocking boat for several hours. Probably they are tired, maybe discouraged. What they are not interested in doing is fishing in the middle of the day. They most likely want to go home to bed and rest before going out fishing again that night. Peter's informing Jesus of the fact they fished all night but caught nothing reflects his desire to go home to bed and his informed suspicion of the fruitlessness of trying to catch fish in the middle of the day. However, Jesus, now that he is done talking to the crowds commands Peter to row the boat into deeper water and to let down the nets for a catch.

4. What does Jesus tell Peter will happen if he rows out and casts out his nets?

Jesus promises that he will catch fish. Throw out the nets... “for a catch”, is Jesus’ promise.

5. Compare this command/promise combination with Deut. 5: 23-29, 10: 12-13, Matthew 11: 28-30 & Acts 2: 37-41. What is true of all of God’s commands? What does Peter’s action tell us about the nature of faith? How are faith and obedience related?

Every command that God gives to you contains a promise. If you obey the command the promise will come true, without exception. The ultimate promise contained in every command is the joy of knowing God. The power to obey one of God’s commands is to believe the promise that is contained in the command. Being a Christian is not a duty filled life but a delight filled life. The gospel of Jesus Christ simply stated is that you must stop pursuing such puny pleasures as that which comes from TV or drunkenness or sex or work or vacations or pleasing others or making others pay for the wrong they’ve done to you and pursue with all your might the eternal, overwhelming happiness of belonging to Jesus Christ through obeying his commands. Do you see that in Jesus’ command to go fishing? “Peter, I know you worked all night and got no fish. You are looking forward to going home to sleep. But I’m telling you, that if you will simply do what I say, go out into the deep water now and put down your nets, you will make a catch that will blow your mind. What do you say Peter? Will you take the pleasure of going home to bed or trust that I am able to do immeasurably more than you could ever imagine?”

6. According to v. 5, why does Peter row out and put down the nets?

Peter’s explanation that he just went fishing all night reveals the choice before him. Will he believe that what he needs is to go home to bed or to obey Jesus and drop the nets? Peter believes that Jesus will more surely provide than what his own work and plans can provide. Peter chooses to live by faith. He recognizes in Jesus a person of power and authority and so he obeys him on the basis of what he knows about Jesus. He has a desire to please Jesus, to cooperate with

him. It is an astounding thing that Peter, a lifelong fisherman, obeys Jesus, who is not a fisherman. His putting out into the deep and letting down the nets displays Peter’s faith in Jesus.

7. What does Peter’s astonishment at the catch reveal about the nature of his faith? Did he expect to catch fish? What does this tell us about the nature of faith?

It does not seem that Peter expected to catch fish. He certainly did not expect what happened. Peter’s surprise at the catch shows that faith is not “believing that God will do what you want him to do.” If that were the case, then there would have been no fish or only a “normal” amount of fish. He was not simply humoring Jesus. He obeyed out of a desire to please Jesus and trusting that Jesus had a good reason for commanding him to do so without a full understanding of why or what was going to happen.

8. What was the cause of the great catch of fish? Did Peter’s letting down the net produce the great catch?

Absolutely not. Jesus is the one who, by his word of command and promise gave to Peter this amazing catch of fish by means of the net. Peter’s casting of the nets was simply the expression of his faith in Christ. Peter did what Jesus said because he believed what Jesus said. This is always what faith does. Faith never produces anything. It is merely the instrument that God’s promises are fulfilled for us.

9. What effect did the great catch of fish have upon Peter? (NOTE: What does Peter call Jesus in v. 5 and what does he call him in v. 8?)

He falls on his knees before Jesus and says to him, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” Verse 9 says that the reason he said this was because he was astonished at the catch of fish. He and the men with him knew that this was no ordinary catch. Peter knew that Jesus had by his word of command and promise caused these fish to be brought into his nets. Only God can command fish to swim into nets. He recognizes the work of divine grace when he sees it. He expresses this knowledge by calling Jesus “Lord” rather than “Master”. Look at what happens to him when he realizes he is standing in the presence

of God. He is afraid. He is in despair. He is aware of his own sinfulness. He is aware of how unworthy he is to be in the presence of such infinite power and grace. He cannot imagine it would be possible for him to live in the presence of such holiness.

10. Have you ever been this impressed with how unworthy you are to be in a relationship with God?

Sinners who are exposed to the divine presence cannot take it and want it to end. The emotion that Peter expresses here is the experience of every Christian. The intensity of the experience fluctuates in our lives but always we know that we do not deserve to be in the presence of this holy and gracious God. Always we are confronted with how unworthy we are. Every Christian says with the apostle Paul, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.”

11. A literal translation of Peter’s astonished, despairing cry is: “Go away from me Lord for I am a man, a sinner.” Read Luke 5: 27-32. Why is Peter’s confession of his sinfulness good news?

This is the story of Jesus calling Matthew the tax collector to be his disciple. After Matthew follows Jesus, he throws a party at his house for Jesus and invites all his friends, who are the non-religious folks in town. Notice what the religious people, the Pharisees say when they see Jesus and his disciples hanging out with all this riff-raff. They want to know, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus’ response is full of hope for Peter and everyone like Peter who is overcome with despair over their sinfulness, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” When Peter confesses that he is a sinner, he becomes one of those for whom Jesus came. The only people Jesus came to save are those who recognize and feel how desperate is their condition. The only people who Jesus calls to follow him are those who know that their greatest problem is their own sin.

12. What is Jesus telling Peter when he tells him, “Do not fear”?

When Jesus tells Peter, “Do not fear”, he is telling Peter that his sins have been forgiven. Jesus is not telling Peter, “what are you talking about, why are you afraid? Don’t you know that God loves you? You’re not all that bad Peter.” He is assuring him that sinner though he is, God has accepted him. He need not fear the wrath of God because he, the Son of God, has come to save sinners just like him.

13. What does this tell us about how Christians relate to God? (Compare 1 John 4: 18)

Christians, while recognizing that they deserve hell and on occasions feeling the terror of that reality normally relate to God without fear. They are overcome by the love of God shown in the person of Jesus and so live without fear in the presence of this great and holy God.

14. What does Jesus promise Peter will happen if he does not fear? What does this promise tell us about how we are to understand this incident, i.e., the great catch of fish?

Jesus promises Peter that he will be catching men from now on. This promise shows that Jesus intends Peter and us to learn something about how he intends to use humans to “catch” other humans for the kingdom of God. While this story reveals the divinity, the power, the love of Jesus and show what repentance and faith looks like, it also reveals something to us about how and why the church is to be involved in God’s work of saving his people.

15. What happens after Jesus tells Peter to not be afraid and promises him that he will catch men from now on?

Peter, James and John and perhaps some others leave behind their fishing business and follow Jesus exclusively.

16. Why did Peter, James and John leave everything to follow Jesus?

Did they do so because they knew Jesus needed help in reaching the world and so they followed to help Jesus out? Did they follow because they were looking for adventure; they wanted to be where the action was? Did they follow because they wanted more free fish? Did they

follow because they were looking for a purpose in life and Jesus had now given them a purpose, to catch men? I hope you know it was none of these reasons. There is only one reason they left their entire life behind and followed Jesus, it was because they saw in Jesus a person of such greatness and power and love that they could not imagine living apart from him. Jesus became to them the source of all their happiness and joy. He was what they loved. They didn't leave their old life behind reluctantly. They left their life behind gladly. They did a cost-benefit analysis. They asked, what's better, 80 years of life lived in the pleasures of sin and then an eternity of hell or 80 years of denying myself the pleasures of sin, embracing the suffering that loving people entails while enjoying the company of Jesus and then spending an eternity with him in heaven?

17. Would it be correct for each individual Christian to read Luke 5:10-11 and conclude that God wants them to quit their job, leave their family and go be an itinerant evangelist? Why or why not? (Compare Mark 3:13-14, Acts 1: 21-26, 2: 37-47, Ephesians 2: 21-22 & 4: 11-16)

The wrong way to read Peter's leaving behind his life to follow Jesus is to think that everyone who wants to be a Christian is to quit their jobs and be itinerant evangelists. There is a unique call here to Peter, James and John who are apostles of Jesus Christ. They are the foundation of the church. Every single one of us that is a Christian is a Christian because of these men. We were all "caught" through their testimony about Jesus. However, while each of us has a different role, a different life to live with Jesus, all of us have a life to live with Jesus. Everyone who is a Christian joins himself or herself to Jesus and abandons a life lived in pursuit of the pleasures of sin and of this life because they have seen that Jesus is the greatest and best of all beings. Then we live a life that is full of good works. We do not all do the same good works but we all are eager to do good. We've seen ourselves as sinners and known the terror of being under the just anger of God against us for our sins. But we've seen this perfect man who is God and we've heard him say to us, "Do not fear. Follow me for I've come to call sinners to repentance and forgiveness." So we leave everything behind in order to be with him forever. This is what we do every day. Each day we prefer the pleasure of being with Jesus Christ to the pleasure of having life go our way. We seek to deny

ourselves and love others out of our joy at being in the company of Jesus. When a group of people, a church joins itself to Jesus Christ and then to each other in a life of forsaking the pleasures of sin for pursuing the pleasure of being with Jesus, the world will take notice.

18. What does this passage tell us about how and why we, as a church, should be involved in the task of "catching" men for Christ?

- 1. Just as Peter used a net to catch fish so the church uses the word of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ to catch men. We know this because of the context within which the story unfolds. Jesus is occupied with preaching the word of God to the masses. Therefore, every church that wants to "catch men for Christ" will do so through casting out the net of God's word. We will make it our ambition to do all we can to get people into situations where they can hear, read, study, and examine God's word.*
- 2. We engage in the work of evangelism as a church because Jesus has commanded us to do so and because he has promised that we will "catch" men if we will cast the net of God's word into the world of human beings. We proclaim the word of God in faith, believing that it will effectively catch men for God.*
- 3. We know that it is our life together as a community of Christ-followers that will attract people to Christ. Also, it is into this community of faith that we are trying to win men. Men are only truly "caught" when they join the community that is following Jesus to heaven. Evangelism is a community project as Paul says in Ephesians 4:16, "From him, the whole body, being joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work." We are to live our lives with Jesus Christ at the center of our attention while forsaking the pleasures of sin, loving one another and inviting those who do not yet know Jesus to be among us. Because Jesus is at the center of our lives, the truth about Jesus is at the center of our fellowship. We are not recruiting people to a cause but to a person. We are not out to clean up the world but to invite the world to follow Christ. We do this in and through our life together following Jesus.*

The church catches men by casting the net of God's word into the world because

- **Jesus commands us to do so**
- **Jesus promises that his word will catch men and lots of them**
- **Jesus is magnificent to God's people, the church**

19. How are we doing as a church in this process? What should we change, if anything?