

## Not “Where?” But “Will You?”

by Mark Jarvinen

<sup>1</sup>One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

<sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

<sup>5</sup>Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

<sup>6</sup>When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup>So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

<sup>8</sup>When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup>For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, <sup>10</sup>and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." <sup>11</sup>So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him. **(Luke 5:1-11).**

Fisherman are notorious for the stories they tell. If I told you that my friend and I were written up in **Outdoor Life Magazine** for catching the same fish, many of you would listen politely while in your minds saying, “**Yea, right. Sure you did.**” ... It's true! The **October 1973** issue of **Outdoor Life** recounts how my friend and I caught the same fish. The crazy trout took both of our hooks one after the other as it passed under our boat. I'll never forget it. We both felt the initial tug

on the line just seconds apart. Then I'd be reeling in like mad, while my friend's line went slack. A moment later the opposite occurred. We finally caught on and realized the fish had both our hooks. On another occasion that same summer, a trout jumped out of the water and landed in my boat. No joke.

All fisherman have their stories to tell. It's like a man who had spent a fruitless day fishing. In desperation he picked out three fat fish at the local market. ***"Before you wrap them," he said to the clerk, "toss them to me, one by one. That way I'll be able to tell my wife I caught them and I won't be lying."*** There's something about fishing stories and exaggeration that seem to go hand in hand. Someone has said that the only thing that could cast doubt on the miracles of Jesus is that they were all witnessed by fishermen.

In today's text we read that Jesus prepared to teach the multitudes that followed Him along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, after He got into a boat owned by a fisherman named **Simon**, who later became known as Peter. Putting out from shore a short distance, Jesus taught the crowd. He then made a startling, almost absurd request. He instructed **Simon** to put out into deep water for a catch. Don't miss the irony here - a carpenter telling an experienced commercial fisherman how to catch fish!

The men who were mending their nets on the shore the day Jesus happened to come along had not fished the previous night because it was their hobby. This was their livelihood and it was serious business. Fishing was of huge importance to their economy

and daily life. In fact, the town “**Bethsaida**” meant “**fish town**” – and was the town from which four of Jesus’ disciples came from. As part of their occupation, they fished at night because it was then that the fish would be feeding closest to the surface. But that’s not all the job entailed. By morning they would still have to mend and wash their nets, repair and maintain their boats, preserve the fish, and finally bargain with local merchants in order to sell or trade their catch. It was a rigorous, demanding, and exhausting job.

Not only is it ironic that a carpenter would tell skilled fisherman what to do, but it so happens that on this occasion they had fished the whole previous night without a catch. After being skunked the night before, Jesus now had the nerve to tell them to try again. The nets were all cleaned and mended, ready for the next night’s expedition. Furthermore, the men were frustrated and tired, ready for some sleep. Now they were being told by a carpenter to go back out. Was he crazy? With this as the backdrop, let’s see what we can glean for our instruction from Simon Peter’s response to Jesus’ request.

This entire episode speaks of the events surrounding Peter’s call to become a disciple (learner) of Jesus. Peter’s call involves leaving his fishing nets behind to follow Jesus. This raises an important question: “***Must all disciples leave their vocations to serve Jesus?***” The answer is self-evident. **Of course not!** Church history shows that not everyone is called into full-time ministry. In fact, we know that the apostle Paul kept right on working as a tent-maker as he ministered. The important element to remember, which Peter’s call to discipleship so clearly illustrates, is that ***THE CALL TO WALK WITH***

**JESUS TAKES ON SUCH A PRIORITY THAT ONE IS WILLING TO BE WHATEVER, OR GO WHEREVER THE LORD DESIRES.** For example, the healed demon possessed man in **Luke 8:38** begged to go along with Jesus, but Jesus sent him away, saying, **“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.”** In response, the **“man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.”** For this man, following Jesus meant going home. For Simon Peter, it meant leaving his nets and following. The question of **“where”** is not as important as the **“will you?”** which leads to my first point ....

#### **I. AM I WILLING TO OBEY GOD? (Casting)**

The first issue Peter had to address in response to Jesus was **“Will I obey this outrageous request?”** It’s the wrong time of day! We’ve been out all night! The fish just aren’t likely feeding right now. Notice Peter’s response: **“BUT BECAUSE YOU SAY SO, I WILL LET DOWN THE NETS.”** These probably weren’t the first words from Jesus’ mouth that Peter had ever heard. I wonder if he hadn’t been listening to Jesus teach the multitude that had gathered that day. My guess is that the Holy Spirit working through Jesus’ words had already softened Peter’s heart. In any case, it is clear that in spite of how Peter felt about Jesus’ command, whether or not it made a lot of sense, he obeyed. He obeyed Jesus’ word. **That’s faith in action!** Look at the blessing that resulted. They gathered so many fish that the nets were breaking and both boats began to sink. Refusing to obey would have meant coming up empty. They would have missed this huge blessing.

So often we tend to attribute God's blessing in our lives, or success in reaching people, to being in the right place at the right time, almost as if there's a bit of luck involved, or prudent thinking on our part. But **being in the right place at the right time is simply being where God wants us to be.** We don't always want to take time to listen, and even when we do, we may not like what we hear, so we stick with the status quo and miss the blessing.

Here's a radical thought. Perhaps we don't obey because we don't know if God is speaking to us. **How does God speak to people today?** In the Old Testament, God most often spoke through angels, visions (Moses' burning bush), dreams, symbolic actions (Gideon's fleece), Elijah's "still, small voice, etc." Without trying to limit God, He most often speaks to us by the Holy Spirit, through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church. This is less dramatic, in most cases, but equally effective. ***The real question is: Does God have your permission to redirect your lives and become your first priority?***

## **II. AM I HUMBLY DEPENDENT ON GOD? (bowing)**

Peter was humbly dependent on God. Notice when the great catch came in, contrary to all conventional wisdom and good fishing technique, Peter bowed before Jesus in deep humility and awareness of his unworthiness. The root word of humility is humus, which means "***of the earth***" or "***of the ground.***" Did Peter catch a glimpse of his own lack of faith (sin) when he saw what a great catch came in?

We learn here that Jesus is well able to direct the mission he asks us to embark upon. He knows how we can best serve him, even

when it doesn't make sense to us. God saw in Peter someone He could direct and not someone who needed to call the shots. God could use Peter because Peter knew he needed God, not the other way around. Some people in ministry give the impression that God would really be struggling if it were not for them. Peter understood that he brought nothing to the table except what God would direct. This did not make Peter insignificant, but only more usable in realizing that his strength came from his own weakness. It must not escape our notice that Jesus didn't always choose the most educated, most respected, most influential people to assist him in His ministry. He chose the ones who in humility were willing to follow.

### III. AM I ABANDONED TO FOLLOW CHRIST? (willing to leave everything)

Notice that Peter and the others were willing to leave everything to follow Jesus. The **KJV** says they ***“forsook all and followed him.”*** The idea here is ***“abandonment.”*** They left their homes, their jobs, their friends, their families, their routines, their comforts, their stability - everything! Did they have an idea where they were going? Did they have a clear picture of what Jesus wanted them to do? Did they realize how much they would suffer? ***ALL THEY KNEW FOR SURE IS THAT JESUS LIVED UP TO WHO HE SAID HE WAS. HE WAS LORD. THEY COULD TRUST HIM. AND THAT WAS ALL THEY REALLY NEEDED TO KNOW.***

All of us need to ask ourselves: ***“Am I willing to forsake everything to follow him?”*** The word ***“everything”*** is all encompassing. Even if financial or material security has lost its attraction for us, we could get tripped up in other ways.

For example, **Origen** was a third century theologian of some renown. When he was only 17, his father was arrested for being a Christian. Origen was aflame with the desire to follow his father to a glorious martyrdom. Origen's mother pleaded with him not to go, but the headstrong boy refused to listen to reason. His mother did the only thing she could think of and hid his clothes. Though young Origen fussed and fumed, she wouldn't reveal where they were hidden. He couldn't leave the house naked and so was unable to volunteer for martyrdom.

Think about it. Origen was brave enough to be martyred, but not brave enough to go outside naked. He would have felt uncomfortable, exposed. ***Are we like Origen? Do we declare our devotion and willingness even to die for the cause of Christ, while hesitating to risk public embarrassment for the cause of Christ?*** Then we wonder why we feel like we've come up empty in our Christian lives. No joy. A lack of purpose. A loss of vitality.

This week, Minnesota Lynx superstar, **Maya Moore**, made the unexpected announcement that she would not be playing professional basketball with the Lynx this year, in order to pursue her lifelong passion to follow Christ through direct ministry involvement. This evoked quite a stir among many of our local sports media, who wondered if there was really a story behind the story. Why would arguably the best player in franchise history leave basketball during her peak? **"What's the real story?"** they asked. Was she at odds with the head coach? The front office? Does she have a nagging injury? Obviously, Maya felt there was more for her to give in service

to Christ, which Lynx head coach, Cheryl Reeve validated and supported in a recent interview. **Tired of coming up empty in the Christian life? Do you want a revitalized walk with God?** It starts by being faithful in the little things. How might God be speaking to you along these lines? Perhaps we can identify with and learn from Maya's decision.

**Max Anders**, an author and seminary professor, who once saw a stunt rider get his horse to jump off a high bridge into the churning water below, asked the question, ***"How could a rider ever get a horse to make that kind of jump?"*** According to trainers, **the secret is in the training.** From the time training starts, the trainer must never ask the animal to do anything that hurts. First the animal does little stunts that seem dangerous, and then gradually graduates to more difficult stunts. Over time, **the horse learns to trust the trainer.** As a result, the horse will eventually do anything the trainer asks of him. Max Anders says, ***"If you know anything about horses, it almost brings tears to your eyes to imagine the amount of work and trust that goes into a bold movie stunt."*** (Sermon Central).

It's the same in our walk of faith with Christ. Like those fisherman of old, we learn to obey Christ in the little things. As we learn we can trust him, we learn to give him what we understand to be our all. When we give Christ our all, our faith rises, our joy becomes complete and our sense of purpose intensifies. **The bottom line?** The abundant life that Christ came to give us becomes increasingly our new reality as we learn to take each new step, trusting Jesus.

**A-men.**