

The call of faith; a master to follow
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Today, we are going back to the Gospel of Luke. And we pick up the story in Luke 5. Let me tell you what's been happening. Jesus has begun his earthly ministry. His teaching is gracious; his miraculous power is evident through his healings and deliverance ministry. And the crowds are coming. Reports about Jesus are spreading all over Galilee, all over Judea and even in foreign regions. The crowds are streaming in and they are bringing their sick in the hopes that Jesus might heal them.

Chapter 5 just continues this emphasis. It doesn't really introduce any new work or new teaching by Jesus, it just solidifies it even more. What is Jesus like? What is he doing? What did he teach? Who did he reach out to and how did he do that? It's almost like Luke is saying, "Here are the reasons the crowds are coming to him! Here are the reasons people are so amazed!" Let's keep reading to know why better because (and this is important): to follow Jesus to Jerusalem, to take the path of suffering and sacrifice Jesus demands, you really have to believe he is the One and his way leads to life. You see, at the end of chapter 9 Luke says Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem. He knew suffering was coming; he knew what he needed to do. While he took the journey first and bore the burden only he could; he invites us to follow. He says, "If you want to follow me you need to set your face towards Jerusalem, too. You have to die to yourself; you have to be willing to lay your life down as an offering, too. If you try to save your life, you'll lose it; but if you lose your life for me you'll find it." Will you? Will you lose your life for Jesus? The only way you will is if you convinced if you follow Jesus you will find life? Our current section describes how the absolute wonder, power and grace of Jesus Christ fuels our faith in him when Jesus makes that call on our lives (READ vs. 1-11).

This section seems to focus on the response people will need to have in order to follow Jesus. It's striking: in vs. 11 we're told that Peter, James and John just leave and follow Jesus. They left everything it says. Leaving everything is hard to imagine, isn't it? How could they just... leave? Thankfully, we have great examples of this kind of faith in our own church body. In fact, if you are a follower of Jesus you have, in some way, left everything, too. Some of you have walked away from a lifestyle, from a network of friends that were (and maybe still are) trapped in darkness. They don't get it; you're a bible thumper now. Some of you have left family. You didn't leave them like you hate them, but you're walk with Christ has taken you down paths, it's taken you to places that they don't get. "What do you mean you're going on a missions trip? What do you mean you're moving away? What do you mean you're going to that church?" Some of you have left jobs, you've left opportunities to pursue the purposes of Christ. And it needs to keep happening, doesn't it? God is so... loving. He doesn't look at just one sacrifice and say, "Ok, that's good enough." He says, "Way to go! You did it with my grace. And you've found me faithful, didn't you? Guess what, I have another step for you to take." And you're like, "What?" But, you buckle up and get ready for more.

Or maybe this Christianity thing, this Jesus thing is new to you. You're just trying to figure it out. I'm so glad you're here. I want you to know something: Jesus is calling you to radical, risk-taking faith. And yes, he's calling you to die to everything you know so you can discover that you can really trust God with every part of your life. Maybe you're scratching your head: where does faith like that come from? This passage gives us some help. Let's start at the beginning of the story.

Over and over again in our current section, Luke keeps talking about how the people were amazed at Jesus; the reports about him keep spreading and spreading. More and more people keep coming. That wouldn't happen if Jesus was just a flash in the pants; a one-hit wonder. And Luke lets us know that Jesus is more than that. Look at vs. 1, "On one occasion." Look also at vs. 12, "While he was in one of the cities." One more; look at vs. 17, "On one of those days." What's Luke trying to do? He's using this literary device to let us know that these remarkable stories and these remarkable events were not one-time, isolated instances. Jesus did many more miracles than the one that convinced Peter, James and John to follow him. He didn't just heal the one man full of leprosy (vs. 12), he would do this everywhere he went. So, hear our story today, next Sunday and the following not merely as isolated instances, but rather as the regular occurrences of Jesus as he ministered to the lost sheep of Israel.

So, here's the scene: the crowds keep coming and Jesus keeps teaching. He's near Capernaum (that's where he was at the end of chapter 4) in the NW corner of the Sea of Galilee, which is also called the Sea of Gennesaret. And, with all the people, crowd control was a problem. So, Jesus hops into the boat of some fisherman to get away from the shore a tad to more effectively teach the people. It was Simon's boat, who we know to be Peter. Peter, James and John are cleaning their nets after a long night of fishing; they got skunked.

The focal point of this story is not Jesus and the crowds, but instead it's Jesus and Peter (along with James and John). Because as soon as Jesus is done teaching, he starts interacting with Peter and this relationship is the only thing that matters in the rest of our passage.

So, Jesus tells Peter to go back fishing. The command is almost humorous. Peter is a professional fisherman. He most likely has been doing this awhile. Jesus is a preacher with a previous career in carpentry. Could you imagine a preacher telling you how to do your job? It's like me coming and telling you how to build a house, or how to make windows, or how to engineer plastics. It's me coming into the exam room and telling you how to diagnose an illness or how to treat a patient. You would be like, "Back-off, preacher man!" You would be annoyed. But, Peter takes Jesus' advice. Why?

One thing that we see about Peter is that he had a previous relationship with Jesus and already witnessed his miraculous power. Look back to chapter 4, verse 38 (READ). Ahh,

so it's not like Jesus was some stranger who made this absurd request to Peter to come follow him. Jesus was a friend; Jesus had already proven his power and authority. Jesus' name was already revered in Peter's home as a healer. So, when Peter, James and John leave everything in vs. 11 to follow Jesus, it wasn't blind faith. It was reasoned faith. It was faith based on something; it was based on the evidence of the divine power and authority of Jesus Christ.

Blind faith is not the faith Jesus calls us to, my friends. Blind faith throws caution to the wind; blind faith is taking a stab in the dark. Jesus calls us to something greater and even harder. Jesus calls us to reasoned, count-the-cost faith. He's patient with Peter. We have no evidence that Jesus called Peter to catch men the first time they met. He called him when Peter was able to see his power, his authority, his gracious words and his compassion.

Notice what Peter said in vs. 5, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." Notice a couple of things. First, look how Peter refers to Jesus. Master. This is another piece of evidence that Jesus was a known quantity to Peter; Peter already regarded Jesus very highly. You're the master, Jesus. Secondly, notice why Peter goes back fishing. Peter gave him reasons why not to go, but then he said, "At your word. Because you said so, Jesus, I will."

That, friends, is the epitome of faith. At your word; because you said so. Faith says, "God, I will do what you say because you said it." There were a lot of reasons for Peter to say, "No thanks, Jesus, I'll stick to my plan." I'll give you several. 1) Peter was the professional fisherman. Jesus is the preacher-man. Who knows what about fishing? We've talked about that already. Peter could have pridefully said, "I know more than Jesus.". 2) The fishing Peter was doing was called trammel net fishing. Trammel nets were made out of linen and fishermen would drag this net in the water in hopes of catching the fish. But they only would do this at night. Fish can see the net during daylight and avoid the net. But at night time, when the fish would get spooked (a tactic used by fishermen) the fish would swim into the net not knowing it was there. They just got skunked at night; no way are they going to have success during the day time. Previous experience, conventional wisdom says, "No way." 3) Finally, mending nets was a pain. Because nets were made from linen they needed to be washed after every use and it was a chore. Go fishing during the day time and have to wash these nets again, no thanks? Peter could have said no because the cost was too great.

I can find reasons not to listen to Jesus, too. Can you? I bet you can; I bet you do. My pride tells me I know better than Jesus. I can hand my finances myself. I know what to do with my spouse. I know what it takes to manage these relationships. My pride gets in my way.

Or we might say, "Jesus, it's never worked that way before. That's not what others say I should do it. Nobody goes fishing during the day; nobody forgives someone for such a sin; nobody serves so much. It's more blessed to give than to receive? It doesn't feel that way, Jesus. Conventional wisdom tempts us to ignore the words of Jesus, too.

How many times do we fail to do what God says because it's too hard. It's hard (and humbling) to confess sins. It's tiring to serve. It's difficult to forgive. Just like the hard work of washing and mending the nets could have tempted Peter to ignore the words of Jesus, so does the work and sacrifice we are required to make tempts us to ignore the words of Jesus.

Friends, do you believe Jesus? Do you believe him where you will drop your nets at his word? Even though you think you know better? Even though conventional wisdom tells you to go another way? Even though it's going to require sacrifice? Faith says, "At your word. I will obey." Peter was rewarded for it. Will you put in your nets at his word?

Maybe you're thinking, "I want to believe; I want to have that kind of faith. What do I do?" Peter did two things. First, he watched the power of God. Vs. 6 and 7 say they did it; they let down the nets. And they caught some fish. But not just "some fish;" not even a "boatload of fish;" over 2 boatloads of fish! There were so many fish that the net began to break; Peter calls the second boat of fishermen (the boat that was probably scaring the fish, which was customary) and both boats began to sink because there were so many fish.

Look how kind God is to Peter. Again, he's demonstrating and showing his power. He did it once before when he healed Peter's mother-in-law. He's doing it again now. It proves to you and me: God is always looking to build and create faith. We forget that God doesn't expect us to have faith on our own. You don't have to try and muster up faith by yourself. God knows we need help to have faith so he grants us the evidence of his power and grace. Jesus didn't say, "Come and follow me and I will make you fishers of men," before healing Peter's mother-in-law, before the miraculous catch, but after. Jesus didn't scold Thomas for needing to see his scars. Here's the principle: God produces faith in us; he doesn't expect us to produce it ourselves. He brings it about by showing us, displaying to us his great power and grace.

How does he do that today? How does he do that for us? Well, through a variety of means. I mean, consider our *Reaching Beyond* news today. God is giving us a picture of his power at work. But I would argue that we had to have faith to even do what we did. So, the Reaching Beyond campaign is a great example of God building our faith, solidifying our faith. But he creates our faith another way. God creates faith by his own converting power in the gospel. Listen to 1 Cor. 2:3-4 (READ). Here's what Paul is saying: I preached and ministered the way I did so that your faith in Christ, your faith in God would rest in, would be based on, God's power and not in man's wisdom. Look at your own faith.. Look what God has done in you through the preaching of the word. If you've been saved, he changed you. He saved you. He rescued you. You once loved sin and hated God, but now, since he saved you, you love God and hate sin. How did that happen? God's Spirit ignited the simple, spoken word of Christ to bring conviction and repentance of sin and faith in God. It wasn't done through fancy words, eloquent wisdom; it wasn't done by the light show put on by your new favorite

Christian rock group. It wasn't done by the emotional story of deliverance. God's power is demonstrate to us this way: God's gospel message is spoken and we get changed.

The greatest evidence of God's miraculous power today is not the money being raised for our mission to reach lost people (as amazing as it is); the greatest evidence of God's miraculous power is that you are saved; that you worship Jesus; that you love his word and way. So, rejoice and follow your king!

You are the walking miracle. Your changed life; your transformed faith. The fact that you confessed your sin and have found forgiveness is the evidence you need to keep following Christ. And if you are not following Christ yet, but you are seeking, right now, the power of God is being made evident to you. You are hearing that God forgives sinners. You are hearing that Jesus loves you and accepts you even though you've broken every one of his commands. And your heart is being cut; you are beginning to believe. That's the power of God.

But Peter did something more than observe Jesus and his power. He bowed to Jesus. Look at vs. 8, "But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'" That's different than seeing, isn't it? You can see Jesus, you can even acknowledge him, but that doesn't mean you have to submit or bow to Jesus.

Upon that confession, Jesus had Peter. Picking up and going; leaving their boats and following. It's radical. But it's reasonable. It makes sense. He is the Lord. He is the master. No one is like him. There's no need to fear (even though the scene was quite fearful). Friends, this is Jesus' call to discipleship. Will you follow?

Questions for the week

- What evidence did Peter have to call Jesus "Master" and "Lord?"
- Do you ever wish God gave you more reasons to believe? What does this passage say about that?
- How important is it to have eyes that see the evidences of God's power and grace? What has he given you to see?