

“Forsake All and Follow Christ”

Luke 5:1-11

In this text we see the circumstances of Jesus calling Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him and be fishers of men. As we work through this text we will see the Power of God, the Fear of God, and the Call of God. And while there are many lessons to be gleaned from this text, I want us to focus on this main application: God wants us to forsake all and follow Him. Forsake all and follow Christ.

I. The Power of God (v. 1-7)

Verse 1 begins by telling us that the people “pressed upon” Jesus. This word could refer to a demand or imposition or it could refer a physical pressing, as if the crowd was pushing to be near Jesus. It seems that it was a physical pressing, because we see later in this text that Jesus went into a boat to separate himself from this crowd in order to teach them. The pressing of the crowd made this necessary.

There are several times where we see Jesus “pressed upon” by great crowds in the Gospels. At times he was pressed upon by crowds as they were eager to see his miracles. We saw something like that at the end of Luke 4 when the people of Capernaum sought for Jesus, came unto him, and “stayed” him, or laid hold of

him. They did not want Jesus to leave their city because of the miracles he had performed there. They were eager to see miracles and so they pressed upon him.

At other times, the crowds pressed upon Jesus with the intent to harm him. And we saw an example of this also in Luke 4 when Jesus visited his hometown of Nazareth. There the crowd was angry at his words and thrust him out of the synagogue and to the brow of a hill where they intended to throw him off headlong. They were angry, so they pressed upon him.

In our text this morning we see yet another reason for the crowd pressing upon Jesus. We are told they: “pressed upon him to hear the word of God.” This is a good reason to press upon Jesus. Do we press upon the Lord? Are we eager and hungry to hear his Word?

At this point in Jesus’ ministry the crowds were eager to hear the word of God from Him. But this would not always be the case. There would come a time when the multitudes would leave Jesus because he taught them hard things, hard to accept.

We don’t gather in this church building every Sunday to hear the Word of God directly from the mouth of Jesus, but we do gather to hear the Word of God. The written Word, the Bible. Oh! that we would press in to hear the Word of God, that nothing would turn us aside from this act of worship, as we hear and heed the Word of God.

The end of verse 1 and verse 2 further sets the scene for us. At the end of verse 1 we are told that Jesus “stood by the lake of Gennesaret.” This is just another name for the Sea of Galilee. There was a small city and a fertile plain at the north-west end of the lake that bore this name and it was common for the people of that region to refer to the lake by this name as well.

The beginning of verse 2 tells us that there were two ships standing by the lake. Relatively recent archeology has given us an excellent idea of exactly what these boats would have looked like. In 1985 a first century fishing boat was found buried in the mud along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The boat was 27 feet long, 7 1/2 feet wide, and 4 feet deep. These fishing boats would have been relatively small. And there were two boats like this pulled up on the shore near where Jesus was being pressed upon by the crowd.

We are told that these boats were empty. The second part of verse 2 says, “The fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.” The fishermen were present, but they were not in their boats. The fishermen were on the shore mending their nets.

Notice that these fishermen are not a part of the crowd that was pressing upon Jesus. These were working men, and they are busy with their business. They had toiled all night out in their boats, and now that it was day their work continued as they cleaned and mended their nets and prepared for another night of fishing. We know that some of these men had been with Jesus earlier on in his ministry.

In John 1:40-42a we read, “One of the two which heard John speak (that’s John the Baptist), and followed him (that’s Jesus), was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus.”

So we see they had some acquaintance with Jesus, but they had not yet been called to follow Jesus and attend to him as disciples constantly. They had gone back to their work as fishermen.

Verse 3 tells us that Jesus used one of these boats as a teaching platform. Jesus entered into one of the boats which belonged to Simon Peter. Once Jesus was in the boat he asked Simon to push it a little ways out from the land. When Jesus had this slight separation from the crowd which had been pressing upon him, he sat down and taught the crowd.

When Jesus finished teaching, he told Simon to let down his nets as we read in verse 4. Look at Simon’s reply in verse 5. We know Peter. Peter is the sort of man who speaks his mind. He speaks very directly.

Look at how he began: “Master.” This is a term of respect. It isn’t the term normally uses for “Rabbi,” but it’s similar. It’s academic. It expresses the idea of “master teacher,” not “master fisherman.”

Simon Peter continued, “We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.” Peter and his partners were fishermen by trade. This is what they did six days a week. They had been doing this their whole lives. They were the experts

when it came to fishing. And so Peter says, “We’ve tried Jesus. We’ve tried all night, and we haven’t caught anything.”

Night fishing was the most common method of fishing at the time because it was the easiest. They would go out at night when the larger fish came up to feed in the shallower water and they would hang torches off the side of the boat. The hope was that the light would help attract fish so they could use their nets more effectively. But the previous night it didn’t work. Peter and his fishing partners had tried all night, and they got skunked. They didn’t catch anything.

But Peter goes on in v. 5 and says, “Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.” Peter almost sounds reluctant. Peter says, “We’ve tried all night and failed, but if you want us to, we will try again.”

In verses 6 and 7 we see the miracle of this text which demonstrates the power of God. They let down their net and enclosed, we are told, a “great multitude” of fish. They had caught nothing all night, but now they had a great multitude. They had so many fish that their net began to break. The load of fish was too great, they couldn’t bring it in by themselves. They called to their partners in the other ship to come and help them. They filled both ships so full that they began to sink. It had gone from a fruitless day, to the most productive day of fishing Peter had ever had.

This miracle demonstrates Christ’s power over nature. Even the fish in the lake obeyed him. Like the ravens that fed Elijah or the great fish that swallowed

Jonah, so the fish in the sea of Galilee perfectly obeyed the will of their Creator. When Jesus told Peter to let down his net, a great multitude of fish were waiting there to be caught. This was not a natural occurrence, this was supernatural, and it was immediately recognized as a miracle by those who were present. It demonstrated to them the power of God exercised by Jesus Christ,

Why did Jesus perform this miracle?

Was it to show gratitude toward Peter for letting him use his boat?

Maybe as Jesus was teaching he could tell Peter was agitated because he hadn't caught anything the night before.

Maybe Peter needed a good catch of fish because he was short on funds, and the lake just had not provided.

I don't think that is why Jesus performed this miracle.

Jesus performed this miracle to demonstrate the power of God, and this was specifically focused toward Peter, Andrew, James, and John. We see that in the response of Peter. In verses 8-10a we see the fear of God.

II. The Fear of God (v. 8-10a)

There are many facets to the "fear of God." Bro. Bell taught on this topic yesterday morning for the Men's Bible study from Jeremiah 2:19. But the facet we see in this text is the fear that comes over a sinner when God's power and holiness

is revealed to them. Verse 8 begins, “When Simon Peter saw it.” Keep in mind, Peter must have been tired. He was up all night fishing. He has been mending and cleaning his nets all this time that Jesus has been teaching. Jesus asked him to put his net back in the water and Peter said, “Master, we’ve tried all night. But if you want us to, I will try again.” Peter put down his net and now he has in these two boats the greatest catch of his life. What did Peter do when he saw this great haul of fish?

Peter saw this great catch of fish and he was amazed. He said, “Master, I thought I knew how to fish. But I see now that this is a far superior method. Jesus, if you would, come back tomorrow morning. You can use my boat for as long as you want, just tell me when to drop my net at the end. Jesus, we should become partners. 50/50 split. I’ll do all the work, you just tell me when and where to put down the net.”

That’s how we often act toward God. “Lord, I want your provision. Lord, I want you to smooth out the bumps in my life. Lord, I want you to fill my net. Just tell me Lord how I can grease your palm and get what I want from you.”

This is how we often act, but look at how Peter responds to this incredible demonstration of the power of God. Peter doesn’t say to Jesus, “Fill my net,” he says, “Depart from me.”

Look at verse 8. Peter fell down at Jesus’ knees. All throughout Scripture when people come face-to-face with some visible manifestation of God’s power,

they respond like this. Sinful man cannot stand before a holy God, and Peter is no exception. He fell down before Jesus.

And in that position of humility Peter makes this confession: “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Peter’s confession brings to mind Isaiah 6:5. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon His throne and he said, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

In this moment Peter suddenly became keenly aware of two things. First, that Jesus was holy. And second, that he, Peter, was sinful.

Verse 9 says, “For he was astonished, and all that were with him.” This word “astonished” is frequently associated with terror. For example, we see this same word used to describe Saul in Acts 9:6 after he has been knocked down by God on the road to Damascus he is described as “trembling and astonished.”

Peter was afraid. Jesus has just performed a miracle for Peter and his fishing partners, a miracle of provision, a miracle of wealth creation. But they are not happy, they are terrified, and rightly so.

We are often very cavalier in our attitudes toward the Lord. We think of God as our buddy, as our friend, as our helper. Rarely, if ever, are we gripped by the terror of holy God. God is holy, and you are not. God is all-powerful, and you are not. God is all-knowing, and you are not. God is supernatural, and you exist in the natural realm. There is tremendous comfort in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the

reconciliation of sinful man with the holy God. But that is only a comfort if you first see your need, if you have first been gripped by the terror of the holy God.

Have you ever been gripped by the fear of God? Have you ever come to a point in your life where you glimpsed in some small way the holiness of God? Have you ever had your sin exposed by the holiness of God? Have you ever confessed, as Peter did in our text, “I am a sinful man.” Such a confession will only come when we understand in some small way the holiness of God and, in comparison, the depth of our own sin.

Peter and those who were with him were gripped by the fear of God. Peter doesn't know what to do, so he says to Jesus, “Depart from me.” At this point, Peter and Jesus are together in a boat out in deep water. What is Peter saying? What does he want Jesus to do?

In many ways Peter's reaction here reminds me of the demon possessed man we studied in Luke 4. There are major differences between these two. I'm not suggesting they are the same. I think it is clear that the motivation behind the demon's words and Peter's words are totally different. But there are some interesting similarities.

Look again at what the demon said in Luke 4:33-34, “And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God.”

The demon knew he was sinful and Jesus was holy and so he said, “Let us alone.” Peter, in this moment of clarity when he saw his sinfulness and Jesus’ holiness, Peter said, “Depart from me.”

This is what sin does. Sin separates us from God. It’s been this way since the very beginning. In Genesis 3:8, after Adam and Eve had committed the first sin, we read, “Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.” You cannot know the power and holiness of God and be comfortable in your sin. Sin and our Savior cannot co-exist. One will drive out the other.

There is a spiritual paradox which manifests itself in man’s relationship with God. Men earnestly seek the presence of God, but as soon as God appears they are struck with terror and they want to get away from Him. In God’s absence, men call out for Him because our conscience and nature show us that we are miserable without Him. But when God appears to sinful men, they are all, without exception, overcome with the realization of their sinfulness and they desire separation from God.

So far in our text we have seen the power of God demonstrated in the miracle Jesus performed. And we have seen then fear of God as Peter was seized by astonishment, terror, after Jesus had performed this miracle. But now look at what Jesus said to Peter. At the end of verse 10 through verse 11 we see the call of God.

III. The Call of God (v. 10b-11)

The first thing Jesus says to Peter is “Fear not.” If there was any question still about whether or not Peter was afraid, here is the answer. Jesus tells him: “Fear not.” This indicates that Peter was afraid.

Peter has said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.”

Jesus replies: “Fear not.”

Only Jesus can remove the penalty for sin, only Jesus can satisfy the demands of God’s justice, and so it is that when we are fearful because of our sin, it is only Jesus who can comfort us with these words: “Fear not.” If you are fearful because of your sin, that is good. It is a fearful thing to stand guilty before a holy God. Come to Christ that you may “fear not.”

Again, compare this to the interaction Jesus had with the demon in chapter 4. The demon said, “Leave us alone.” Jesus rebuked him and said, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him.” (verse 35). Jesus didn’t go anywhere, but he cast that demon out. Jesus did not give any assurance to that demon. Jesus didn’t speak any comforting words to that demon. Jesus drove him away.

Why? Because it was a demon. There is no redemption for the fallen angels. God will be glorified through His judgment upon them. There is no alternative for demons. They will face the eternal judgment of God for their sin of rebellion.

Peter was just as guilty as any demon. Sin doesn't make us guilty by degrees. You are either sinful or innocent, and by that measure Peter was just as guilty as the demon in chapter 4. But Jesus doesn't drive Peter away. He doesn't rebuke Peter. Rather, he responds to Peter with these words that are full of hope and assurance: "Fear not."

Why? Peter was right! He was sinful. He fully deserved God's judgment, and with some awareness of God's power and holiness Peter realized that he could hope for nothing more. But unlike the fallen angels, God has a plan of redemption for man. God would glorify Himself through the redemption of Peter. God would glorify Himself by using Peter as a disciple and an apostle. And so Jesus responds to Peter with these words of hope and encouragement: "Fear not."

Jesus continued and said, "From henceforth thou shalt catch men." This was to mark a change in the relationship between Jesus and Peter, as well as Andrew, James, and John who were also present. Before they had some familiarity with Christ. Andrew had even told Peter, "We have found the Messiah." But now they were to follow Jesus continually and they would be used by Him mightily.

Now look at how this account ends in v. 11. They return to shore. They take these fish to market. Then they go home and rest for their next night of fishing. But they make sure to make their calendars because they are going to meet Jesus at the synagogue the next sabbath day.

No. They returned to shore. Then they “forsook all, and followed him.” They left everything. Their nets, their boats, and this huge haul of fish. The call of Jesus held more weight than the call of all these earthly things and so they forsook them all, and followed Jesus.

When riches increase, we are the most tempted to place our trust in them instead of in Christ. Don’t set your heart upon the things of this world. They are passing away. We must be willing to forsake anything and everything that would keep us from following Christ as we ought.

I titled this sermon from this verse: “Forsake all and Follow Christ.” In this text Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to a very specific ministry which required them to literally forsake all they had, and to follow Jesus. They had to physically leave their nets and boats and fish to follow Jesus. We might not be called upon by the Lord to literally forsake all to follow Him: to leave your car and your house and your job to follow Him. But the call of the gospel is a call to die: to die to sin, to die to this world, and to die to our flesh and all its lusts. In this sense we are all called upon to “forsake all and follow Christ.”

There is a gospel application here for those who have never been born again. If you have never been saved, if you are not trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, consider this question. What is the price for your soul? What would you give in exchange for your immortal soul?

The Bible teaches that there is nothing you can give in exchange for your soul. You don't even have possession of your soul. As the just wages of your sin, your soul is held in debt to to the judgment of God in death, and there is nothing you can do to redeem your soul.

But there is hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Your soul cannot be redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold, but it can be redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. From our text this morning see the power of God, the holiness of God, be convicted of your sin, and flee to Jesus Christ for salvation. Nothing you could ever possess is worth your soul. Forsake it all, and follow Christ.

There is also gospel-living application here for Christians. What is keeping you from following Jesus as you ought? What are you holding on to that is of this world? It could be a possession, or a person, or an attitude, or something else. Whatever it is, forsake it and follow Christ. I'm reminded of that line from Jim Eliot's journal: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." You can't keep these things where you are going, dear Christian. Forsake all, and follow Christ.

In many ways this has been a hard year for me. A lot has changed from the way things were just a year ago. A few months ago I was sitting in this auditorium during a Sunday morning service feeling sorry for myself and feeling a little self-righteous as well. And as I was sitting there, wallowing in these feelings and

thinking about all that I have lost and all that I have willingly given up, this question suddenly crossed my mind: “Lord, how much do you want from me?”

That was a question I asked the Lord out of pride and self-pity: “How much do you want from me?”

Immediately I was convicted and the Holy Spirit brought one word to my mind: “Everything.”

Everything.

Is He worthy of everything?

Yes! a thousand times yes.

Then forsake it all, and follow Christ.