

“Jesus’ Challenge”
Luke 5:1–11
Dr. Mark Cushman
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We will be looking at a very familiar passage in this study. It is a fun passage to read and more than that a fun passage to imagine. In a sense I want to paint a picture for you from this passage. Those who have been to Israel and visited the Sea of Galilee this can be a moment to really imagine and to feel what it must have been like to be those disciples who followed Jesus, watched His miracles and heard Him speak. This is a passage where Jesus is interacting right there at the Sea of Galilee.

Luke 5:1–11 says [1] *On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, [2] and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. [3] Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. [4] And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” [5] And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” [6] And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. [7] They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. [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.” [9] For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, [10] and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” [11] And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*

The grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of our God will stand forever.

Isn't it fun to watch experts do their work? During this time of March Madness there are many experts during this time of basketball where college teams are vying to win a national title and what we find is that these experts aren't really experts. Many like me, who chose the University of Virginia to win know that is not going to happen and so goes those who picked Michigan State, Arizona, and the University of North Carolina. If someone does end up picking most of the winners it's simply because they were filled with good fortune and they happen to have a good day when they were picking because it's not an arena for real experts.

Here on the other hand we have a real Expert at work in this text. He is an expert at building the Kingdom and He has chosen to do it through people like you and me and like His Disciples. He is a craftsman skilled in the art of dealing with the human soul. Here Jesus works with Peter in a very tender compelling way. He does so in a way that I think is instructive for you and me. I'm going to give you four 'e's' of how Jesus dealt with Peter and how He deals with you and me in this business of Kingdom building.

The first 'E' is that Jesus engaged Peter. He was at the lake of Gennesaret which means from the Old Testament heart-shaped and if you look at a map of the Sea of Galilee is kind of resembles a human heart. This is where Jesus observed some of His future disciples. They weren't His disciples yet but He had His eye on them and He observed them doing their normal jobs and He came to them. He had already met with Peter and we learn this from John 1:42 but now He pursues them. He initiated direct interaction with them and even asked a favor of Simon

Peter when He said ‘Can I use your boat as a pulpit?’ He did this because the crowds were pressing around and could not see Jesus so in a shrewd move He steps into Peter’s boat and asks him to push out from the shore just a little bit so that He could talk to the crowds.

It really is a great picture that Jesus didn’t minister from a distance. He jumped into this group of fishermen. Peter didn’t reach out to Him but He engaged Peter and He used the tools of Peter’s work as a fisherman to minister to others and illustrate what was needed in the Kingdom. Jesus stepped into the business side of Peter’s life and invited him to the mission field. Eventually He would challenge the other disciples to follow Him. He would recruit them and would send them out doing much different things than fishing, tax collecting and their other jobs but in doing so Jesus engaged them. He found them. He called them. He didn’t improve Peter’s ability to fish or give him lessons on how to fish but He blessed his ability and He just made Peter a better fisherman.

It’s a beautiful picture and the point is that Jesus takes over what belongs to us or we think belongs to us. He takes what is mine and uses it. My marriage, my children, my house, my hobbies, my job, and all aspects of my life He wants. He wants us to devote all aspects of our life to Him. Of course we know that everything that is mine is really His in the first place and that’s a universal Biblical truth. Psalm 24:1–2 says [1] *The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,* [2] *for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.*

I’m the pastoral care pastor here at Briarwood and in my line of work I have seen this lesson driven home repeatedly that everything really belongs to the Lord. What is the perfect measure of what I truly own? It’s what I get to keep when I die and that would be nothing, not even my body for it remains here as I go to be with Jesus. Therefore I really don’t own anything for everything I have – my family, my children, my house, my job, my hobbies, everything I have – is just a loner. I’m just a steward of those things but I will leave them behind when I die.

There was a man who worked all his life and he was a real cheap skate. Just before he died he said to his wife, ‘Listen, when I die I want you to take all my money and place it in my casket with me so I can take it with me.’ He got his wife to promise with all her heart that she would do so when he died and finally one day he did die. There he was at the funeral home stretched out in his casket. His wife was sitting there next to her best friend and as they were finishing the funeral service and started to close the casket his wife said ‘Wait a minute.’ She reached under her chair and pulled out a little cardboard box. She put the cardboard box in the casket, they closed it and wheeled it away. Her friend said ‘I sure hope you didn’t put all the money of that stingy old man in his casket!’ She said ‘I sure did for I promised that I would and I’m a good Christian.’ The friend said ‘You did?! Why did you do that?’ She said ‘I got all his money together and put it in my account and then wrote him a check.’

So it didn’t make any difference because this man couldn’t take any of it with him. Everything we have belongs to Jesus and it’s beautiful to know that when we come to Christ, Jesus takes all that stuff which is really His and uses it for His glory. That’s what He did with Peter. He took Peter’s business, his skills and used it for God’s glory.

The second ‘E’ is that Jesus educated Peter. He invited Peter to sit alongside of Him in the boat. Of all the people there Peter got a front row seat to hear and see Him teach the multitudes. I think that’s important because Peter was not yet a Disciple of Jesus but he hadn’t been acquainted much with Jesus yet. Jesus first called him to quit washing his nets and to come and listen to Him teach. I would have loved to have heard the content of that sermon. I would suggest that in some ways this was a set up to do what Jesus was about to do with Peter. It may

have involved some kind of outreach or Kingdom building and He wanted to drive the point home so when He is finished He turns and addresses Peter. I believe it was no accident that Jesus' teaching was followed by His challenge to go fish. We don't know what He taught but we certainly see the pattern.

The point is that Jesus teaches us from His Word. If you're a new Christian you need to understand that your life will be surrounded by admonitions to study and read God's Word. Jesus points out here before He sends Peter to do anything and this may have been the first time that Peter had heard Jesus speak to some degree, but Jesus teaches him. We know that Jesus loved and used God's Word in His own life. He used it to fend off temptation and to fend against His opponents. He used it to justify His ministry and to prove His own identity. He constantly referred to it throughout His life. For us to say that we know and love Jesus Christ but don't constantly listen to His Word or go to His Word is absurd. It's like saying 'I love my spouse but I never listen to them.' You know how that works. Or 'I only listen to them second hand through others like if the children come talk then I know what they are saying.' You know that marriage is probably in a lot of trouble if that's the case.

We can't listen to God's Word second hand either. In other words, Sunday morning sermons are not enough. The preaching of the Word is incredibly important. You need to hear it but it's basically God's Word second hand. It's where you are hearing what the pastor is saying from the pulpit about God's Word when they have read it but that's not sufficient. Peter needed to hear it firsthand from Jesus' mouth and that's what worked in a powerful way. As Scripture was essential to Jesus in ministry so it is with us and that's why Satan loves to drive wedges between God, His Word and Jesus' followers. Satan loves for you not to trust God's Word. Satan loves to water His Word down. Satan loves to make you so busy you simply don't have time to read it. Satan loves to make you think just come on Sunday mornings and that's all the doses we need. What a deception! Peter gets a heavy dosage and that would continue throughout His earthly ministry.

Years ago when we lived in Georgia we did a renovation in our bathroom and in order to save some money I volunteered to redo the vanity. It wasn't a small one. It was probably four to five feet wide, a large sink and larger drawers on each side. The carpenters helped me pull it out from the wall, where I set it up to sand it, paint it and when we took it away from the wall we realized it didn't have a back on it. The carpenters highly recommended I put a back on the vanity before putting it back into place. So I dutifully and carefully added a back onto it and when I lined it up to put it back into place I realized that the vanity was slightly skewed. It was leaning more to one side and my default mode how I was going to fit the piece of plywood onto that tilted vanity. I had a table saw but I couldn't cut that kind of subtle angle. I was up all night trying to figure this out.

So the next day I asked the carpenter and asked him how I could fit that piece of plywood on the vanity and his response was 'Just straighten the vanity.' He reached down, leaned against it and just straightened it up. I quickly tacked it into place and it fit perfectly. For me, this has been a little parable for God's Word in my life because I'm like that crooked vanity. It's so easy to bring God's square word into my life that's a good standard and try to trim it down to make it fit my crooked life. Certain priorities I like and certain priorities I think are for someone else. Or I just won't bother with certain passages that are difficult. We have those ways of listening to the parts of Scripture that we really like and that's not we're to do. We are to conform to God's Word. We are to lean in that direction and let God put His Word in us. Peter was learning from the very beginning that he would need Jesus' Word to function properly.

When Martin Luther was challenged for his beliefs, being threatened by the authorities and knew his life was at stake if he didn't recant from some of his teachings, I remember some of those great words he said during this time which are good for you and me. He said when challenged to recant or perhaps lose his life, "My conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God and to go against conscience or Scripture is neither right nor safe." I love the inclusion of safe. Luther is facing potential execution but he is saying it would not be safe to go against God's Word.

We see this in so many cases where people who know God's Word, decide not to follow it and they enter a path that is very dangerous. It may not cause problems at first and that may be where some of us are today where we have some things going on that we know are contradicting God's Word in some way and Luther said 'It's neither right nor safe not to listen to God's Word' but Peter did. In Luke 5:5 it says [5] *And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."* Peter didn't know what would happen if he did this but we see that Jesus engaged Peter directly, educated him and then thirdly He exercised Peter's faith, the third E.

This is a classic picture of a Carpenter telling a fisherman how to do his job. I'm sure that didn't pass Peter's notice. He asked Peter to do what didn't make sense to a fisherman. Peter is skeptical, not of his own skill or ability but what were the conditions for this success? Fishing in the mid-day or late morning just wasn't done. Everyone knew that by that time of day the fish would be swimming way too deep in the lake and Jesus said 'let's go where they are, let's go deep.' Peter knew this was very counterintuitive but we don't really know what he was thinking at that moment and it was probably not something that should be penned in Scripture, but he did complain and do it anyway. In such a situation, Jesus' word was all that Peter had but it was all that he needed. In following Jesus' word Peter was in for a big surprise. The point is that Jesus calls us to trust Him even when it may not make sense. If He hasn't already done it a number of times in your life, He will do it again and again and again.

Especially in times of difficulty and trauma one of the most irritating things about God is that He wants us to live by faith. I say that honestly but with deep reverence. It can be very irritating when you think you need more answers before I step out in faith. Jesus says in His Word I have given you all I am going to give you so you need to step out and trust Me. You may be facing some big decisions but you want God to give you a little more information before you step out and trust Him. Notice that Jesus did not tell Peter what was about to happen. Jesus told him to cast his nets out, Peter did so but it was a difficult time. Jesus is saying 'let Me show you what I can do even when it doesn't make sense.'

Imagine Jesus using a coward like Moses to lead His people to freedom. Imagine Jesus using a religious terrorist like Saul who would become the Apostle Paul. What's that about? That certainly couldn't happen, but Jesus did it. Imagine Jesus being able to use an ordinary 18 year old who dove into the water, broke her spine and was paralyzed for life. There's a loser but Joni Eareckson Tada is one of the most beloved Christians and I believe has touched so many people in the evangelical world today. Imagine Jesus using an old crusty politician turned criminal, incarcerated, humiliated in a jail cell, named Chuck Colson. God takes a life and transforms a prison system in many areas and becomes a great inspiration in the church. God says 'Trust Me and watch what I can do. Give Me what you have and let me work with it.'

We're not to be envying what others can do like those missionaries who seem to be so effective but this is exactly what this passage is addressing. It is addressing those of us who

think that our nets could ever catch anything but they can and that is what Jesus is telling us. Jesus exercises Peter's faith and it is going to take faith to step out and be used by Him.

The fourth 'E' from this text is that Jesus enabled Peter to accomplish His will. He does through Peter what Peter thought was next to impossible, highly unlikely yet in an instant Jesus did what human efforts couldn't do alone. How did he catch the fish? We don't whether it was a miracle of knowledge where Jesus just knew where the fish were or whether it was a miracle of dominion where Jesus was literally controlling the fish. We are not to know but the blend of Jesus' human and Divine nature is a mystery but what Peter sees is Jesus specializing in the area of Peter's specialty. Peter realizes that this Rabbi Jesus doesn't just know the Bible and theology but He knew fishing. What a stunner! Therefore the point is that Jesus knows our potential ability.

Jesus understands medicine, sales, teaching, education, engineering, marketing and even homemaking better than you and me. He knows how to take all those talents, skills and areas of vocation and reel in a bunch of fish, if we step out and trust Him for when we do that then He uses us. I wonder how much time I pray, not that He would change my circumstances in my job but that He would equip me to do my job better for His Kingdom. Lord, let me do my job that You might get the praise and glory and reap in the fish for Your Kingdom. Jesus knows our potential ability and when He looks at us He sees opportunity because we're filled with His Spirit. He sees all kinds of opportunity in my life.

A woman named Wanda Vassallo from Dallas, Texas told this story. She said 'A gem dealer was strolling down the aisle at the Tucson Gem and Mineral show and he started looking through a large bin of random stones. He saw a blue violet stone the size and shape of a potato. As calmly as possible he asked the vendor 'You want \$15 for this?' The vendor realizing the stone was not as pretty as some of the others said 'Well, would \$10 be too much?' The gem collector bought it and took it home. Since then, that stone has been certified as a 1905 carat natural star saffire that was 800 carats larger than the closest stone of its type ever found. It was appraised for approximately 2.28 million dollars and this man bought it for \$10. That has never happened to me. It took a lover of stones to recognize the saffire's worth. Likewise it takes the Lover of souls to recognize the true value of ordinary people like you and me.

We don't know what Jesus spotted in Peter and those 12 Disciples because in many respects they seemed like such losers, such ordinary men but something was there. I believe in unconditional election and I don't believe there is anything in me that commends me to God but in terms of where He leads me, takes me and how He is going to use me, He sees certain things in me just like He does in you and says 'That is where I want you to serve in My Kingdom.' What a privilege to know this Lover of souls can recognize our true value.

I really love this passage because it really does magnify Jesus in many ways. It shows His wisdom in preaching from the boat. It shows His knowledge in where to find the fish. It shows His generosity because they didn't just get a few fish but they got two boatloads of fish and both were about to sink because they were overflowing. Those fishermen had probably never come across a phenomenon like that. It shows His majesty as Peter recognizes what is going on and bows down in amazement and humility. It shows His passion for the lost. Peter, from now on we're going to be fishing for men.

Peter shows the appropriate response when confronted by such a miracle for he bows down in humility (vs 8), and in fear (vs 10). Peter's perspective challenges me to look at my own gifts and skills from Jesus' perspective to conform my life to His priority rather than to my own. When Jesus saves us He will either transform our vocation or give us a new one or most

likely He'll just transform where we are and use us for His glory regardless of what we do. We are given the new priority of helping to build His Kingdom.

Fishing was a big deal for Jesus. He knew that God has sent Him to do it. Jesus said in Luke 4:18, [18] *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."* The oppressed, that's you and me. He also said in John 4:34, [34] *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."*

I believe that is the call that He has on all of us because as I said earlier we're going to take nothing out of this world. We are going to leave everything behind and so what a better thing to do is say 'Lord, since all this stuff isn't mine in the first place, could I just give it to You and let You help me invest in the Kingdom and use it to bring others into the Kingdom?' This is the least I can for what He has given to me. As I follow Him He will use my talents, gifts, resources, prayers, brain, and heart and in a sense His work in the world depends on from a human perspective what He has offered and able to use. Obviously He is going to have His way but how He does it, in a way depends on how we respond.

Here is a thought that has been nagging me for a while. Do you know what is the greatest disaster facing America today? I would say that it is not godless leaders or sexual anarchy or governmental tyranny or foreign enemies or financial decline or material wealth. I would say it is the church not doing Her job, because if the church does not do Her job then the spiral of evil will only pick up the pace. You and I need to realize that we are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. You might think you don't have any abilities or skills or think you can't preach but Jesus knows that. He still says if you know Him that you are the salt and light of the world.

I find it very poignant when we consider the plight of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 13. Sodom and Gomorrah had been approached by Lot yet Lot was having a problem with his uncle, Abraham due to the fact that both had big flocks and needed to split up. Genesis 13:10–13 says [10] *And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)* [11] *So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other.* [12] *Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.* [13] *Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.*

Lot turned his face toward men because of the opulence, abundance and the potential prosperity. Five chapters later Abraham intervenes and the angels have showed up. They have indicated that Sodom and Gomorrah are going to be judged. Abraham asks God that even if only a handful (ten) of righteous people could be found would God save the city and God says yes but apparently not even ten could be found. That was the trigger that unloaded God's judgment on those two cities. Now you know Lot was spared but one of the greatest disasters on America today is that if we don't do our job, we retreat, and certainly there are many factors involved, we won't be doing what God wants us to do because Jesus is in the fish catching business and He wants to use you and me to grow His Kingdom. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You so much for the privilege of knowing that just like Simon Peter who had very limited skills and perhaps limited education but when He was filled by Your Spirit and exposed to You Jesus he was used to transform the world for Christ. Lord, we know that he was

no different than us, except that You chose to use him in that way and I pray Lord that we would stand available to You and that we would be sensitive to Your calling and that we would be looking for opportunities so that even if Jesus gives us an unlikely message of pushing out into the deep, certainly Lord we feel like it's a deep world out there with a lot of animosity toward You, the Bible, Biblical morality for the fish are not swimming near the surface anymore like they used to but Lord, You are perfectly confident in Your Gospel and ability to change this world for Christ. I pray that You might do that. Lord, use us that we might give You the glory. We thank You and make ourselves available. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Jesus the Expert...

A. Jesus Engaged Peter.

Point: Jesus takes over what belongs to us....

B. Jesus Educated Peter.

Point: Jesus teaches us from His Word....

C. Jesus Exercises Peter's faith.

Point: Jesus calls us to trust Him even when it makes no sense....

D. Jesus Enabled Peter to accomplish His will.

Point: Jesus knows our potential ability.