

Jesus' mission and ours

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Date: 15 May 2011

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[0 : 00] Would you turn please to Luke's Gospel and Chapter 5. I'm going to read the first 11 verses in your church Bibles. It's page 860.

Luke's Gospel, Chapter 5. Luke describes for us a remarkable incident. It's quite a well-known incident involving the Lord Jesus and his disciples by the shore of the Lake Galilee, called here Gennesaret.

Luke's Gospel, Chapter 5. On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret.

And he saw two boats by the lake. But the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, Jesus asked him to put out a little from the land.

And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he'd finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.

[1 : 33] And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing. But at your word, I will let down the nets. And when they'd done this, they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking.

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. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man.

For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken. 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. And when they brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Well, can I thank you very much for your welcome, Edward, for his invitation. I'm here for three days altogether.

[2 : 58] I'm teaching at the Cornhill training course here tomorrow and Tuesday. And I was very glad to be asked to come a day early and be with you here this morning.

Would you please turn to the passage we had read earlier, Luke's Gospel and Chapter 5? I think 860 was the page number in your church Bibles.

It's a well-known passage. It's a passage much beloved, I think, of Sunday school teachers down the years. It may be that it's a passage with which you are well familiar.

There may be some here for whom it's relatively new territory. At any rate, I hope to show you that it's really a grown-ups passage and something very much on the theme of God's mission.

At the very heart of this passage, the Lord Jesus teaches his disciples a particular thought. Just one key idea to do with mission.

[4 : 12] Now, sometimes sports coaches are very keen to do that. It seems today that any sports team or a leading sports individual has to have a coach or maybe a whole entourage of coaches.

There's a great story of the Ryder Cup back in 2004. It was the second practice day before the Ryder Cup competition.

And Colin Montgomery was practicing on the range. And Bernard Langer, the German golfer, was walking past. And Bernard, who's a very fine and Christian brother, Bernard noticed something that was awry, he could tell, in the great Monty's swing.

He noticed that his first move away from the ball, he was moving his hips and his arms were catching up afterwards. Non-golfers, just bear with me for a minute. That it is important that the swing begins all together.

And taking his courage in his hands, Bernard approached Monty and pointed it out to him. Now, that is a fairly brave thing to do, as some of you will be aware.

[5 : 26] It's said to be the only tip that Bernard Langer has ever presumed to give to another professional player. The result was that Monty played out of his skin the entire competition.

And those who know about these things know that it led to a great victory. It was a swing thought. Golfers talk about a swing thought. You stand on the tee, it's very easy to think about a ton of stuff.

What the sports coach wants to do is to clear everything away and to put in the golfer's mind one swing thought. That's what Langer did for Monty that day.

And the Lord Jesus, with his disciples here on this day, gives them, if you like, a swing thought. A key thought to do with God's mission.

Well, it comes at the end of this passage. Have a look down with me. It's at the end of verse 10. Jesus says to Simon Peter, From now on, you will be catching man.

[6 : 33] It's a simple thought. It's a simple idea about mission. The idea that mission is like fishing. And it's to do with catching people.

Now, this passage comes at the end of, this verse comes at the end of a remarkable story of events that took place on one day on the shore of Lake Galilee.

Luke is the narrator. This is the early part of Luke's gospel. He tells us at the beginning that although others have done this job before and having followed all events very carefully from the beginning, Luke, who wasn't himself an eyewitness but has consulted those who were, he's seeking to write an orderly account of the things that have happened.

And he's doing it for one man whose name is Theophilus. And God has preserved it for many men and women down all the Christian generations.

And so it is that Luke records the birth of the Lord Jesus and the remarkable things that happened around it.

[7 : 54] And then he brings us to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Just look across the page with me. It's at chapter 4 and verse 16. Here we have leapt forward 30 years and Jesus of Nazareth comes to a synagogue and in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, the Saturday, the custom was that various participants could read from the scriptures and he takes the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, God's great mouthpiece, spokesman in the 8th century beforehand.

And turning to a particular part of Isaiah, Jesus reads these words. Luke sets them out for us in verse 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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, And today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Now you could have heard a pin drop. It's an extraordinary claim. Because everybody knew that this was a key scripture. A scripture that spoke prophetically of the coming of God's Messiah King.

[9 : 42] And Jesus says, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. It is the beginning of his public ministry. And what is that public ministry going to be characterized by?

Three times one word is mentioned. Did you notice? Have a look down again. Verse 18. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives. Again verse 19. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. You can't miss it can you? Proclaim, proclaim, proclaim.

His is to be a proclamation ministry. His work is to be focused on the preaching and teaching of God's word.

No wonder then that as we read through the rest of chapter 4 up to our passage today we find that time and again this is the work that Jesus is occupied with.

[10 : 44] Have a look at chapter 4 and verse 31. And he went down to Capernaum a city of Galilee and he was teaching them on the Sabbath.

Or again verse 36. They were all amazed and said to one another what is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits and they come out.

And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. Or again verse 43. He says I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well for I was sent for this purpose.

And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea. And so we come to this extraordinary day by the shore of Lake Galilee.

Imagine the scene this beautiful lake it's a large lake you can't see from one side of it to another surrounded by rolling green hills. I think you would feel very much at home in the green hills of Galilee with the locks I mean lakes.

[12 : 04] And there is a vast crowd. a great crowd are crowding down toward Jesus and they're doing it in order to listen to him.

Because again he's involved and engaged in this proclamation ministry. And what we find here first of all is an unusually compelling preacher.

Now here was somebody who was really worth getting out of bed to listen to. the crowds pressing in on him were doing so Luke tells us in order to hear the word of God.

And so big was the crowd and so tight the press that what Jesus does is to commandeer a boat. There were some fishermen nearby they had two boats they'd been out fishing all night he borrows one of them gets in the boat pushes out a little away from the shore to give him some space sits in a boat and uses it as a pulpit.

And so it was that the crowd were taught many things from the Lord Jesus as he sat in this fisherman's boat gently rocking on the lake of Galilee.

[13 : 22] Simon and Andrew James and John were the partners in this fishing business. They were the sons of Zebedee James and John and they had this local fishing business.

They were if you like small businessmen. They owned capital with the boats and the nets. They were skillful men.

They knew their way around the fishing business. They were marketing men. They would take the fish that they bought to market and sell it. That was the kind of people and the kind of business that they were.

And it's remarkable that what Luke does is to say that the crowd and they were listening to the word of Jesus. Now did you notice this?

You'd expect Luke to say the word of Jesus, wouldn't you? But he says the word of God. Now Luke is writing this of course from some 30 years later. From all the perspective of knowing the mission of Jesus, his death on the cross, his resurrection, the fact that that gospel has now been proclaimed.

[14 : 38] Luke who's writing this is the former medic who's given up his medical career to be the apostle Paul's traveling companion. He knows the gospel by the time he's written this has spread around the Graeco-Roman world.

And he knows that that carpenter from Nazareth was much more than a carpenter from Nazareth. That the crowd gathered and what they heard was the word of God.

More about that and on. A compelling preacher. What follows of course is an astonishing miracle. As Jesus completes his preaching and teaching, he turns to Simon Peter and says to Simon verse 4, let's go fishing.

Come on, push the boat out in the deep, let down the nets and we'll catch fish. Simon Peter is not amused or enamored of the suggestion.

He says with, I think, a little peak, don't you? Master, not sure where you were all night, probably curled up nicely asleep in your bed in Nazareth. We actually were fishing all night.

[15 : 48] We toiled all night and I can tell you we took nothing. And I imagine that had it been anybody else, Simon Peter may well not have taken those recently cleaned nets and gone fishing in broad daylight.

I don't know what he'd have said if Mrs. Simon had made the suggestion. Anyway, he says to Jesus, but at your word, I will let down the nets.

Well, you know what happens next when they done this. They enclosed a huge, a large, a vast number of fish, so much so that the nets threatened to break.

They beckoned to their partners to bring the other boat, and both boats were filled to the point in which they threatened to sink. It was an astonishing miracle.

That's what we're told in verse 9, isn't it? For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. It was a bonanza.

[16 : 56] They could take this fish to the local market, and it was a tremendous boost to their business. Now, we're not exactly sure what the miracle was.

It may have been a miracle of knowledge. That is, that Jesus knew where the fish were. It may have been another example of his lordship over creation, summoning the fish.

Luke is not interested in delving into that detail. What Luke wants to tell us is what happened next. Now, I want you to imagine for a moment that you were in Peter's shoes.

You're running your own business. It's a fishing business. Reasonably successful, but you've just had a very bad night. You've caught absolutely nothing, and it's a bit of a frustrating business, obviously, because you toil all night.

It's pretty hard work. You never know if you're going to get a good catch or you're not. And now you've got a remarkable prospect, haven't you? You've got a partnership at the moment.

[17 : 56] There's four of you, you and Andrew, and there's James and John, and the business is going quite nicely, but here is somebody else, and somebody else who apparently doesn't mind going out in boats, and who knows where the jolly fish are.

Now that is a business opportunity and a half, isn't it? And if you bring him in on the business, then you don't have to fish at night anymore, you go out in the daytime, you know where the fish are, you can corner the market, can be the most successful fishing business that Galilee has ever seen.

So what do you do next? Well, it's obvious, isn't it? You offer Jesus a partnership. You say, come and join in. You bring your expertise, we'll add it to ours, and we've got this thing made.

Are you with me? You don't need to be a business consultant, do you, to spot the business opportunity. Am I right? Okay. You just need to be thinking in those terms to feel the shock of what happens next.

Let's pick up at verse 8. When Simon Peter saw it, that is the astonishing catch of fish, he fell down at Jesus' knees and said, depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

[19 : 19] Now, to put it at its very least, that is a surprising request. Peter's saying, go away, leave us alone, don't come back.

Now, why does he do that? Why does he squander an obvious business opportunity? What is Peter thinking? Now, a truth has dawned on Peter that is the common experience of every person who finds themselves in the presence of the living God in the scriptures.

You might think in the Old Testament of St. Moses, that bush that appeared to be on fire but wasn't burned up. You might think of the prophet Isaiah himself with that vision of the holiness of God in the temple.

Isaiah who ends up saying, woe is me, for I am a sinful man. Peter realizes his own sinfulness.

sinfulness. It is a remarkable moment. A truth has dawned on him. His eyes have been opened to a truth and a reality that he had never come to terms with before.

[20 : 39] And he says to Jesus, you must go away. I don't deserve to have you here. I'm a sinful man. And he recognizes in whose presence he stands.

And so he falls at Jesus' knees. Now Jesus' response is highly instructive. You'll notice that Jesus doesn't contradict Peter's words.

Jesus doesn't say, now, now, Peter, never, don't be so hard on yourself. You're really not that bad actually. You're rather a good bloke. You run a decent business. You're honest. You have integrity. You have a decent reputation.

There are people a lot worse than you are. Jesus doesn't do that. Neither does Jesus excuse Peter's sin. He doesn't say, well, I know you are, but it's not really your fault.

It's because of the company you keep. It's because of the society you live in. It's because of the home you grew up in. He neither contradicts what Peter says, nor does he excuse it.

[21 : 42] But neither does Jesus acquiesce in Peter's request. Jesus doesn't go away.

He takes Peter's words with full seriousness. He recognizes that Peter is afraid. And my friends, you and I would also be afraid if we found ourselves in the presence of the living God.

Because we too are sinful men and women. And what Jesus does is speak remarkable words of grace. do not be afraid, Jesus says to Simon.

From now on you will be catching men. Jesus has come to earth on a mission.

It is a mission that his father has given him. It is a mission, Isaiah says, to bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth. earth. And what happens here is that in response to Peter's words, Jesus offers Peter a partnership in his fishing business.

[23 : 04] Do you see that? It is remarkable, isn't it? From now on, Peter, you will be catching men. a compelling preacher, an astonishing miracle, a surprising request, and lastly, a decisive moment.

Jesus' invitation to join his fishing business uses a very crude metaphor for mission, doesn't it? I mean, fishing is a fairly crude business, isn't it?

Fisherman here will forgive me for saying so. I wonder whether you can cope with that this morning. Is that too crude an image for you? Obviously, the idea of fishing doesn't say everything that there is to say about mission, but it is the analogy that Jesus uses.

And of course, it was peculiarly apt for Peter and for Andrew and for James and for John. Well, it was a decisive moment.

What we read is verse 11. When they brought their boats to land, remember these boats are full of this astonishing catch of fish worth a great deal of money with the nets and everything else.

[24 : 28] When they brought their boats to land, they left everything. They left the boats, they left the fish, they left the nets, their business, and they followed Jesus.

And I imagine that the reason that they did that is always the same reason as anybody ever changes one job for another. The same reason why Luke abandoned his medical career to become the apostle Paul's traveling companion.

It is because they recognized that they were moving from something lesser to something greater. And the greater thing was to be partners in Jesus' great work of mission.

From now on, you will be catching people. Well, the rest of Luke's gospel and Luke volume two that we know as Acts, spells out the significance of this moment.

Showing the gospel leadership, for example, of Simon Peter, as he becomes that leading apostle. We don't have time to think about that this morning.

[25 : 46] Let's pause now and let's ask ourselves what we can learn from this. It is a terrific story, isn't it? It's a wonderful story. But it's not really a children's story.

Somebody said to me once that the point is not really the fish, is it Alan? No, the point is not really the fish. Let's see if we can get to the point by pondering three questions.

May I ask you three questions this morning? Let me begin with this one. What is your opinion of Jesus of Nazareth?

What is your view of him? It's interesting to see a bit of a progression here. In verse one, he's portrayed as a great teacher and preacher. Clearly he was that, and crowds came to listen to him.

In verse five, he's portrayed not simply as an interesting preacher and teacher, but as a master whose word ought to be obeyed.

[26 : 51] but in verse eight, Peter describes him, not only in those terms, but as his Lord.

That, of course, is the progression that we often make. We first encounter Jesus as a great teacher. We then begin to understand that his word is a word that we need to listen to and take to heart.

But the progression needs to continue, because we are to understand that Luke's portrait is of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one at whose knees we are to fall.

One day, of course, every tongue will confess. Jesus Christ is Lord. The gospel brings us to do that ahead of time.

What is your opinion of Jesus? This passage is about a right opinion of Jesus. Then let me ask you another question.

[28 : 08] Forgive the impertinence of it. I ask it of myself as well. What is your opinion of yourself? You look in the mirror.

What do you see? Do you see, for example, a man, a woman, a young person, an older person who is, well, basically pretty good, upright, respectable?

You're somebody who's reasonably proud of what you've achieved, of the business you've built up, of the career you've had, of your academic achievement, somebody full of hope and plan and ambition?

Or are you somebody who has come to terms with the truth and the reality that dawned on Peter that day? that is, have you been brought to the realization that the words that Peter speaks here are true of you as well?

I am a sinful woman. I am a sinful man. Sin, the Bible, you remember, is to do with an attitude toward God.

[29 : 29] It's to do with an attitude of rebellion. We teach the children that sin is a simple word, it only has three letters, and it has I in the middle. And sin is to do with putting me in the middle.

If I think of God, that's fine, but God has to be in orbit around me. God has to keep in his place. Sometimes he's useful.

We need a Copernican revolution, where we no longer have us in the middle, but we put God in the middle. We put the Son in the middle.

It happened with Peter on this day. Can I ask you, what is your view of yourself? This passage is a passage not only about who Jesus is, it's also a passage about the truth of who we are.

Yes, even the leading apostle Peter, who, when Luke is writing this, is one of the great leaders of the early church, the one who preached on the day of Pentecost.

[30 : 37] The truth is Jesus that Peter is a sinful man. Jesus didn't correct him. He didn't excuse him. He took his words with full seriousness.

And the wonderful truth is that Jesus still does that today. This is the first step, isn't it, to becoming a real Christian, actually.

that we come before God ourselves, understanding not only the truth of Jesus, but the truth about ourselves. That we are humbled and brought to our knees, and we acknowledge that actually what we deserve is for God to abandon us.

Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man, a sinful woman. And wonderfully, marvelously, still, as on that day, when anyone does that, whatever their background, whatever their record, whatever their age, whatever their experience, they are met with words of grace from the Lord Jesus.

Don't be afraid. I know you're afraid. Don't be afraid, he says. Come and join me. Which brings me to the third question, and my last question, which is what is your understanding of mission?

[32 : 07] How do you think of mission? The analogy Jesus uses here doesn't say everything the Bible has to teach about mission. He doesn't speak of the motivation of love. You remember that the Bible tells us that God so loved the world, he sent his only son, that whoever believes should not perish, but have eternal life.

He doesn't speak of the worth of each individual. It doesn't speak of the loving purposes of God to draw us to himself that we might live and serve him.

It's not a perfect analogy. God is not out there wanting to put you on the barbecue in the way a fisherman might. But it is the analogy that Jesus chooses.

It is the swing thought he wants to plant in those disciples' minds. You see the next day and the next week and the next year are going to be all different for Jesus' fishing business.

That is what happens in the book of Acts. In the absence of the managing director Peter is still about Jesus' fishing business. How about yourselves here in this part of this great city?

[33 : 28] What happens if somebody were to analyze the accounts of St. George's Tron? Would it be apparent that your fishing business? Your great priority engaging in God's mission here and at arm's length?

Is that how you think of what you're about? What about yourselves tomorrow morning wherever you find you? I wonder where you'll be tomorrow morning.

You'll be at school, at college, at work. Perhaps you'll be out and about meeting neighbors, friends, strangers, how do you think of yourself when you're at your social club?

How do you think of yourself when you're at your golf club or wherever you are? Do you think of yourself in this way? Is that swing thought in your mind? Do you understand moment that as God has showed you the truth of who Jesus is and showed you the truth of who you are drawn you to himself with words of grace?

It is that you might join his great fishing business. Well, it was a high risk thing that Bernard Lanner did to Colin Montgomery.

[34 : 50] he could have been sent away with a flea in his ear. It's been a little impertinent of me, I think, this morning to ask you those questions. I trust that you won't send me away with that flea in my ear.

You remember that Luke's gospel finishes with an account of Jesus' great commission in which he makes it clear that every Christian believer of every generation is to be engaged in this great fishing business of his.

It's a simple story this morning of a compelling preacher, of an astonishing miracle, of a surprising request, and then of a decisive moment.

And the disciples never look back. Let's pray that God's word would change our hearts and minds as well.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Let's be quiet for a moment.

[35 : 59] Let's reflect on these things. Father, we thank you for your servant Luke and for this remarkable account of the events that day so many years ago.

We ask for ourselves this morning that you would send us away from here determined to come to a right view about who Jesus is.

Lord, you know the variety of opinions and understanding that we have amongst us. Please lead us to that acknowledgement of Jesus not only as a preacher and teacher but as our master whose word we need to listen to and obey but as our Lord at whose knees we need to fall.

And then Father, we do pray that you would ever show us our own need, our own sinfulness. Have mercy on us where we have grown hard-hearted, where we have known these things in the past but lately forgotten them.

Open our eyes again. Show us the truth not only of Jesus but the truth of ourselves. Lord, we are sinful people. We deserve you to leave us but we ask you to have mercy on us.

[37 : 45] And then we thank you. We thank you from the bottom of our heart. We thank you for your graciousness. We thank you for your gospel. We thank you for your great mission in this world.

And we marvel that even we may be offered a partnership in your fishing business. Help us to get our heads around that. Help us to think in the light of it this week.

May our lives, may our words, may our church's priorities be fashioned by this great privilege. And so as we thank you for this passage today, we ask indeed that we may walk and live in the light of it, for Christ's namesake.

Amen. Thank you very much.