

Luke 5:1-11

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Jesus begins to recruit His disciples. As Jesus walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He sees two sets of brothers who are fishermen: Simon and Andrew, and James and John. After He finishes His teaching, Jesus tells Simon to cast off from shore and let down his nets to fish. Simon obeys and they catch two boats full of fish. Simon recognizes that Jesus is the Christ and He tells him that from now on Simon will be catching men instead. After returning to shore, the four men leave everything and follow Jesus.

The parallel Gospel accounts for this event are Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; John 1:40-42.

Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat (v 1-3).

Luke zooms in from his broad remark about *Jesus* beginning His public ministry to a specific instance with the phrase *Now it happened*. *Jesus* was walking and teaching *the crowd* by the *lake of Gennesaret* (most likely in or around the town of Capernaum and/or the fishing village of Bethsaida).

In the Old Testament, when Galilee is spoken of (which is rarely) it is called “Chinnereth,” which is a Hebrew word that means “harp” since the sea is shaped like a harp (Numbers 34:11; Deuteronomy 3:17; Joshua 11:2, 12:3, 13:27, 19:35, 1 Kings 15:20). Sometimes the Greek New Testament calls it “Gennesaret,” as in this verse, which is the Greek form of “Chinnereth” (Matthew 14:34; Mark 6:53).

It is also called the “Sea of Tiberius” after the Caesar who reigned during *Jesus*'s adult life (John 6:1; 21:1). The town of Tiberias was established by Herod Antipas, and remains the name of the modern city on the western shore of the lake.

Today, the Sea of Galilee is roughly the same as it was in the New Testament era. It is thirteen miles in length from its north to its south. The Jordan River feeds and flows from it at each of these ends. The sea is a fresh water lake, and is about eight miles across at its widest point. It has 64 miles of surface area; its maximum depth is about 140 feet; and it has an average depth of 84 feet. In modern times, the eastern hills overlooking the Sea of Galilee are called the “Golan Heights.”

Apparently, *the crowd was pressing around Him* to such an extent that *Jesus* felt the need to remove Himself from them so that *He* could teach more effectively. This led *Him* to use a boat to create a platform from which to speak.

Luke continues that *He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets*. One method used to wash fishing *nets* was to cast them into the water to clean them off. This is how Matthew and Mark's Gospel accounts describe *Jesus* finding the brothers *Simon (Peter)* and Andrew (Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:16). From these parallel passages in Matthew and Mark we also learn that at least two of *the fishermen* Luke is referring to is *Simon* and his brother Andrew.

Because of *the crowd pressing around Him, Jesus got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land*. This gave *Jesus* the space He needed to speak to *the crowds* without being inhibited and so that all could hear as His voice carried across the water. After *Simon* had moved the boat offshore, *He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat*.

Simon, along with *James and John*, will become one of *Jesus's* closest disciples over the course of His earthly ministry. *Simon's* nickname is *Peter*, and it is by this moniker that he is most often spoken of. Peter is the Anglicized version of the Greek word for "rock" or "stone" which is "Petros." *Jesus's* nickname had not fully caught on at this time because Luke is using *Simon's* given, Hebrew name instead of the name of *Peter*, the name by which *Simon* would be more widely known.

As Luke's Gospel progresses the author will use the nickname of *Peter* more frequently (and *Simon* less frequently) in his general references about this disciple. *Peter* is also sometimes referred to as "Cephas," which also means "stone" (John 1:42).

The Hebrew name *Simon* means "listen" or "hear."

Simon's nickname is an appropriate one. Rocks are hard. *Peter* was hard-headed. Sometimes for good, sometimes not. For example, just after confessing *Jesus* is the Messiah, the Son of God, *Peter* takes *Jesus* aside and rebukes *Him* for saying He is going to die (Matthew 16:16, 22).

Simon's personality appears to be outgoing and impulsive—which leads to some spectacular failures on *Peter's* behalf. But *Peter* also is used by God in inspiring ways (Acts 2:14-40). Despite his hard-headedness and his failures, *Jesus* loves *Peter* and will lead this fisherman from Galilee to do great things for His Kingdom. *Peter's* fearlessness will be a strength worked to good purposes by God.

Less is known about *Simon's* brother, Andrew. He is mentioned by name only a few times in Scripture. In John's Gospel, we learn that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptizer who, having heard John speak of *Jesus*, began following *Him* (John 1:35-40). From John's account, Andrew then went to find his brother *Simon* saying, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). When Andrew brought *Simon* to *Jesus*, "Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas' (which is translated as Peter)" (John 1:42). Their previous encounter apparently took place outside of the district of Galilee (John 1:43), probably near the place where John the Baptist was camped. It most likely occurred shortly during His return to Galilee (Luke 4:14) after *Jesus* came out of the wilderness where *He* was fasted for forty days and was tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1-13).

What are we to make of this account in John compared with Matthew, Mark, and Luke's? It appears that *Jesus* met *Simon* and Andrew before coming to Capernaum. From Mark's account we can also place the brothers *James and John* in the house when *Jesus* heals *Simon's* mother-in-law (Mark 1:29). According to Luke's timeline this would mean that *Jesus* had met all four men before His *teaching* on the shores of the *lake*. There would already have been a familiarity and companionship between *Jesus* and the two sets of brothers before He reveals more of His true identity to them in the coming verses.

The different arrangements and ordering of these events among the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and Luke probably amount to Matthew and Mark narrating things in a thematic order and Luke narrating in a chronological "consecutive order" (Luke 1:1-3).

After He had finished speaking, Jesus then asked Simon to "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

But *Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing"* (v 4-5).

The experienced fisherman informs his passenger (*Jesus*) that it is not a time when fish can be caught and that *they* did not have any success the *night* before. They are likely tired, discouraged, and do not want to have to repeat the painstaking process of cleaning and storing *their nets* a second time.

This would have been extra-humbling with the crowds of onlookers watching from shore. After seemingly venting his frustration, *Simon* says "*but I will do what You say and let down the nets.*" He will obey the teacher who miraculously healed his mother-in-law from her fever (Luke 4:38-39).

When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink (v 6-7).

After gathering up *their nets* they make their way out into *the deep water* and begin to fish. To *Simon's* astonishment, *the nets* become so full of fish that he must call for *help* to load them into the other boat before his *nets break*. The weight of the fish *they* caught was enough to fill *both boats* so that *they both began to sink*. Remarkable!

But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which 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 fear, from now on you will be catching men" (v 8-10).

Luke describes that *amazement had seized Simon and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken*. Peter had already expressed that catching *fish* at this place and at this time was impossible. So they properly interpreted this event as a miracle.

It is at this point that *Simon* realizes a portion of the authority *Jesus* has and he bids *Him* to depart, “*for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*” After witnessing *Jesus*’s miracle of healing in his own home and now the miracle of the large catch, *Simon Peter* correctly equates that this teacher who has power over earthly creation must also have authority over sin.

At the same time, *Simon* also recognizes his own failures and inadequacies in light of who *Jesus* is. *Simon* sees his own unworthiness to be associated with the *Lord* because *he is a sinful man*. In seeing these things, *Simon* is remarkably humbled. Humility is seeing reality as it is. In his amazement, *Simon* sees the reality of *Jesus* and himself with great clarity.

Jesus assures *Simon* and tells him “*Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.*” Matthew and Mark’s Gospels also relate that *Jesus* told Andrew, and likely *James and John*, a similar message (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17). *Jesus* is telling these *fishermen* that if *they* leave *their nets* and follow *Him*, *they* will be “catching the hearts and souls of men” rather than *fish*.

The *Zebedee* brothers, *James and John*, round out *Jesus*’s inner trio with *Simon Peter*. They appear to be close knit and boisterous. Their father’s name *Zebedee* means “Gift of God,” though *Jesus* later nicknames them “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). At one point the “Thunder Brothers,” to the irritation of their fellow disciples, get their mother *Salome* to ask *Jesus* to pick them to be the ones sitting at *Jesus*’s left and right when He inaugurates His kingdom. By asking to sit on His right and left, they are asking to be the next in charge (Matthew 20:20-24). *James* will be the first of the twelve disciples to be martyred, executed by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-2).

John was *James*’s younger brother. He was most likely the youngest of the disciples. He would become the author of the Gospel of John and three short epistles (1 John, 2 John, 3 John). As an old man exiled on the island of Patmos, *John* received apocalyptic visions and wrote the Book of Revelation.

When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him (v 11).

After returning to shore with both *boats* on the verge of sinking, Luke says *they left everything and followed Him*. This would mean that *they left* their business and previous affairs then and there to follow *Jesus*. Matthew more strongly forces this point using the adverb, “Immediately,” before saying *they left their nets* and *followed Him* (Matthew 4:20). Leaving *their nets* is a euphemism for “leaving everything” and it shows that *they* did not even take the time to unload (and sell) this large haul of fish. After witnessing the power and authority of *Jesus*, these four men were ready to follow *Him* and would become His first disciples.

Biblical Text

¹Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; ²and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. ³And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. ⁴When He

had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; ⁷ so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which 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 fear, from now on you will be catching men." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.