

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

Luke 5:1-11

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Scripture

Luke wrote his Gospel about the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus who came to seek and to save lost sinners. Luke wanted to communicate that God sent his only Son Jesus as the Messiah to deliver people from sin and hell.

The central theme of Jesus' message was the kingdom of God. Jesus called people to become his followers in the kingdom of God. Today I would like to look at the account in which Jesus called the first disciples.

Let's read about Jesus' calling of his first disciples in Luke 5:1-11:

¹On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, ²and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³Getting 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. ⁴And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." ⁶And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷They 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. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." ⁹For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰and 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. (Luke 5:1-11)

Introduction

When I was working with students as a campus minister at the University of Cape Town I remember a student who made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. For the first few months he attended worship services on Sunday and was active in a Bible study on campus. But then he started attending less and less. After a few weeks I spoke with him about what it.

“Attending worship services and Bible studies are interfering with me playing cricket,” he said. He was an outstanding cricket player who played for the University of Cape Town.

Having played cricket myself I knew well how time consuming the game was. Nevertheless, it was still possible to be active in worship services and Bible studies while playing cricket. The key was a matter of priorities.

I suggested to the student that he could still play cricket and be active in worship and Bible study. But he did not agree.

I realized that he was no longer serious about following Jesus. He was more interested in playing cricket than following Jesus. He did not want to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

Luke wants his readers to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. He wants us to know who Jesus is. That is why gives us so many clear facts about Jesus’ life and ministry. He tells us about the miraculous conception of Jesus, and that he is a descendant of David. Jesus teaches with authority. He heals people of demons and diseases in order to demonstrate his unique power. Luke wants us to know for sure that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of sinners.

Luke tells us all of these things so that we will follow Jesus as our Lord and our God. He wants each one of us to follow

Jesus wholeheartedly. As soon as we know for sure that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of sinners, we must follow him, which is what it means to be a disciple. A disciple follows Jesus wholeheartedly. That is what it means to be a true disciple.

To help us make a commitment to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, Luke tells us about Jesus' calling of his first disciples in Luke 5:1-11.

Lesson

An analysis of Jesus' calling of his first disciples in Luke 5:1-11 will teach us what characterizes a true disciple of Jesus.

I. A True Disciple Listens to Jesus (5:1-3)

First, a true disciple listens to Jesus.

By the time that Jesus called his first disciples as recorded in Luke's Gospel, Jesus had already been preaching for over a year. By this time he had become an extremely popular preacher, and great crowds of people thronged to hear him.

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 (5:1). Commentator William Barclay says, "The famous sheet of water in Galilee is called by three names—the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias and the Lake of Gennesaret. It is thirteen miles long by eight miles wide. It lies in a dip in the earth's surface and is 680 feet below sea level. That fact gives it an almost tropical climate. Nowadays it is not very populous but in the days of Jesus it had nine townships clustered round its shores, none of fewer than 15,000 people."¹

Luke said that **the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear the word of God.** Jesus had come primarily as a preacher,

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 67.

and he was proclaiming to them **the word of God**.

But, it was difficult for everyone to hear Jesus. So, he looked around him, 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, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat (5:2-3).**

Becoming a true disciple of Jesus always begins with listening to Jesus. For **the people** in that region, it meant going to listen to Jesus on the shore of the **lake of Gennesaret**.

For us, listening to Jesus means exposure to his words in the Bible. It means that we must study the Bible, on our own and with other believers. It means that we must listen to the reading of God's word in the worship service. It means that we must listen to sound, faithful preaching of God's word. The Bible says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Of course, the person who heard Jesus best was Simon Peter, the owner of the boat. He needed to listen to Jesus. Peter had heard Jesus' authoritative preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum on a Sabbath day. He had seen Jesus cast the demon out of a man in the synagogue. He had seen Jesus heal his mother-in-law later on that Sabbath day. Then, when the Sabbath day ended, he had seen Jesus heal every person in Capernaum of diseases and demons. Surely, that was enough to make anyone believe that Jesus really was the Messiah, the Son of God and Savior of sinners. And yet, it seems that Peter was not yet a wholehearted follower of Jesus.

We learn an important lesson here. Jesus calls people to follow him wholeheartedly. Sadly, many people listen to Jesus but do not follow him wholeheartedly. They listen to the word of God in sermons or Bible studies, and they say, "That was a great message!" But that is as far as it ever goes.

Listening to the word of God is important. In fact, it is a

necessary and essential first step in becoming a true disciple of Jesus. However, it is *only* the first step. It is useless if that is the only step that is taken by a person.

James 1:22 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” People who only listen to the word of God and do not practice what the word teaches deceive themselves.

Allow me to state this biblical truth more strongly. Some of you may get offended by what I am about to say, but I am simply stating biblical truth frankly without trying to be tactful. Here is my statement: If you *only* listen to Jesus, it would be better for you not to go to church at all. God holds us all accountable for what we hear, and if we do not become wholehearted followers of Jesus, then our judgment will be more severe than those who have never heard the word of God.

Here is another statement: There is a sense in which church is the most dangerous place in the world. What do I mean? When the word of God is opened and we are exposed to the truth of the word of God, we are held accountable for what we hear. Jesus once said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). As awful as it is for people to be killed, it will be infinitely worse for those who must stand before him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Merely listening to the word of God increases our penalty because we will be held accountable for listening to Jesus.

Becoming a true disciple of Jesus begins with listening to Jesus. As I said, that is a necessary and essential first step. But it is only a first step. A true disciple takes a second step.

II. A True Disciple Does What Jesus Says (5:4-7)

Second, a true disciple does what Jesus says.

And when Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Si-

mon, **“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch”** (5:4). Now, this is very interesting. Peter is a seasoned fisherman and Jesus is a carpenter-turned-rabbi. It seems strange for Jesus to tell Peter how to catch fish.

So we understand Peter’s initial hesitation when he **answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!”** (5:5a). I can almost see Peter waiting for Jesus to say something like, “Oh, I am sorry, Simon. I don’t know what I was thinking. You are the fisherman and I am only a preacher. I am sorry.” But Jesus says nothing.

I believe Dr. Ryken hits the nail on the head in his commentary about this interaction. He writes:

Peter was trying to straighten Jesus out by suggesting that it was pointless to try again what he and his companions had been trying all night. No one likes to get on-the-job advice from someone in a different line of work. Peter was the professional here, not Jesus. If Jesus wanted to teach the Bible, that was one thing. He could even borrow Peter’s boat, if he needed to. But when he started telling Jesus how to fish, that was another matter entirely. But climbing into his boat and giving orders, Jesus was invading Peter’s personal space. He did this to teach his disciple that his life was not his own. It was more than Peter’s worship he wanted; he also wanted his work. Jesus was saying, “Your whole life belongs to me, Peter, even your fishing!”²

Peter may have thought that Jesus was meddling. But he said, **“But at your word I will let down the nets”** (5:5b).

Here is another important point: even though he was a little reluctant, Peter still obeyed Jesus. He was starting to put the words of Jesus into action in his life. He was not only listening to Jesus but he was doing what Jesus said.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Volume 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 205.

A disciple does what Jesus says. Even though he may not understand everything at first, he still does what he is told.

There were clearly others in the boat with Peter and Jesus, and so they put out into the deep to catch fish. Quite unexpectedly, **when they had 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 (5:6-7).**

This was the catch of a lifetime. This was something that the fisherman would talk about for the rest of their lives.

There was clearly something remarkable—even miraculous—about this extraordinarily large catch of fish. We don't know exactly what brought it about. But we do know that Jesus is to be taken at his word. If Jesus says something, do it.

When your children are very little you tell them, for example, to eat their vegetables. But they don't like to eat their vegetables and ask why they should eat them. You say, "Because it is good for you." Naturally your children do not understand why it is good to eat vegetables, but you insist. And as your children grow older, they eventually come to understand that eating vegetables is necessary for a well-rounded diet.

Similarly, a true disciple does what Jesus says, even though he may not fully understand the reason for obedience.

III. A True Disciple Is a Penitent Disciple (5:8-10a)

Third, a true disciple is a penitent disciple.

A true disciple of Jesus must turn from sin. Simon Peter turned from sin, and was perhaps the first true disciple of Jesus to repent of his sin.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." 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 (5:8-10a).

Peter was **astonished at the catch of fish**, but he was completely overwhelmed by realizing that he—a sinful man—was in the presence of Jesus. It is at this point that Peter realized that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of sinners. And the reason I say that is because in verse 5 Peter called Jesus “Master,” but here in verse 9 he now calls him “**Lord.**” Commentator Alfred Plummer says, “It is the ‘Master’ whose orders must be obeyed, the ‘Lord’ whose holiness causes moral agony to the sinner.”³ Peter was acknowledging the sovereign and supreme lordship and holiness of Jesus, even as he acknowledged and confessed his own sinfulness and depravity.

Every true disciple is a penitent disciple. Far too many people simply want “fire insurance.” They don’t want to burn in hell, and so they will say whatever is necessary to escape hell. So, they will say that they are sorry for their sin and that they want to give it up, but there is no real turning. Or, they are sorry for a short while, but after a period they become dulled to the ongoing sin in their lives. And before long they have happily wandered back into the ways of the world.

Every true disciple says what Peter said, “I am a sinful man, O Lord.” And he does not only do it once, at the start of the Christian life, but he does it constantly, throughout his Christian life.

IV. A True Disciple Tells Others About Jesus (5:10b)

Fourth, a true disciple tells others about Jesus.

³ A. Plummer, *Gospel According to St. Luke*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922), quoted in Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 113.

Thankfully, Jesus does not leave us in a penitent state. First, he said **to Simon, “Do not be afraid”** (5:10b). Jesus assured Peter that his sins did not disqualify him from God’s love. In fact, it is only those who recognize and confess their sins that God will forgive and use.

And then Jesus said to Simon Peter, **“From now on you will be catching men”** (5:10b). Jesus was calling Peter to serve him by **catching men**. This calling was not only for Peter but every true disciple of Jesus. While it is true that some have the gift of evangelism, all true disciples of Jesus are to be actively engaged in the enterprise of evangelism. All true disciples tell others about Jesus.

Let me ask you: when is the last time someone came to faith in Jesus because of you? When is the last time you shared the gospel with someone?

Let me make another bold statement: If you never cast your fishing rod, you will never catch a fish! It is just that simple. So, how do you catch people for Jesus? Invite them to church. Invite them to a Bible study. Invite them to a fellowship event. Tell them about Jesus. Tell them about what God has done in your life. Make Jesus a natural part of your daily conversation with everyone!

A true disciple tells others about Jesus.

V. A True Disciple Leaves Everything Behind to Follow Jesus (5:11)

Finally, a true disciple leaves everything behind to follow Jesus.

Luke tells us that **when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him** (5:11). This is one of the most dramatic moments in Luke’s Gospel. It is at this point that they were now truly surrendered and became wholehearted followers of Jesus.

You may say, “Surely you don’t mean that I am to leave *everything* behind to follow Jesus?” Yes, I do mean that. That is the demand of the gospel. A true disciple of Jesus leaves everything behind to follow Jesus.

Listen, far too many people “call themselves Christians, but they are not willing to leave behind selfish ambitions, sinful pleasures, comfortable surroundings, bitter grudges, precious idols, or simply the right to live the way they want to live.”⁴ Imagine if Peter said that he would follow Jesus but that he wanted to bring his fishing boat along, just in case things didn’t quite work out? If he had done that, he would not be a true disciple of Jesus.

A true disciple of Jesus leaves everything behind to follow Jesus.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus’ calling of his first disciples in Luke 5:1-11, we must commit ourselves to be true disciples of Jesus.

Jesus is calling every one of us to follow him.

What does it take to be a true disciple of Jesus?

Jesus is calling you to listen to his word, do what he says, repent of your sin, tell others about him, and leave everything behind to follow him.

Answer his call today and be a true disciple of Jesus. Amen.

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Volume 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 213.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

Jesus, you are calling each person to listen to your word, do what you say, repent of sin, tell others about you, and leave everything behind in order to follow you.

Friends, take a moment and ask Jesus to help you do what he is calling you to do in that area in which you have not yet surrendered to him. Are you:

- Not listening to Jesus? Say, "Jesus, I am going to listen to your word."
- Not doing what Jesus says? Say, "Jesus, I am going to do what you say."
- Not repenting of your sin? Say, "Jesus, I am a sinful person. I really do want to repent and turn from my sin."
- Not telling others about Jesus? Say, "Jesus, forgive me for being ashamed about you. I will tell someone about you this week before I come to worship next Lord's Day." And,
- Not leaving everything behind to follow Jesus? Say, "Jesus, I give up my selfish ambitions, sinful pleasures, comfortable surroundings, bitter grudges, precious idols, and the desire to live the way I want to live. I will follow you wholeheartedly the rest of my life."

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!