

“They Left Everything?!”

Luke 5: 1-11

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Sunday January 15, 2012

Text: Luke 5:1-11 (NIV) ¹ One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Pastor Brown's "Family Faith Talk Guide" has a great discussion about this passage! But as I think about this account, I am reminded that sometimes preaching is dishonest. I mean by that...sometimes preaching simply does not address the hard and puzzling questions that arise from the Word of God. It just pretends they are not there. What we just read seems to me to be a perfect example of a hard question that might be easily ignored. Just accepted. Think about this please:

“1 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.”

Really? We are simply not told any more than that. They left everything and followed him. This was their business...their livelihood! A first century fisherman would work for years to acquire strong and effective nets. He would clean them and mend them and care for them as a carpenter takes care of his tools. He would travel to the city and visit a blacksmith to acquire small metal buttons the size of marbles and sew them into the edges of the nets. This enabled him to cast the net off in the distance so it would settle down on the waters and bring in a catch of fish. This took skill and time and actual investments of capital. To say nothing of boats. These guys are not fishing for fun. They are entrepreneurs!

When we were in Norway a few summers ago, we visited a museum that had handmade boats from the first and second century. They were old and fragile but they looked remarkably like modern boats in their shapes and details. And as you looked closely, you could see the necessary craftsmanship that created the notches and angles that held the hull to the sides and to the shelter on top. Building or buying a fishing boat two thousand years ago was not a matter of shopping at the Boat Show in Novi or online! It was a very big undertaking and a man might save from boyhood to do so! So, if these men were married...what did their wives say when they stopped back home? Can you picture the conversation? "By the way dear...I left the nets and boats and hooks and tools all on the beach today...because I'm going to follow Jesus now...but don't worry." And she might say "Excuse me? You did what?" "We left everything!" We can see why this passage might be dismissed by skeptics and nominal believers as just a figurative story. But they are wrong. This is what happened. But the real question is not did this really happen or what did they leave to follow Jesus...*but what have we left to follow Jesus?* Maybe not something material but what in our lives is so central to us that we would cling to it and not naturally leave it? Success? Fame? Pleasure? Unforgiveness? Pride? First, let us pray. *What have we left to follow Jesus?*

A Christian friend of mine is an investment advisor to some very wealthy people. He recently told me about a man who came to see him. The man came to Christ some time ago and has heard from the Holy Spirit that the time has come. He had his "beach moment" with Jesus. So, he has retained my friend to liquidate most of his assets and leave him a reasonable amount to live on...so he can give a few million dollars to World Vision. He'd like to feed a few thousand starving children for a while more than he'd like to build a fabulous house or play golf all around the world. He would enjoy those things also...but not as much as giving it all up for Jesus. But...again...it would be a mistake to see this whole sermon as only about or primarily about money and assets...be they nets or millions of dollars. No. This sermon is about one simple question: "*Have you had your beach moment with Jesus? What have you left to follow Jesus?*" Consider the passage very closely.

¹ One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ²he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.

The people are all pressing in. Jesus knows that the still water will carry his voice many hundreds of yards. He sees the boats that have been pulled up to the shore. Jesus probably knows these fishermen and they have spoken with him previously. Once before they heard him call them to follow him. Maybe they sat down with Jesus and listened but they did not give up everything that day. So...we read in Mark Chapter One:

Mark 1:16-18 (NIV) ¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come,

follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

Yes...this seems like an earlier incident. Jesus often calls to us more than once. He is patient. He understands that his radical callings are...*radical!* Sometime later, Jesus sets out to the Sea of Galilee called the Lake of Gennesaret by Luke. He knows what time it is and he knows the boats will be available after a hard night of work by the fishermen. So, Jesus proceeds to borrow one of the boats. Jesus often wants to borrow from us...our time and our assets for his use. We read:

³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

Now he is borrowing Peter himself. Jesus often asks us to drop what we are doing and serve him. He does not say to Peter "Look I know that you're busy cleaning your nets Peter...and that is important...but could you let that go and help me out here?" So, Peter leaves the cleaning to others and pushes out twenty-five yards or so and Jesus begins to teach. Never mind that Peter is exhausted and dirty and very eager to get home after a long night of fruitless labor! To be perfectly honest, no one could blame Peter if he were to say "Ahh Jesus...I am really whipped and can't you just do whatever you're gonna' do from the shore? Do you really need me to give up my time and the very little energy I have left to serve you?" But you see...that's exactly how Jesus often calls on us. He asks us to drop what we are doing that is so important to ourselves and serve him! But are we so fixed on our tasks that we ignore Jesus? Are we so in love with our own desires and priorities that we tell Jesus "But that's not what I want to do Jesus!" Make no mistake. This was not convenient for Peter. But this sermon is about one simple question: ***"What have we left to follow Jesus?"***

Following Jesus....serving Jesus...is often inconvenient. I'll give you a perfect example of this in my life. Donna and I will be travelling to Russia to work with Jim and Sally at the end of the month. We will be gone just about two weeks. People have said to Me "Oh that's great! Good for you! How cool is that!?" But I'll tell you something...I don't want to go. Why? Because I'm lazy and I don't like to travel very much. I love Jim and Sally and I'm happy to be in Russia again but I want to be transported like on Star Trek! I want to get into one of those machines and get "beamed" to Siberia!

So, I've been grumbling before the Lord. That verse where Paul said "Do everything without grumbling or complaining?" That verse bothers me! I think that verse is for other people. I find that passage irritating to my flesh! [Phil. 2:14] So...the Lord recently led me to re-read the account of George Whitefield crossing the Atlantic thirteen times in the 1750's to preach the Gospel...each trip taking four weeks each way! Freezing in winter and gasping in the summer heat. The guy died of exhaustion at 56 years old! And I hear the Lord asking me what is so hard about getting on a Lufthansa 747 and relaxing for fifteen hours and watching a film and having dinner to get to Russia to serve him? I feel silly! But it is not in my old nature to give something up...my time and my comfort and my preferences...it is not naturally in me to do that even for

Jesus! So, this moment on the beach is for Peter a very definite growth moment. This trip is another beach moment for me. And this sermon is about one simple question: ***“What have we left to follow Jesus?”***

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

This is reasonable for Peter to say. “It should be clear that the fish are not biting today Lord Jesus! But ok....since you say so...we’ll let down the nets that we just got finished cleaning! No problem. Sure. We’ll just clean them again. OK!” But it is morning and I have read that the likelihood of schools of fish accumulating in that little cove in the morning with sounds and activities on the beach is very small. So, Jesus tells them to go further out. “Deep water” meant really deep...really out there. Jesus guides us into deep water where we will be blessed! So, they obey.

Notice something. When Jesus asks us to give something up for him, he always follows it with a double blessing. First we are blessed to serve him as he does his task. In this case, they lent him the boats without objection and assisting Jesus in preaching the Gospel addressing eternal needs. Second, Jesus then blessed them with guidance for their own immediate right-now needs! They do need some fish. The same as you do need some sales or some help with your department or the class you are teaching or your parenting. You can expect Jesus to bless when you obey and bless him! In other words, it is very definitely in our own best interest to bless Jesus and serve him! Even if he asks us to do something that is not convenient. Has Jesus asked you to teach but you do not want to? Has Jesus asked you to sing but you do not want to? Has Jesus asked you to go down to Military Avenue and tutor but you don’t want to? If so...in the end...you are missing out on a blessing! So, this sermon is about one simple question: ***“Have you had your beach moment with Jesus? What have you left to follow Jesus?”*** Consider what happens next:

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

Jesus always over-blesses! They are catching so many fish that the nets are tearing! Peter called the other men and both boats began to sink! And the lesson is clear for all of us as we share the Gospel that if we go to the waters that Jesus points out and do things his way we will be abundantly blessed. John relates a similar but different incident after the resurrection when Jesus met them on the shore. Once again, they put out into the deep and caught 153 fish. Why tell us that number? Perhaps because the nets did not tear. So, we know that this previous incident in Luke Five had them catching far more fish because the nets tore apart! The point might be that this was far more stunning than we realize. Why? Because those nets rarely if ever came apart!

In fact, it was so amazing that Peter realized finally that he was in the presence of someone most extraordinary. We read:

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Would you be astonished if the Lord came so close to you that he would bless your small endeavors? If the might of Heaven came your way to invite you into a marvelous miracle would you tremble and fall down? At this point, Peter is not thinking about fish or nets. He is just thinking about how unworthy he is to be in the presence of the God-man Jesus! "Go away from me Lord!" It reminds us of the prophet Isaiah seven hundred years earlier coming before God. We read:

Isaiah 6:5 (NIV) ⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Experiencing the magnitude of God's Holiness is breathtaking forcing us to our knees! We've all seen some people scream and cry at the sight of celebrities and famous people. Bordering on idolatry, they need to worship someone! Ever since Adam and Eve were chased out of the garden and banished from God, man has longed to draw near to God...but because man is a sinner...he comes near to God compromised by his own ungodliness! The light is so great that everything shows in us and we say "I am ruined!" Or as Peter said "Oh no! Go away from me!" Like that scene in the King's speech when the woman realizes she is in the presence of the King and she is breathless...all the more are we stunned in the presence of God! Because we all know there is a God...and Peter just realized who it is that has helped him catch fish! Oh the blessings for those who do as he asks and who give things up for Jesus...they will be blessed to the point of shock and awe!

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

So, this sermon is about one simple question: "*Have you had your beach moment with Jesus? What have you left to follow Jesus?*"

Then, Jesus began to train them in sharing the Gospel. They left everything to follow him. Their nets and boats. Someone no doubt took them away to storage. Maybe they were held in safe keeping because there is another element to this story. And it must be told. That day when they left everything? They would not have known, and they could not have known, that the one calling them would be captured like a common criminal and executed upon a Cross. So, what happens when you sacrifice to follow Jesus and then begin to regret it? What happens when you

leave something or everything to serve Jesus and then you wonder “Should I have done that?” Does this happen? Sure!

Usually, the beach moment is experienced as a miraculous event and we’re ready to sing “I have decided to follow Jesus...no turnin’ back! No turnin’ back!” But here is an inadmissible truth in Bible-believing circles. At some point, everyone wonders if they should have done this. Everyone wants to be saved and have eternal life but did we maybe give up too much? If salvation is by faith not works...why give up anything? After all, we may have given up something that later in life we might wish we still had. Right? What if that fellow who wants to give the millions to World Vision loses his health and ten years from now he is sickly and poor? Will he regret the day of his “beach moment?”

Jesus allows us to experience such spiritual check-up times. Even those closest to him had such struggles. It came on the day when a rich young man decided he would rather be a rich young man than follow Jesus. And Jesus commented that it is very hard for the truly wealthy to seek the Kingdom although God does bring that about. The disciples are stunned and puzzled. So, as usual Peter speaks up. Try and picture the concern on his face:

Matthew 19:27-30 (NIV) ²⁷ Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

Curious question. Is he asking if there will be a special blessing for them because they left everything? Is he asking about the future? Can we get into his mind and heart? Supposing you worshipped the Lord and served him for forty years in the true church and you also tithed on your income all those years? If your income had averaged \$ 75,000 for forty years you would have tithed \$300,000. Then when you’re old your annuity is depleted and Social Security has gone bust and you are living very, very carefully? Will that be ok? So, what we’re really asking is this: “If we have our beach moment and leave whatever he calls us to leave...can we trust him to take care of us for the rest of this life and in eternity?” Consider the reply of our Lord:

²⁸ Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”

So, they went home re-assured. And then Jesus was Crucified! So they went back and got their nets out of storage and went back to work...as fishermen. And then Jesus appeared to them in his Risen state...for yet another beach moment.

John 21:3-6 (NIV) ³ "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. ⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. ⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

And so Jesus still knew their needs. So...it turns out that when we walk with Jesus we do not have a single beach moment...but a series of beach moments! Perhaps the question then is: *“Have you had your beach moments with Jesus? What have you left to follow Jesus?”*

Let us pray.