



You Shall Catch Men

Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men (Luke 5:10).

In this marvelous account, Jesus catches Peter. Now, this may seem strange, given that Simon Peter had already become a follower of the Nazarene. Andrew, Peter's brother, had been a follower of John the Baptist. But the Baptist redirected his disciples to Jesus, for Jesus "must increase," and he "must decrease" (John 3:30). Andrew dutifully went but soon was himself caught by the Master. From there, he went to his brother for another catch. "We have found the Messiah" (1:41). Andrew drew Peter to shore, as it were, and Jesus did the rest. Peter began following Jesus.

Nevertheless, Peter kept one foot on dry land. He held on to his day job—better safe than sorry, after all. Following is one thing; forsaking all is quite another. But Jesus would not let this one go. So, on this morning, after He finished teaching the crowds, Jesus bade Peter go fishing. "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught" (Luke 5:4). What? Peter was the fisherman, knew these waters like the back of his hand, went when the fish were out, and had done everything right, yet that night had come up empty. But out of respect, he yielded to Jesus—reluctantly, no doubt, but reverently. He believed the Master, at least, generally speaking. But what did the carpenter-preacher really know about this trade?

Much, much more, Peter. Oh, so much more than you realize or can even imagine! For soon, the tug of the dragnet—and behind the tug, a raw force such as he had never felt before, yanking his hands, his arms, his body over and down. He beckoned his partners in the other boats. As they pulled in this once-in-a-lifetime catch, the boats were not the only thing weighed down. Peter's soul was overwhelmed with guilt. "He fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (v. 8). But where his sinful unbelief abounded, grace did much more abound. Grace and glory—gracious glory and glorious grace. Jesus caught this man, this sinner. With the cords of love, He drew him. By effortless, almighty power, with perfect wisdom tailoring a miracle to this Galilee fisherman, with tender lovingkindness, assuring provision

in the face of ungrateful skepticism, with this hidden net, Jesus caught Peter.

What Jesus did with Simon Peter, He does with a world of sinners. He left the shore of heaven to come into the depths of this world awash with sin. All sinners move along, quite at home in their world of ungodly rebellion. Little do they know they are soon to perish. However, unlike the fisherman's trade, Jesus came not to destroy men's lives but to save them.

He draws these sinners by the Word, by the preaching of the gospel. To be sure, during the days of our Lord's earthly ministry, His Word was accompanied by miracles such as this. These miracles attested to the truth and heavenly authority of Jesus's teaching; they also signified the spiritual realities set forth in His preaching. The miracles drew people, no doubt. But the miracles themselves were too weak to catch the soul—witness many who fell away who had seen the "finger of God" in Christ. Even the outward act of preaching reaches only so far. Jesus casts His dragnet into the waters broadly and indiscriminately. He draws any and all by that freely preached gospel. But the Word never fails to catch the elect. Those particular sinners the great Fisher of Men will draw to shore and save, those, each and every one, will be irresistibly drawn. The very force of heaven will do its work, yet the drawing will be sweet, gentle, and harmless through and through. No arm-twisting here! "And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him" (v. 11).

But Peter was both an end as well as a means to an end. "And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him" (vv. 10–11). Jesus had been preaching the gospel of the kingdom that morning. He had cast His preaching net into the waters of men, and many were drawn by it. But He would recruit helpers. What a wonder that the very Son of God, who needs no help, not even a silly net to woo fish together

to one spot, should cut His time short. He would catch for three years and then hand His trade to others. Better put, that He should powerfully fish through His apostles from heaven.

Jesus had earlier said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). For three years, Jesus both fished for men *and* made fishers of men. Twelve of them. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). The apostles were endued from on high with Jesus's power, the Holy Spirit, that they may fish in Israel, fish in Samaria, and fish to the very ends of the earth. A world of sinners must be gathered. They must be saved!

Now, let the caught catch. Have you been caught? Were you surprised, like Peter, by the unforeseen, unspeakable, awesome love, grace, power, tenderness, and wisdom tailoring your salvation to your sinful soul in particular? Were you lost in the watery depths, at home in a condemned world, ignorant of the blessed world above? Did the preaching catch you? Were you sweetly forced to comply with Jesus, who sought and saved? Is Peter's sense of unworthiness yours? And is Jesus so precious that you must come near His feet, prostrating yourself? Then, if you have been caught, help catch!

Let gospel officers—first and foremost—go and catch men. The apostles may be in glory, but the work continues. Jesus ascended and gave gifts to men: "some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). Have you, ministers, been caught? Then catch! Have you perishing souls in the waters before each and every Lord's Day? Cast in the net. Spare not; lift up your voice! Proclaim their doom by the law, then ply them with the overtures of mercy by the cross. Study the "art of man-fishing" as Thomas Boston did; study and learn by trial and error.

Labor in complete dependence on the mysterious, hidden power of Christ. Yet labor with all your might to cast out that gospel net and strenuously pull them to Jesus. Pull them with persuasion, with appeals, with promises, with threats. Do not despise them, for you are a caught sinner as well. Cast the net for the prodigal, and cast the net for the elder brother.

And, O elders, you too! You have been caught as well. You do not preach, but are you not "apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2)? Are you not equipped to "convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9)? As you go on family visitations, cast the net in for Christ. Let it down for the little ones who are under your care. Let it down "in meekness [also] instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25). And fear not to venture out into further depths, where many elect souls swim on in ignorance of their sin and misery. Ministers need you in this vital labor as well.

And indeed, stay not by the shore, ministers and elders. Go where the fish are, not where you wish them to be. Row and row and row again until you encounter the heathen. Don't wait for them to swim into church. Fish in your immediate neighborhood. Cast out the net for the profane, the Roman Catholic, the thrice-divorced. If you have no natural "parish," create one of nothing. Many streams, ponds, and lakes of sinners are all about. Adopt your own Galilee, and fish in faith. If you toil all night with no haul, wait for the day of Christ. Then and only then will the hidden force compel them into your net. But be not slothful in business. The Master will call us to account.

And, O gospel believers, one and all, help catch men! Now, while you may not be a "fisher" by trade, you, Christian, have been caught no less than your pastors. Christ has caught you that you might help catch others. Is your mother, son, or daughter swimming in sin? Catch them. Your foul-mouthed co-worker? Catch him. That stubborn agnostic friend? Catch her for Jesus. Pray in faith. Drop the Word. If you cannot draw them straight to Jesus, draw them, if you can, into the dragnet of your pastor's preaching. Peter was a needy fisherman. He beckoned to his partners to lend him a hand. Can you lend your pastor a hand? Do it for Jesus, who sweetly, mysteriously, mightily caught you. "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

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There are two pools wherein the net should be set. [The first place is] in the public assemblies of the Lord's people. There it was that Lydia's heart was opened. The pool of ordinances sometimes is made healing water to souls pining away in their iniquity. The second place to set a net is in private conference. Many times the Lord is pleased to bless this for the good of souls.

—THOMAS BOSTON, *Art of Man-Fishing*, 42–43