

## Calling Sinners to Serve

Luke 5:1-11 on February 16, 2025

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*Please read Luke 5:1-11 before going further in this transcript.*

Have you ever had a bad day at work? Let's define work broadly: work for pay, stay-at-home parent work, volunteer work, any kind of work.

Maybe you're a stay-at-home parent, and the kids were all sick, or maybe you were sick. Maybe you ran out of milk, or diapers, or burned a batch of cookies? Maybe the water lines froze, or you ran your tank out of propane?

Maybe your work-for-pay job was pretty rough. Maybe the kids you teach were a handful, or maybe their parents were! Maybe the construction job, or the plumbing or electrical project you got stuck with, went sideways and ran into all kinds of snags.

Maybe you volunteer somewhere, and there wasn't enough help. Maybe the person overseeing the volunteers didn't have the supplies ready, or the project organized. Maybe the people you were serving didn't appreciate the work you were doing for them, and instead of being thankful, they decided to complain!

Now, even if I didn't touch on your particular job scenario, you get the idea: From time to time, every single one of us has a bad day at work! In today's text, Peter was having a pretty bad day. In Luke 5:5 Simon Peter tells Jesus, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything." The *ESV* says it this way: "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!" Then Jesus shows Peter how it's done: enough fish to sink two fishing boats! Suddenly one of Peter's worst days at work becomes one of his best days ever. But today's story is about so much more than just having a bad day at work. Today's text reveals how Jesus calls sinners to serve, to leave everything in order to follow Him.

Last week Jerry Drebelbis preached on how Jesus established His authority to teach, and demonstrated His power to heal and to cast out demons, which officially inaugurated a new era of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus' ministry in Capernaum at the end of Luke 4 shows people responding quite differently than they did in Nazareth. In Nazareth, they drove Jesus out of the city and tried to toss Him off the cliff, but in Capernaum, the people tried to keep Jesus from leaving. Jesus resists this appeal though, because He must remain faithful to God's call on His life. Jesus was sent to proclaim the good news of God's Kingdom in other towns as well, and this is where today's passage picks up:

Luke 5:1 begins, “One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God.” Now, the Lake of Genessaret<sup>1</sup> is just another name for the Sea of Galilee,<sup>2</sup> and Luke continues to record events from Jesus’ ministry in this region. As Luke 5 begins, we see people continuing to crowd around Jesus, hungry to hear more of “the word of God.” It’s important to note that “the word of God” here, is referring to something more than just God’s written Word from the Old Testament. Here, “the word of God” most likely refers to the fact that Jesus’ teaching was a direct revelation from God, not merely a reiteration of truths from the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> So, although Jesus very likely referred to various Old Testament texts throughout His teaching, He wasn’t dependent on those written texts for His authority, the way that other teachers in the 1<sup>st</sup> century were, or the way that preachers like me are today.

This flows right out of a verse that we read last week: Luke 4:32 said, “They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.” For Jesus, the very words that came out of His mouth held direct authority.<sup>4</sup> When Jesus taught, His words alone were sufficient.<sup>5</sup> And *this* is why the crowds were flocking to Him: Jesus had the words of eternal life!<sup>6</sup> Words full of grace and truth!<sup>7</sup> Nobody had a message of power and authority like Jesus did!

Luke 5:2-3 go on, “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.”<sup>8</sup> This type of fishing with nets is pretty different from what most of us are accustomed to here in northern Minnesota. The fisherman didn’t use rods/reels, but instead they netted the fish directly, normally at night. So it’s likely fairly early in the morning when these men are washing out all of the sticks and debris that

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<sup>1</sup> How to pronounce “Gennesaret”

[https://www.google.com/search?q=pronounce+gennesaret&rlz=1C1CHZN\\_enUS924US924&oq=Pronounce+Gennesaret&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBwgAEAAyqAQyBwgAEAAyqAQyBwgBEAAyqAQyCAgCEAAyFhgeMgoIAxAAAGIAEGKIE0gEJNjIwNGoxajE1qAllsAIB&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:2062a623,vid:n5TOu1QkHP8,st:12](https://www.google.com/search?q=pronounce+gennesaret&rlz=1C1CHZN_enUS924US924&oq=Pronounce+Gennesaret&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqBwgAEAAyqAQyBwgAEAAyqAQyBwgBEAAyqAQyCAgCEAAyFhgeMgoIAxAAAGIAEGKIE0gEJNjIwNGoxajE1qAllsAIB&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:2062a623,vid:n5TOu1QkHP8,st:12)

<sup>2</sup> By the way, the Sea of Galilee is about 8 miles wide and about 14 miles long, and its maximum depth was around 140 feet deep. Google search and Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 454.

<sup>3</sup> See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, pp. 453-454.

<sup>4</sup> To be clear, the words of pastors and priests today, DON’T have this kind of authority. When one of us preaches a message here at E-Free Bemidji, our words don’t have any inherent authority; only GOD’S words have that kind of authority.

<sup>5</sup> Darrell Bock explains it this way: “...the scribes would teach from tradition, while Jesus would handle the text directly and independently. His word alone was sufficient.” Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 429.

<sup>6</sup> See John 6:63,68.

<sup>7</sup> See Luke 4:22 and John 1:17.

<sup>8</sup> Citing Ellis, Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 455.

had accumulated during that night's fishing. They would have also likely been mending any holes or tears in the nets, getting them ready for the next evening. (*At this point, they'd been up all night, and they just wanted to clean up their gear, and then get home for some much-needed sleep.*)

Verse 3 says that Jesus got into Simon's boat and asked him to push it out from shore a little.<sup>9</sup> Tired as he was, he complies with this request. And once again we see the cultural practice of the teacher being seated while teaching, although teaching from a boat was a bit unique.<sup>10</sup> Verse 1 mentioned that the people were crowding around Jesus, so He needed a way to keep the people back, and being in the boat meant that they could only get so close before they got wet.<sup>11</sup> So there was likely a good-sized crowd gathered there on the shore that day to witness what was about to happen next!<sup>12</sup>

Luke 5:4-5 goes on, "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." Now, I've already mentioned that these men would have been tired from a long night's work.<sup>13</sup> But now, this carpenter from Nazareth adds insult to injury by telling these fishermen how to do their jobs!<sup>14</sup> Catching nothing after a full shift of work, tends to put a guy in a pretty foul mood.<sup>15</sup> Simon Peter had just had a bad day at work, so he was likely more than a little bit grumpy that morning! And he probably didn't appreciate Jesus messing up the nets that they'd just finished preparing for the next night's work. And yet, despite being bone tired, and just getting skunked, out of respect for

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<sup>9</sup> By the way, this is likely not the first time that Simon had encountered Jesus, but it was early on in their association. As we'll continue to see throughout Luke's Gospel, not everything is placed in chronological order, and certain details need to be accessed from the other three Gospel accounts. So, this is not actually the first time that these men met Jesus or had spent time with Him. For example, John's Gospel records the time when Simon Peter's brother Andrew had come to find him and tell him that they'd found the Messiah. See John 1:40-42 as well as Jesus first miracle at the wedding in Cana in John 2:1-2. Now, that said, this account in Luke 5 is a pivotal moment in which some of them move from knowing Jesus casually, to committing themselves to be His devoted followers by leaving everything behind. See *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1713 footnote on Luke 5:11.

<sup>10</sup> If you've ever been out on the water, the sound travels a long ways, right on up to the surrounding shoreline, especially on a calm morning. And there certainly weren't any sound systems back then, so any advantage of positioning oneself in a natural sound corridor was something to be maximized. But Jesus wasn't just in the boat for acoustic value.

<sup>11</sup> Citing Ellis, Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 455.

<sup>12</sup> Unless of course the crowd had dispersed after Jesus finished teaching in verse 4. However, the crowds that sought after Jesus seemed reluctant to leave, and instead were often looking for Him and urging him to stay longer. See Luke 4:42 and others. Not to mention they would have likely been curious at the sight of the men heading back out to fish during the daytime.

<sup>13</sup> In verse 5, "The participle chosen to express their labor... refers to wearisome work." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 456.

<sup>14</sup> "The son of a carpenter is telling the fisherman where to toss their nets!" Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 455.

<sup>15</sup> My wife and I enjoy watching Deadliest Catch, and we can attest to the grumpy fisherman on these hardworking crab boats in the Bering Sea.

this teacher named Jesus, Simon Peter respectfully honors Jesus' instruction "because *you* say so, I will let down the nets."

Verses 6-7 say, "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." The contrast that Luke sets up here is stunning: Peter and his professional fishing partners went from working hard all night and getting completely skunked, to following Jesus' instruction and catching the biggest haul of fish in their entire careers! It was an impossibly large catch of fish, and in the daylight no less!<sup>16</sup> The extreme contrast of going from catching nothing all night, to just about sinking both boats with a single drop of the nets, *drives home the power and authority of Jesus*. This is no coincidence or lucky catch; this is the work of God! And Peter knows it!

Verse 8 says, "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Now wait a minute! How did we go from an epic fishing story, to confessing personal sinfulness!? Clearly something much bigger than fishing was going on here. To put it mildly, Peter was *overwhelmed* by Jesus. So he falls at His knees in reverent fear, broken by the awe and wonder of Jesus' power and authority. In that moment, Simon Peter feels the intense burden of his own sinfulness.

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by God? If there's any chance of us ever becoming a deeply devoted follower of Jesus, then it begins right here: with an honest assessment of our own unworthiness before God. This demonstration of Jesus' supernatural power caused Simon Peter to recognize his own sinfulness; his own unworthiness to be in the presence of someone so powerful and so holy.<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 6:5 comes to mind, "'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.'"<sup>18</sup> Friends, in and of ourselves, we are unworthy to be in the Lord's presence; He is the one who graciously inclines Himself to move

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<sup>16</sup> Not only had Peter, the experienced fisherman, just got skunked, but Jesus, the carpenter's son, urges him to let down the nets during the daylight, which was not the recommended time for this kind of fishing. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 456.

<sup>17</sup> "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man. ... The request is not to be taken literally, for where would Peter have expected Jesus to go? Rather it is idiomatic for "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner" or "Forgive me" or something like, "What is a Holy One like you doing with a sinner like me?" Peter's sense of his own sinfulness was... due to a general unworthiness (cf. 7:6; Job 42:5-6) as he confronted the Lord's might and majesty." Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 169.

<sup>18</sup> At the end of Job's long struggle, he says this in Job 42:5-6, "5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

toward us. He stoops down to our level; He's condescending in the best sense of the word. He condescends Himself, but, at the same time, He doesn't treat us condescendingly. Jesus sets aside His own dignity to publicly associate with the likes of us. Our Lord and Savior treats us so much better than we deserve!

Simon Peter made an accurate assessment of himself; he is precisely correct. He was just the sinful man he proclaimed himself to be. He had no right to be in the Lord's presence. In fact, it was appropriate for him to suggest that the Lord go away from Him, and Jesus would have been justified in doing that very thing. But, here's the thing about Jesus: Peter was just the kind of sinner He was looking for! Peter was just the kind of guy Jesus could work with. In fact, He invites Peter to do exactly that! Luke 5:10-11 says, "10 ...Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."

The greatest catch of fish in their career, and what do they do? Leave it sitting on the shore! They left everything and followed Jesus.<sup>19</sup> So how about you and me? Have we been so overwhelmed by Jesus' power and authority and holiness, that we've left everything to follow Him? Friends, Jesus not only calls sinners to repentance, He calls sinners to serve. Not because we're so great, or because He can't do it without us, but because He's so gracious. He kindly invites us to join Him in His kingdom work.

But just how literal should we be here? Do we need to leave whatever we're doing currently, and go into full-time evangelism? Do we all need to become paid ministry leaders and missionaries, who go out and "fish for people"? Well, no, not all of us, but probably some of us are being called to exactly that. But for most of us, applying verse 11 to our lives is about surrendering whatever we're already doing; not by literally "leaving it," but rather by offering it up in service to Christ. The broader context of Scripture gives plenty of examples of people who continue in their same livelihood, even after they become deeply devoted followers of Jesus.<sup>20 21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Our church's mission of "Becoming Deeply Devoted FOLLOWERS of Jesus together," is directly rooted in the end of verse 11, "leaving everything and FOLLOWING Him." In other words, "from now on," from the time we have a personal encounter with Jesus, He becomes everything to us.

<sup>20</sup> What we don't find in the broader context of Scripture are examples of followers of Jesus who were not expected to share the Good News with others.

<sup>21</sup> It requires careful and prayerful discernment to know what is descriptive and what is prescriptive when we read Scripture. In other words, is Simon Peter's calling here descriptive of how it happened to work particularly for him? Or, is it prescriptive for how each and every follower much respond to Jesus? Does being a deeply devoted follower mean that we must leave our current vocation and become a full-time evangelist? If not, why not?

We began today's message by defining work broadly: work for pay, stay-at-home parent work, volunteer work, any kind of work. Has our personal faith, and our own encounter with Jesus, overwhelmed us to the point where all that matters now, is knowing Him better, and serving Him faithfully with our lives?<sup>22</sup> If so, then our faith should redefine and reorient our daily work, whether that be for pay, stay-at-home, or volunteer.

*Think of it this way:*

- If you're a mechanic or a construction worker, then follow Jesus well as a mechanic or a construction worker. Be good at your job! And represent Jesus well at your workplace.
- If you're a medical professional, then follow Jesus well at your clinic or hospital! Represent Jesus well as you offer quality medical care.
- If you're a teacher, then follow Jesus well in your classroom! Be a good teacher, and be a good influence on your students and your fellow staff, as you represent Jesus well by following Him fully!
- If you're a stay-at-home parent, then follow Jesus well in your home! Be a good parent, and represent Jesus well to your kids and their friends.
- If you volunteer somewhere, then follow Jesus well as a volunteer! Be a good volunteer, and let your service be a service unto God, and for His greater kingdom purposes.

You see, not all of us need to be in official full-time ministry, in order to do full-time ministry. All of life, including our regular daily work, is an opportunity to "leave everything and follow Jesus." And we can "fish for people" wherever we work!<sup>23</sup> Tom Nelson wrote a book titled, *Work Matters*. He urges followers of Jesus to see their "work as an essential component of a broader, robust theology of Christian calling," and to "see how the gospel transforms [our] work."<sup>24 25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Listen here for Big Daddy Weave's song, "Overwhelmed."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6oxXwRWFTo>

<sup>23</sup> I appreciate how Darrell Bock says it: "Those whom Jesus calls come from various backgrounds... His ministry is open to all, and the disciples who follow him are to gather even more people, like themselves, to him. The MEANS that God uses to 'catch' others include the disciples' faithful walk with God, their message, and their ministry of love and compassion to all." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 446.

<sup>24</sup> Earlier he also writes: "how we *view* our work and how we *do* our work matters a great deal more than we might imagine." Tom Nelson, *Work Matters*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2011, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> Tom's book came out in 2011. I recently learned that he has an updated book scheduled to come out on April 8, 2025: *Why Your Work Matters: How God Uses Our Everyday Vocations to Transform Us, Our Neighbors, and the World.*

Let's wrap up today with a few insights on...

**How following Jesus impacts our daily work, and “fishing for people”:**

*(Several of these ideas are based on the work of the now departed Pastor Tim Keller. I was blessed this week to listen to a teaching that he gave about 10 years ago, at a Gospel Coalition post-conference titled “Faith at Work.”<sup>26 27</sup> He also wrote the book *Every Good Endeavor*.)*

**First of all,**

**1) Following Jesus helps us to recognize the dignity and value of all work, which points people toward God, especially when it's done well.**

Any work that we do, any job or task that we attempt, has inherent dignity and value, simply because of the fact that it carries forward God's intended creation order. Toilets need to be cleaned, food needs to be prepared, and the laundry needs to be washed. God is honored when tasks like these bring blessing to the people He's created in His own image. God is honored, when we work hard to take good care of the world that He's created for us, which goes all the way back to His original design in the opening chapters of Genesis to rule over and subdue the earth.<sup>28</sup>

One of the most basic and simple ways for followers of Jesus to highlight God's glory, is to do good work each and every day. Our stewardship of this daily work brings strength and security to the fabric of our society, and it provides the necessary infrastructure for human flourishing. All peoples, and all societies, are blessed, when God's people do their work, and when they do it well! All of this undergirds our ability to “fish for people.” People are more prone to believe that Christians actually care about them, when we actually care about them, by serving them well, and by meeting their daily needs through our daily work.<sup>29</sup>

**Secondly,**

**2) Following Jesus gives us a moral compass so that our work doesn't corrupt us, which then reveals the work of Christ within us.<sup>30</sup>**

Our world system is driven by profitability in our work, profitability whatever the cost! There's so much pressure to cut corners, so much competition to get nasty when we need to. Pressure to gain the whole world even if it means losing a little bit of our souls.<sup>31</sup> But, for deeply devoted followers of

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<sup>26</sup> Tim Keller 27:42 minute “Redefining Work” video at The Gospel Coalition's 2013 Faith at Work post-conference at Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGH5bhUwMB4&t=948s>

<sup>27</sup> Many of these insights came from a book that Tim wrote titled: *Every Good Endeavor*.

<sup>28</sup> See Genesis 2:15 and Psalm 8:6.

<sup>29</sup> Consider 1 Thessalonians 11-12 and Ephesians 4:28.

<sup>30</sup> 2 Peter 1:3-4 says, “3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

<sup>31</sup> See Matthew 16:26 and 2 Peter 1:3-4.



Jesus, our moral compass guards us from being corrupted by our work.<sup>32</sup> And a watching world takes notice, when some of us actually escape the corruption of this world, and become living proof that following Jesus really works! This is the kind of salt and light that preserves our world, through daily work that's unstained by corruption, as it's guided by the work of Christ within us.

**Finally,**

**3) Following Jesus helps us to endure the frustrating times in our work, and thus demonstrate the hope we've found in the gospel.**

A friend of mine recently shared a story with me about a woman who was going through some personal struggles, and it was impacting her work. She turned to a colleague and said, "I've worked with you for three years now, and you always seem so steady, what's your secret?" Without hesitation she answered, "Jesus." This woman wasn't quite ready for that answer. "Really?" she asked. "Yes, really." As you can imagine, this opened the door wide for a conversation about the hope of the gospel.<sup>33</sup>

Even when this life makes our work frustrating, our faith provides us with an ongoing passion to persevere, to keep doing good work even in a world that in some ways has gone bad.<sup>34</sup> We long for the hope held out in the gospel to come to fruition. We believe that this broken world can be mended and made whole, by a God who reconciles, restores, and renews all things. And, ultimately, we rest in the final hope that is yet to come, in the new heaven and the new earth. Until that day though, we live faithful lives in this world, hoping to catch at least a few more fish before the end. **You see, one of the best ways to fish for people, is to live a genuine Christian life which demonstrates that *hope* can still be found in the gospel.**

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<sup>32</sup> See Philippians 2:14-16.

<sup>33</sup> See 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>34</sup> Rich Mullins said: "Love has come, and it's given me hope to carry on!"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3\\_OZJTynraE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_OZJTynraE)