

# From Simon to Peter #06 - Called to Be Fishers of Men #1

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of becoming fishers of men, following the Lord Jesus Christ, and being definite in our quest for souls.*

**Duration:** 41:54

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 16:18, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 1:16-20, Luke 5:1-11, John 1:42, Acts 1:8

**Topics:** "Simon to Peter"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the theme of becoming fishers of men, as mentioned in the Bible. The speaker highlights three main points: the task to which Simon and his followers were called, the training involved, and the token of success. The speaker emphasizes that just as Simon and his followers were called to be fishers of men, believers today are also called to bring people into the kingdom of God. The sermon draws from the biblical accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke to illustrate the different aspects of this calling.

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## Transcript

to our theme in these morning services, From Simon to Peter. And we come now to the episodes which we find in the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, that refer to the summons of our Lord to Simon and his fellows to become fishers of men. You will find the relative material in Matthew 4, verses 18-22, Mark 1, verses 16-20, and in Luke 5, verses 1-11.

Now let's get the setting. You remember that Simon, the subject of our present study, was included among a small nucleus of people who were introduced to our Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah very early on in his public ministry, whilst he was still down in the south of the country in Judea. Jesus spoke to Simon and promised not only to change his name, but to make him a man that would be stable, Petros the Rock.

And then in the subsequent chapters in John's Gospel, chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4, we see how our Lord appears to be confirming the emerging faith in Simon's heart and in the hearts of others, showing that he really did know the human heart. He had not let go an arrow at a venture. When he said to Simon, look you'll be a different man, he knew Simon.

He knew his heart, he knew his life, he knew his needs, he knew all about the man. And we also see how John 1-4 proves likewise that our Lord is able to change men and change women too. Now the scene changes.

We move up to the north of the country to Galilee. As a matter of fact, when we were last meditating upon this theme in John 4, we saw that our Lord Jesus was then on his way north, leaving Judea in the south, going towards Galilee in the north, passing through Samaria, and it was en route that that very lovely incident took place at Sychar's well. Now, we have already indicated that three of the Gospel writers refer to this theme in our Lord's teaching or training of the Twelve.

It is necessary, however, to see that the incident referred to in Matthew and in Mark, on the one hand, is different from the one to which Luke refers to in chapter 5. May I just, in a few words, indicate the differences? I think it is necessary to see this for an understanding of the Gospels. But you have the same unifying theme in both. The theme is becoming fishers of men.

Now, in Matthew and in Mark, on the one hand, you will notice that our Lord is recorded as having called four disciples, called them in pairs. In Luke chapter 5, he does not call two pairs of people, two couples, two brothers, two sets of brothers, but on the contrary, he calls a larger multitude of people all at once. Matthew describes one of the pairs as casting their net into the sea, and the other, mending their nets.

Whilst in Luke, both occupants of two empty boats were, to quote, washing their nets at the beginning of the episode, and both boats are involved in landing a whole of supernaturally caught fishes at the end of the episode. It is a different thing altogether. In the one case, recorded by Matthew and Mark, Jesus is alone, walking on the Sea of Galilee, along the side of it.

In the other, there is a whole crowd of people pressing in upon him, so that he requires a boat to preach from. They are two different incidents. And again, whereas Matthew and Mark record a summons to follow Jesus, in order to become fishers of men, Luke says something which is distinct and different from that.

Luke records our Lord as telling the disciples, don't be afraid, henceforth you shall catch men. In Matthew and Mark, then, it's an invitation to become fishers of men. In Luke, it is the assurance that having come, they shall.

Now, because of the obvious unity of theme, we have to see the whole as one picture. We shall not be able to cover both this morning, but I will give you now the outline that we propose to take this morning, and in the will of God, next Lord's Day morning. There are three main things here concerning this theme before us.

First of all, we note the task to which Simon and his followers were called, then the training that is envisaged, and then especially in Luke chapter 5, the token of success. Indeed, one might almost go further, the guarantee of success, which our Lord gave them, even at that early stage in his ministry. He said in effect, you can't be failures, henceforth you will catch men.

Though Simon had to wait some time, on the day of Pentecost, by the grace of God and the provisions of that same Savior, we see something of the fulfillment of that great promise. Now, all this, of course, applies to a larger group, but we are focusing our attention especially upon Simon. Having said that, now let's come to consider, first of all this morning, the task to which Simon, as well as the others, was called.

Matthew and Mark record our Lord summons us one, quote, to become fishers of men. Fishers of men. Luke's terminology is a little different.

Catching men, he speaks of henceforth you shall catch men. But that again, given in a fishing context, means that he has the same thing in mind, though there is a very real difference to which we shall refer a little later on. Now, let us start here.

What does this image suggest? I think that the image of men as fish in the sea is most vocal and most suggestive. Our Lord sees men as enveloped in an element that is strangling them and killing them, out of which they need to be extricated and introduced into an entirely different element, out of the sea, into another element. And that is the picture.

This world is a fallen world. This world is a sea of death. Satan rules.

Death rules. Sin rules in this world, apart from the grace of God. And mankind is caught like fish in the sea, and there is no way out.

Someone has got to come to fish us out of the sea of this world and transfer us and transform us into an entirely different element, if we are to be redeemed. Now, you come across this kind of imagery in many places in the New Testament. We are to be taken out of the kingdom of Satan and transferred into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

We are called out of darkness into light, and so forth. It's the same basic principle that underlies all these various images or metaphors. I wonder whether there is someone here today who is a fish in the sea of sin, poisoned and perniciously influenced by Satan and sin, and you can't get out of it if you're left to yourself.

The only thing you can do like a fish is to go round and round in circles. You may discover something new today, but it's always been there. You're in the same old pool, and the pernicious influences of Satan are all brought to bear, and you can't get out of it.

You're enclosed, you're confined, you're doomed. Now that's the picture of this world that the Bible gives us. And so our Lord ordained that His people should be fishers of men, moving along the side of the pool of human life and extricating men, gathering them out, bringing them out and transferring them by His Spirit and His Word into an entirely different element where life and light and love prevail, and where eternal joys are experienced even in this world.

Now look at the definite intention specified by our Lord. Come after me, He says, and I will make you to become fishers of men. I find this quite challenging.

We need to mark the precise, the definite terms of our Lord. We are always prone to clothe our Lord's clear and unambiguous terms with some qualifications of our own, so that we denude them of their thrust, or we make them vague and indefinite. And my friends, there is nothing in life that so militates against the glory of God than our vagueness in spiritual things.

The Bible is never vague. Even when it speaks in terms of general principles, it is never vague. It is always precise.

Our Lord's terms here are clear and decisive. He has positive goals in mind. He knows exactly what He wants His disciples to do.

He's got a plan for Simon, and it's a fishing plan. We must match our Lord's definite call with our own equally definite response. Because the call to Simon is equally a call to you and to me if we are followers of Jesus Christ this morning.

The pool is larger than in Simon's day, and there are more fish in it. The population explosion means that there are more people to reach for Jesus Christ. There are more people dying in sin than without the Savior.

And therefore the call comes to the Christian church this morning as never before. Come after me, says the Savior, and I will make you to become fishers of men. Unless we get this definite concept of our duty firmly established in our minds, my friends, we are not going to be about our Father's business.

If you don't aim at catching men, you will rarely catch one. If you and I simply move lackadaisically hoping for the best through life without positively aiming at this, I'll tell you, the powers of hell will see to it that you'll not win the soul for Jesus Christ. Taking our Lord's word seriously then, we ought so to organize our lives that the task of fishing men should assume a place that corresponds in its importance to the word and the work of God in the world.

Insofar as the salvation of men is central to the divine plan, it should also be central in the plan and in the program of His people. Now you see, this makes sense. If it is true to say that all the purposes of God crystallize down to one--the gathering in of the lost out of a fallen world and building them up in grace--so, my friend, should your purpose and mine be synchronized to that.

You see, you can't have fellowship with God unless you're one with Him in purpose. So then we notice the definite intention. Is it heretical for a minister to ask people in the twentieth century, look, men and women, be definite in your quest for souls, in your evident purpose for living, with an end in view that you should extricate sinners from the element of death and of sin and transfer them into a new element, the kingdom of God.

Definite. But now notice the discriminating designation here. I think our Lord's approach to Simon and his friends was wonderful.

Oh, how He knew men. And you see, He wanted to be clear. He wanted to be definite.

And so He speaks to them very specially in a language that they understood. There is no communicator like our Lord. He had no problem of communication.

The speak of the disciples calling under the metaphor of fishers of men was essentially the most significant and eloquent of them. Now, they were fishermen, as you know. They were called from their fishes and from their boats and so forth.

They were fishermen. The Bible uses other metaphors in relation to this very duty. It speaks of farming and of building and of reaping and of shepherding and of stewarding and rendering slave service.

All these are Biblical metaphors speaking of one facet or other of Christian duty. But when Jesus is speaking to fishermen, He says, look, you come after me and I will make you to become not farmers, but

fishers. Fishers of men.

You see, He wants the truth to get across in a language they understood. In so far as it related to the fisherman's role, as distinct from the experience of the fish, I mean, this metaphor stressed at least two important points. Jesus would have these people realize that there would be a measure of continuity between their old life and the new.

They had been fishermen. They are to be fishermen still. There is a continuity between the natural and the spiritual.

Now, here is again something which I find most encouraging and most comforting. The God of grace is also the God of nature. The God who calls us today is the God that made us yesterday.

And He made us yesterday with natural abilities and propensities that today He wants to call into play. He made us with a purpose. He made us with a view.

He knew what He wanted us to be. I was an officiating chaplain in the army when I was ministering in my first charge. And this was toward the close of the Second World War.

And I remember how some of the folk who used to come into this particular barracks, coming for the first six weeks of their training as they had enlisted in Her Majesty's army, how many of them were absolutely flabbergasted. That was the world. That was the world.

Very rarely did they find a niche in the army that corresponded with what they were in civilian life. If you were a baker in civilian life, you were sure to be asked to be a nurse or a typewriter or something. So they said.

Now it was their allegation. You know, you never find that with God. He made you with a view.

He knew what He was after. God does not put square pegs in round holes. He knew what He wanted of you when you were conceived in the womb.

And He gave you natural capacities and propensities and so forth. Now when He calls you into service, He doesn't want to make a farmer into a fisherman or a fisherman into a farmer. He says, come with all the latent skills and all the things you've learned as you've been exercising your natural abilities.

Come and bring them. Exercise them for me. There's a continuity.

And so much of the old skills of fishing were to be used in the new realm. The courage. Have you ever thought of the courage that was necessary to go fishing on the Sea of Galilee, that boisterous little lake, that could, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, boil into a cauldron, because of its location being over six hundred feet below sea level.

Oh, the courage of these men. They went out into the teeth of the storm once and twice and over and over again because they were ready to face any difficulty. And the patience of the fisherman and the perseverance of the fisherman and the monotony of life that they have to face and so much else.

All these things will be required in the new realm, in the new life. Fishingmen. There's an element of continuity, but there is also positively an element of discontinuity in this respect.

When we consider the elevation of the new over the old, henceforth they are to catch not fish, but men. Fishers of men. What an inestimable gulf there is between men and fish.

Now I know there are those in the world who would have us see men as but grown-up fish. A little bit of slime developed over a period. But in the Word of God there is a chasm that separates fish from men.

Man is the most glorious of God's creatures, the highest of all, made after God's image. And man is in danger and man is to be fished out of the pond. Man is to be rescued.

I know it's a different thing altogether to fishmen because of the value of the fish. Each fish bearing the image of God, albeit lost, albeit spoilt, albeit marred, but it's there. That's the task.

My friend it is the task to which God called Peter, and God calls you and calls me today. Sometimes, sometimes all the lines of providence converge, and you know I feel we're at such a point just now. I had planned way back last October that starting in January we should, in our Wednesday evenings, we should be meditating upon a theme of being equipped to do the Lord's service.

And I had planned to take something of this kind. Then I felt equally strongly that we should be studying this life of Peter, from Simon to Peter. And equally so that we should be involved in starting our series of guest services.

And all the lines converge today. Isn't this a call to you and to me? Either I am totally out of the will of God, either your minister in Knox today is completely out of the way, or, if he's in the will of God, then God is calling us, my dear people, to really get involved in this, the task. Now just a few words about the training that is necessitated for the fulfillment of this calling.

Listen to how Mark puts it. Follow me, so he reports the words of Jesus, follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men. Now you may say that's a rather cumbersome English sentence.

Well it is. But it's very difficult to know how else to transcribe or translate what our Lord actually said. He said it just like that.

You follow me and then I, for my part, I will make you to become. You will become, but I will do the making. You will be involved, you will be becoming, you will be changed into the image more and more, you will be the one becoming, but I will be the one who is making you to become.

Now there is no way of becoming fishers of men other than by following the Lord Jesus Christ. We shall come back to this again as we close, but let me just say it now. He makes his followers become fishers of men, so that right here I find something exceedingly challenging.

You see, if this passage is right and is to be taken at its face value, then unless you and I have already become fishers of men, we could not have been following very well. Jesus said you follow me, nothing more, just follow me. I'll make you to become fishers of men.

All right, do you claim to be following? Then in all honesty, you and I should already be in some measure fishers of men. In so far as we are not actively involved in this business, I say to you quite openly, and perhaps daringly, there is something wrong with your following and mine. Follow me, says our Lord, nothing else, that's all.

Follow me, and I will make you to become, very well, we say we're following, but we've not become fishers of men. Something surely has gone wrong. Can I say a word here about the evident need of training for this work? Whereas every believer should feel responsible to seek the lost, and indeed in so far as the Spirit of God is working in us, we should have a sympathy and a concern for lost men and women.

This is one of the tragedies of the hour. We have very few concerned hearts in the church. When last did you lose a tear because men were lost? When last, my dear Christian friend, you may have been on the road for a very long time, when last did you lose an hour's sleep because of the plight of the lost? Every believer should sense something in his heart, a concern for men in their plight and their sin.

If the Spirit of the Christ is in me, now if you have another spirit, well, we can understand it. But you see, if the Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth is breathed into you and is living in you and in me, surely we should show some of his concern. Of course.

But we are men of another spirit all too often. Now, to have that concern is one thing. To know how to fish men is quite another.

Now there are those who don't believe that we need much training in this. Let me therefore just say one or two things concerning it. I think that training is essential.

We need training in man fishing, and that is obvious first of all by comparison. Let me put it like this. If, as all agree, those who attend to our physical needs need to be trained and certified as competent to practice, by what process of reasoning can we conclude that physicians of the soul need no such training? Is the soul of man less intricate or valuable than the body? Or if those who educate the mind in secular things must themselves be taught and certificated as capable of doing so, by what process of reasoning can we possibly conclude that men who are to give their time in fishing men, souls immortal, need no training? The thing doesn't make sense.

The soul is of greater value than the body. The soul is greater than the mere mind. It includes the mind.

And if we are to be involved in taking men alive, we need to be trained. But of course, the whole point is this. The training to which we are called is nothing other than the training of following our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately there are few colleges in this world that know much about this art. It is possible to pass nowadays through a theological course in some of our best theological colleges otherwise considered, and yet to come out and learn nothing at all about the art of fishing men. But there is one school, and only one.

The school where we learn how to fish men, it is the school of Jesus Christ. There is no other. Now in every other sphere of life, you want to be a scientist or a historian or what have you, well you can generally choose your college and choose your tutor, choose your professor.

And maybe one is almost as good as the other. But in this school there is only one teacher. In the life of Simon Peter it was the physical Son of God, the Son of God in human form, Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory among men.

In our day it is the same Lord, by His Word and by His Spirit, perfecting in us that which concerns Himself. And unless we are prepared to sit at His feet and see again how in the days of His flesh He exercised this

ministry, and inculcate and apply to ourselves the principles that He employs, and hear Him tell us how we ought to behave and how we ought to act, then my friends, we've not gone very far in the school of Christ. This is the essence of Christian living.

And this is the call of the gospel. Now this is specialized fishing, this. You need training, necessarily.

We can speak of that comparatively, but now you need training also because of the nature of the task involved. And it is with this that I have to close this morning. Whereas Matthew and Mark use a very ordinary word about fishing men, Luke, as we've already indicated, uses different terminology.

And that can be translated, catching men or taking men, literally taking men alive. There is a book that was published some years ago by an American author, *Taking Men Alive*. Now, he really got the secret of it.

That is the word that Luke used. And it is very significant, and I'll tell you why. There were three modes of fishing in New Testament times.

First of all, there was fishing with a line and a hook. Sometimes you would find children, very much as you find children today, just getting their own homemade hook and putting a bait on it and casting it into the sea, and they could fish with a line and a hook. Then you had another mode of fishing.

You used a net which you cast into the sea. It had a cone-shaped net which would assume its form in the water, and you just dragged it towards you. Then you had what the New Testament speaks of as a drag net.

The drag net was passed into two boats, and they would be moving along in the same direction, and the boat stretched--the net stretched from one boat to the other, and as the two boats went in a given direction, they would drag the sea and drag the fish into the net. Now, there are three forms of fishing. Luke implies that our Lord wanted us to be clear about this.

We are not meant to be involved in hook fishing, line fishing. Why? For this reason, when you fish with a hook, you damage the fish in catching it. You fish with a hook, and it catches the jaw or the throat or the stomach of the fish, and the fish can be slain before it has landed.

This is one reason why men need to be trained in the art of fishing, men. It is possible in fishing, men, to slay them in landing them. There are personalities that are spoiled.

They are overrun. They are overrun, and they are mastered, and they are bullied into a position from which, psychologically, they rarely recover. Now, there is a mode of fishing which does despite and damage to the soul God made, and our very employment of such methods is contrary to the glory of God and to the good of those whom we seek to serve.

We are not to fish in that way. We must be very careful lest we damage the fish in catching them. Our fishing has to be of an entirely different nature.

It was probably with this in mind that Jesus used this other qualifying term in this later episode, which Luke records. What he means is this. He is not simply interested, may I change the metaphor, in scalps, but he is interested in lives netted for his glory.

There is a word in the Psalms which speaks of, He redeemeth thy life from destruction. Not just catching a soul disembodied in the net of the gospel, but a life intact, a man with all his capacities for thought and his conscience and his heart and the whole of his being intact, so that unspoilt and unsullied, psychologically whole, not bullied or battered by the gospel, he is one and may serve his God with all that he is and all that he ever can be. This is why, you see, we need to be trained in this noble art of winning men for Jesus Christ.

May I then conclude this morning in this way. Here is the call addressed to Simon. Most of us are very much like Simon.

Perhaps at the moment of the call we say to ourselves, what, what, what really can we make of this? When you think of the glory of a soul and the complexity of a soul, what can we do to win a man and bring him over from one realm into another, so that he is usable in the kingdom of God? And when he comes there, everything that he was by nature comes to fulfillment. How can we do this? Well now, hear my text, follow me, and I will make you to become. But you say, that is simply the call to be a good Christian.

Precisely, precisely. Following Jesus Christ is just another way of saying, walk in fellowship with him. Go where he goes, be where he is and as he is.

Simply walk through life in fellowship, in harmony, close at his heels. You see the point is, as far as the Bible is concerned, Christian character and Christian service are two sides of the same thing. You can never assume the kind of character to which we are called in the Bible.

You can never arrive there and be inactive in the service of our Lord. There is no such thing as sanctity and Christian maturity, sitting in your own armchair, judging other people and seeing how very far short they fall, whilst you, mature man and woman of God, are folding your arms and you're at ease in Zion and you think you've arrived. That's a dreamland.

Maturity means pleasures of men as well. Character is wedded to service. And the man who is following Jesus Christ and is thereby changed and transformed in terms of character, will be a man who also will become a fisher of men.

Where are we this morning? Does the concept of it discourage you? I shouldn't be at all surprised if it does. Satan wants it to be so. And unless we see that he who calls us, who calls you and calls me, is able to make us fishers of men, well, we shan't get very far.

Simply focus on the duty, and we've fallen already, but focus on the one who calls us to the duty and who promises, I will make you to become. You may be a very rough man like Simon was when he was called. Impetuous, quick-tempered, quick-moving, always spoken out of turn.

Could there be someone like that here? And you say, I can never fit into this category. I tell you, Simon's Lord and Savior is alive from the dead and is able to make all grace abound toward you and toward me. His grace is sufficient and that's our hope.

Very well then, it is here that we close. Are you prepared to start following with this in mind, with this deliberate intention in mind this morning? And go out into this week as God enables us, looking, waiting, for the opportunity of casting a net, not a hook, but a net, with prayer and with grace and independence upon Him, and see what He will make us become. May God grant it.

His glory is at stake and the good of many. Let us pray. Oh Lord, our Father, we come before Thee with gratitude that we are privileged to have Thine infallible word to guide us, for we are fallible and very, very frail.

And we have to confess that we have failed a multitude of times, even when we have had the intention to do what is right and pleasing. In action we have failed. Come Thou perfecter of all Thou dost begin.

Come and perfect in us what concerneth Thee. Fulfill in us Thy promise and make us, some of us early in our lives, others of us perhaps not quite as young as once we were, but make us also to become fishers of men, that we may fish our loved ones, and neighbors, and friends, and associates, and maybe some whom we call our enemies, out of the sea and slime of sin into the kingdom of our God. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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