

First Miraculous Catch of Fish

by William Fitch

William Fitch's sermon explores the significance of the first miraculous catch of fish as a call to deeper discipleship and full obedience to Christ's mission of catching men.

Duration: 27:26

Scripture: Matthew 4:19, Matthew 6:33, Luke 5:5, John 21:19, Romans 8:1, Revelation 1:13-17

Topics: "Miracle"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the story of Peter, James, and John's encounter with Jesus on a beach. The sermon emphasizes the transformative power of Jesus' call to discipleship and the profound impact it had on their lives. The preacher highlights the importance of using the tools and resources God has given us in our mission to spread the message of Jesus. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the ongoing call for all believers to be witnesses for Christ and to follow him faithfully.

Transcript

We are going to study today one of the instances of a miraculous catch of fish, one of the miracles of our Lord. There are actually two of these miraculous catches, and they're quite different. One was before the resurrection, one was after.

One was right at the very beginning of our Lord's ministry, one at the end. I want to think, first of all, and probably most of all, about the first one, because it's very important. We'll see just what time's left to think about the second.

But let's look at this first miraculous catch of fish. You read about it in Luke 5, verses 1 to 11. When he had left speaking, he said to--I'm reading from verse 4-- he said to Simon Peter, "'Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught.' And Simon answering said to him, "'Master, we've toiled all night and have taken nothing.

Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net.' And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes and their net break. Let's stop there for a moment. When our Lord performed his miracle, one of the things that we should remember is that he was not intent in the first place on catching fish.

He was intent on catching men. He was intent on bringing Peter and James and John fully into his service. He was catching men, and he caught them.

Not only was there a great multitude of fish caught in the net that day, so many that the net broke, there was also one into the kingdom of heaven, a band of three illustrious men, men who would become leaders of the people and of the church in days to come. And so it was a most significant happening. There's a miraculous catch of fish.

There's an equally miraculous conquering of the wills of three great and outstanding men. These three men had already come to some extent under the power of Jesus. They had heard him on a previous occasion call them, and when he did so, they left all and followed him.

But they were as yet not wholly committed. There is a deeper level of their personality which Christ must reach, and this he is going to do now. From henceforth, they are going to be his and his forever.

Christ is still fishing for men. He wants us all who are called into the fellowship of his church to serve him and follow him. He needs witnesses.

He sends us out into all the world with a promise that we shall be his witnesses and that he will never leave us nor forsake us. This we can learn by watching carefully all he did that day. Look at this story.

We see here a presence that silences all our contradictions. Our Lord entered into Peter's boat and asked him to push out a little from the land, and this Peter did. Then our Lord sat down and taught the people from that pulpit of a ship.

In a little while, he said to Peter, Peter, launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught. Peter thought that this was foolish. Master, he said, we've been toiling all night and we've taken nothing.

But he obeyed nonetheless. He said, nevertheless, at thy word, we will let down the net. Now did you notice something significantly important here? Jesus had said nets, plural.

Peter said, at thy word, I will let down the net, singular. Peter is willing to obey, but not fully. He obeys, and yet he disobeys.

He believes, and yet he doubts. At thy word, I will let down the net. It was a case of partial obedience.

And in effect, partial obedience is really total disobedience. There are going to be consequences rising from this dropping of a single net that Peter had never dreamed. Had he been willing to fulfill all that his Lord said to him, he wouldn't have suffered the strange experience of one of his nets breaking upon him.

Had he obeyed completely, he would have brought him possibly the largest catch of fish he had ever seen or heard of. But this is where our faith sometimes is so weak. We obey, but not wholly.

We are like Augustine, and we say, Lord, deliver me from my sins. But not yet. Peter, however, heard a voice that silenced all his contradictions.

His claim that he and the others had been out all night and had caught nothing, and now Christ is asking him to launch out into the deep and to let down the nets again? For a draft of fish? Unthinkable! He knew more about boats and fish than Jesus did. However, he was too much of a gentleman to object too strongly. So he moved out, and he obeyed, but only partially.

Yes, that voice had silenced all his contradictions, or at least most of them. He's been listening so carefully as the Lord preached from his boat. I'm sure he was proud that Christ asked for the use of his boat that day.

Why, there's no surer way of winning a man's confidence than by asking for his help, and that's what Jesus did. This is surely what any true Christian will do. We will try to get alongside of people on the level on which they live and talk in ways that they understand.

Our Lord didn't begin to expound the law and the prophets to Peter that day, no. He asked him for the use of his boat. If we are really going to be fishers of men, we must be willing to go and sit where they sit, to talk to them the everlasting word of life in ways that they can comprehend.

Christ was the Son of Man. He was human in all points. He was made to be like ourselves.

He understands the human situation, and so must you and I. If the church isn't interested in the doings of the world near her doors, she might as well close her door completely. We have to demonstrate clearly our interest in men. When we do that, they will listen.

Any real minister of the gospel must be concerned about what his people are and what they do. If he isn't interested like that, he isn't going to reach them for Christ. The first principle of a true fisherman is to be close to those we're trying to get.

Dr. J.H. Jowett, in a little book of his called *The Passion for Souls*, has some very interesting suggestions along this line. Among them is one that, to my mind, is very interesting and important. He says, if you're going to be a good fisher of men, learn from other fishermen.

And as he speaks about this, he quotes George Eliot, who was once listening to the complaints of some angling friends as they were describing their fruitless day's work, looking into their empty creels. She said, you should make a deeper study of the subjectivity of the trout. Now, that's a very amusing and a very suggestive word.

But it's also an important word to the church as she goes among men to tell them of the Son of God, the Savior of the world. We have important work to do. Use the tools God has given you.

Don't hesitate to ask help from others. They may become your best and finest converts. Study the subjectivity of your people.

They have much to teach you. But here in the story is not only a presence and a voice that silences all our contradictions. There's a person who makes all tackle new.

Master, we've toiled all night. And the result? Nothing. Well, it was true.

The tackle they've been using is tackle that has been in use all night. Their nets have been washed, of course. That was what they were doing when Jesus came by their way.

They are tidy men. A gardener once told me that he could tell a good gardener by looking at his tools. He said, a good gardener's tools are always clean.

These men were good fishermen. They were washing their nets. But in a sense, they were disappointed with their nets.

What had they done? They'd been utter failures. Unable to catch a thing. Is it believable then that anything different will happen now? Is it? But the Lord said, launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draft.

Was this launching out calling to the spirit of Peter? Was he exhausted? Or was the mere idea of launching out into the deeper waters a challenge to his skill as a fisherman? Who can tell? The fact is, they obeyed. They launched out. They left the shore.

They let down the net. And at once, we are told, they enclosed a great multitude of fish and their net break. In response to the word of Christ, they acted.

And here was miracle before their eyes. Here was the utterly impossible happening. They catch so many fish that the net breaks.

Does Peter immediately blame himself for not dropping more nets? Who can tell? What is certain is that the presence of Jesus made that tackle work in a superlatively new fashion. His presence makes old tackle new. And he does that for us all who serve him.

In that moment, Peter began to find that all his skills on which he had prided himself so greatly were not enough. He needed something more that Christ gave. How ridiculous he thought it was to cast at midday when in the dead of night there wasn't a bite.

But Peter, with whom Christ has dealt so wisely and gently thus far, is now being forced to face something he had never thought of before. He found himself in a world of mystery and of faith. He found that all the foundations of his old life were being knocked away.

He was still the same, and yet he was not the same. The net has broken. There's immediate work to be done.

Their partners must be beckoned. And you know, it's a strange word that is used, *katenuo*, which means to beckon with a sign or by the nodding of the head and with a sense of reverence in the gesture. All that is in this Greek word.

The idea in that verb is one of wonder. The thought is that words have become impossible and the gesture is all that is left. The result of this is very clear.

Peter felt himself in a presence that was different from anything he had ever known before. Something strange had attracted him previously to this man. When he called him, follow me, and he did follow.

He couldn't help himself. But things are even more persistent now. There falls on him a sense of self-abasement and depression that make him realize that he is on the threshold of another world.

He is touching the hem of God's garment somehow. And in that moment, there falls on him a deep conviction of sin. Certainly, he had some belief in Jesus before.

Christ was unusually skilled in teaching and healing, drawing out Peter's admiration. But he little realized what a profound influence this friend could have on his whole personality until now. But here he is, sensing another world, a world of purity, a world of holiness, a world of light.

And so he cries out, depart from me. I am a sinful man, O Lord. A new presence, a new tackle, a new world, a new sense of sin.

And all is yet beyond his comprehension, but enough to make him know how sinful he himself essentially is. His life needs to be remade, he knows, even as the net that he had cast over the side of the boat would need to be remade. It was broken.

His words are like those of every young Christian who has had his first glance at the glory of Jesus and sees himself in his own need and sin. And so he cries, depart from me, O Lord. I am different from you.

Leave me, Lord. I can't bear to be in your presence. I'm not worthy to be one of your disciples.

Depart. I am a sinful man. But he is in the presence of the living and the exalted Christ.

And you know there is only one Christ. John, the beloved disciple, tells us how Jesus called him from mending the nets and he followed him. He also gives to us in the book of Revelation a very clear and wonderful portrait of an exalted Christ, clothed with a long robe and a golden girdle round his breast.

His eyes were as a flame of fire, and his head and hair were white like wool. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his tongue there emerged a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in his strength. John tells us that when he saw him, he fell at his feet as though dead.

This all comes from the first chapter of the book of Revelation. There are not two Christs. This is fundamental.

The Christ of the lakeside is the Christ of the throne. And we must be careful that we do not confuse our hearers by giving them some kind of idea that there is one who is a glorified Christ on one side, and on the other side one who is a gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Christ is one.

He is indeed the sympathizing Jesus who loves and cares for us all. But he is also the cosmic Christ, the creator Christ, the kingly Christ. And we must never try to cover over that burning glory that surrounded Peter that day and made him plead with Christ to depart.

It's significant that this revelation came to Peter when the boat was out on the high sea. He has had to leave the shallow waters of the lake and get out where the rolling breakers were in the majesty of the glory of God's creation, sovereignty, and power. And it's only as you and I are prepared to launch out into depths like these that we come to real depth of faith.

We must encourage all others who would listen to let go and let God take control. It's there we enter into fullness of life. It's out on the sounding main that we behold the wonders of the Lord.

It's here that the Christ who is both man and God becomes to us the Savior that we need. How marvelous it must have been to hear the voice of Jesus saying, Fear not. Out there on the deep device that had called the waters into being in the first of time spoke to Peter.

And it was like the first day of creation for him. Perhaps we are prone to restrict men from going into the depths with God. Perhaps we are unwilling to let them launch out into the deep in case they should make encounter with a holy mysterium of which they can offer no explanation.

It's possible for the church to be like that. Hesitant and unwilling to encourage its people to go in for deeper things of the faith. It's lovely to speak of the birds and the grass and the flowers in the garden and to sing that the Lord God made them all.

Of course he did. But there are heights and depths that we have not yet charted. And we deny to so many the glad and glorious opportunity of meeting face to face with one who can speak this eternal fear not.

For he himself is the Lord of life and glory. It's out there we must lead our people. We must refuse to keep them in the shallows of an all too simple Christianity.

There are great depths into which we must cast our nets. And let us remember that when God commends us to do a thing he gives to us his promise as well. And all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus.

The word catch means to take alive. It's used only here and in one other place to Timothy 2.26 a passage that must be understood as a remarkable parallel to the words of our Lord to Peter. Now our Lord declares that with his sins forgiven Peter's life is going to be lived on a quite different plane from anything he has known before.

From now on friendship and trust in God will dominate everything that will happen to him. And with that assured it follows naturally that Peter from now on is going to be employed on the same great mission as Christ was himself. He's going to be out and about amongst the people catching men alive for God.

There's nothing else left to do. Nothing worthwhile at any rate. What mighty things can happen from a friendly chat on a beach in the early morning.

How little Peter and James and John thought that morning as they pulled to the shore with empty nets that a day which had begun so despairingly was to end for them in the light of an enormous day spring. Life could never be the same for them again. How could it be? Life is radiant, vibrant, brilliant.

Darkness is past and the true light now shineth. Shining and flashing and glowing and glistening. A light of God breaks clear, effulgent.

A halo, aureole, golden and flashing with the power of ten thousand suns. And why? He called me to his side. Called me.

Peter, me the sinner, unclean, foul. He said, I'll make you be like me. We'll catch together, me and thee.

Out there on the sun-drenched sea from now until eternity. Let's think for a minute about the second catch of fish. There are just a few moments to think about it.

But it's very remarkable. There are many ways in which we can think of this. And I'm just wondering what's the most important part that I can lift up at this point.

It's the day of resurrection. Our Lord in his resurrection form has appeared on several occasions unto his disciples. And here is a night that once again they have been out fishing.

And they have caught nothing. He manifested himself unto them, we read. Though as yet they did not recognize him.

And then in John 21. Have you caught anything? Jesus it was standing on the shore. He hailed them.

Have you caught anything? No. Then cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find. They obeyed the command.

Once again there was something in that voice that broke no denial. And when they cast, the net was full. Full of great fish.

153 of them. Full count. They obeyed fully.

And unlike the former miraculous catch. When they obeyed only partially. And the net broke.

On this occasion there is no broken net. Of this St. Augustine says. There are no broken nets this side of the resurrection of our wonderful Lord.

And it was just then that the realization came to John. Who whispered in Peter's ear. It's the Lord.

And Peter suddenly lurched across the boat. Making for the shore. He couldn't get there fast enough to the side of his Lord.

The others followed in a little dinghy. Helping to drag the net to the land. And John remarks as he tells the story.

So simply. But with such felicity of language. Yet in spite of the great multitude of fish.

The net was not broken. It was a miracle within a miracle. Why are we told the number of the fish? Why are we told that the net in spite of the huge catch was not broken? Why does Peter leave them all and head for shore? And why is it that when they come to land.

They find a fire of coal thereon. And fish and bread. Every question has an answer.

Nothing that our Lord does is without meaning. He himself knew what he would do. And it was always so.

And it always will be so. And then graciously the Lord acts as hosts. Hosts and says.

Come and have breakfast. What marvelous thoughtfulness. He knows their tired.

He knows their hunger. And he has prepared for them all they need. Come and dine.

Now not one of them was able to ask. Who are you? They all knew. It was the Lord.

And in speechless reverence. As the sun arose in all his splendor. And daylight filled the skies.

They ate in silence. And I wonder. If they ever ate another meal quite like that one.

Who is this who meets them on the shore? Once again it is the Lord of all creation. This is the one by whom all things were made. This is the one who is the first principle.

And the upholding principle. Of the whole scheme of creation. And this is the one.

Who speaks to Peter now. And draws him back. For Peter had failed his Lord.

Peter had denied his Lord. Three times. With oaths and with curses.

In the moment of his Lord's greatest need. Jesus sees him. And Jesus speaks to him.
And after they had dined. He asked Peter. Three times.
Do you love me? Beside that fire of coals. That must have reminded Peter. Of the same coal of fires.
In the courtyard. On the night of the trial. Do you love me? And Simon Peter.
Answered. Yea Lord. Thou knowest.
That I love thee. And the Lord gave to him. His great commission.
To feed the sheep. To feed the lambs. To feed the sheep.
From henceforth. Thou shalt catch men. That was the message.
Of the first miraculous catch. Now the message. Of the second resurrection catch of fish.
Feed. The flock of God. How marvelous our Lord is.
What wonderful things he loves to do. And he wants to take our life. And use them.
Our lives and use them. As he alone can. To the glory of his name.
To the marvelous. Glorious. Purposes.
And the fulfillment. Of all God's holy. Commandments.
In us. And forever more.

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