

Theme: What's Your Occupation?

- 1. Are You a Fisherman?**
- 2. Or Are You a Fisher of Men?**

Text: Luke 5:8-11 (NKJV)

⁸ When Simon Peter saw it [the miraculous catch of fish], he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" ⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." ¹¹ So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

"I'd Rather Be Fishin'!" For some people this statement is more than just a popular bumper sticker slogan, it's an attitude; a way of life. If this slogan describes you then you must think that the disciples in our text had a "dream job." They got to fish for a living! Can you imagine how incredible and exciting it would have been to be one of the fishermen in that boat when Jesus provided that miraculous catch of fish? Not only would it have been exciting, it would have been very profitable! Our Gospel reading told us that they caught so many fish at once that Peter's net began to break (v. 6), and they needed to signal their partners from the other boat to help them haul it into shore.

And yet our sermon text closed by telling us that these disciples dropped everything—"they forsook all"—including the miraculous catch of fish "and followed [Jesus]" (v. 11). Were these guys crazy? Didn't they know that they had the perfect occupation? They fished for a living! How could they just up and leave right in the middle of the greatest moment of their careers?

Well, fishing was their occupation, and they even returned to it on occasion, even after this account, but it wasn't their preoccupation. In other words, they treated it like it was their occupation, something they did for a living. It was their means of income, and work that they enjoyed. It did not, however, become their preoccupation, or consume their lives and every waking moment. When Jesus called them, they were ready to drop everything; "they forsook all and followed Him" (v. 11).

They willingly went with Jesus because they had a greater desire to "catch men (people)" for Christ, than fish. They wanted to be "fishers of men" (as Christ had promised to make them in **Matthew 4:19**) rather than fishermen. The actions of Peter, James, and John in our text are a great example for us when we consider our own occupations in relation to the work that Christ has called us to do in His kingdom. So, **What's Your Occupation?** 1. Are you a fisherman, 2. Or are you a fisher of men?

Now, no one that I know of here is a fisherman—or fisherwoman—for a living, but like these disciples we all have occupations in this world that are important because they "bring in the fish" for us, so to speak. Our jobs provide us with a source of income and allow us to provide a home, clothing, and food for our families and ourselves. Our jobs, like fishing, are also oftentimes filled with uncertainties and variables that we can't control. Our jobs require that we have proper training so that we have a good idea of what we are doing in any number of situations in order to give us the best chance for success. Our occupations, like fishing, are oftentimes limited by place and time. Most of us go to a separate location for work and have set, or at least semi-set, hours in which we are required to work each day.

These are all, of course, good things, and our occupations are one of the ways God gives us and our families great blessings. But too often don't our occupations become more like preoccupations: Taking up more of our time, energy, and thoughts than they should? Do our occupations leave us with little time to spend with our family and loved ones, or more importantly, little time to spend with God, or little energy to serve Him and others? If this describes you, (and who hasn't gone through this at times in their lives) then there's a good chance that our occupation has become our preoccupation.

Now, let's consider the second question: **2. Are you a fisher of men?** A "fisher of men" doesn't catch fish for a living. They have a much more important occupation on top of the one that they have for their source of income. A "fisher of men" catches people for Christ. They save souls from the cesspool of this world with the rescue "net" of the Gospel. This is the most important occupation anyone can have, and Jesus has given this job to each one of us, not just to those disciples who were in the boats that day. The occupation of a "fisher of men" is not filled with uncertainty, but with certainty and truth. They simply speak the truth of the Word of God in love and let the power of God's Word do the work on people's hearts. The "fisher of men" simply "casts" out the Word, God provides the "catch" and has promised that it will always **"accomplish what He pleases" (Isaiah 55:11)**. A "fisher of men" is not limited by time or place, like many occupations, but can at all times and in all places "cast out the net" of the Word of God. One of God's top "fishers of men," the apostle Paul, once wrote, **"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2 NIV)**.

As we all know, this occupation of being a "fisher of men" is easier said than done. So, how do we do it? More importantly: How do we get good at it? Let's take a look at a few examples from our text. The very first step is shown to us by Peter. After witnessing this generous miracle Peter quickly drops to his knees and blurts out, **"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (v. 8)**. Now, it's pretty clear that we have here another case where Peter spoke before thinking, because if he had a chance to think about what he said I'm sure he didn't really want Jesus to leave him. For one thing, they were still in the boat. (Where exactly was Jesus going to go???) What we do want to take from Peter's example is his realization of his sinfulness before the Almighty, sinless, Son of God. Confession and repentance of our sins are the very first step to becoming successful "fishers of men." Because of Christ's perfect sacrifice for our sins on the cross He can tell us the very same words he told Peter when he confessed his sins, **"Do not be afraid" (v. 10)**.

The second step to becoming a successful "fisher of men" is shown to us by all the disciples who were in the boat. We are told that **"when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all" (v. 11)**. When Jesus called they came running. They didn't question Jesus about what they should do about this huge catch of fish. They didn't say, "Let me pack first and say good-bye to my family." No, Jesus had called them to come be His students and learn from Him and they trusted that when they **"forsook all"** and put Him first, He would take care of the rest. When we read Christ's promises and commands to us in His Word, we shouldn't drag our feet, make excuses, or try and out-think His commands with our own logic or interpretation. When He says, **"Seek first the kingdom of God,"** He means first. He doesn't want us to hear this passage and say, "Yes Jesus, I'll seek to serve you, but first my family," or "my house," or "my job." No! Remember, Christ's command to put Him first is followed by a generous and sure promise, **"and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33)**.

These first two steps prepare our heart for the third step in becoming a successful "fisher of men," and that is to **"follow [Jesus]" (v. 11)**. The disciples in our text didn't just forsake everything to chase after the latest "fad Rabbi" in Israel—the Dr. Phil or Oprah of their day—they were following the Master Teacher Himself. This entailed more than just physically "showing up" and following Jesus around. It included listening to His Words, taking them to heart, and following His example.

This is how we will learn to be successful “fishers of men,” by following the Master “fisher of men” Himself. How did Jesus get crowds to follow Him that were so large that He had to get into a boat and shove off a ways from shore in order to preach to them (v. 1-3)? Did He use a clever advertising campaign? Radio, internet, and television broadcasts? A top notch P.R. team? No. Jesus drew people to Himself by speaking and *living* the message He came to proclaim. He not only told others that He loved them and that He came to be their Savior from sin, He showed them by His kindness, His compassion, and care for individual sinners. Sure, He spoke to the masses at times too, but some of Jesus’ greatest feats of evangelism were done when He was one-on-one with someone who needed to hear the message of their sins and His saving grace.

- † Jesus took the time to speak with the adulterous Samaritan woman.
- † He set aside a day in His busy schedule to stay at the home of the thieving tax collector, Zacchaeus.
- † As we read in our text, He used His miraculous abilities to call Peter, James, and John to be His close followers.

What happened in each one of these cases? The Words of Jesus worked miraculously in their hearts.

- † The Samaritan woman brought an entire village to come and learn of Jesus as their Savior.
- † Zacchaeus was so moved by Jesus’ love that he repented, believed in Jesus, and gave generously to the poor and repaid fourfold anyone he had cheated out of money.
- † In our text we see how He used the miracle of a huge catch of fish to give His disciples a preview of the huge “catch of people” they would make for the Lord during their ministries (think of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost in which 3000 people were brought to faith in Christ).

Who knows whether the next person you bring the Gospel to will be like the Samaritan woman and bring a whole community of people to see their Savior?

Who knows whether the next person you confront with the message of their sin and God’s forgiving grace will be like Zacchaeus and be moved by the Holy Spirit to change their sinful life and look in faith to Christ for forgiveness?

Who knows whether the next time we open our mouths to confess Jesus as the one and only Savior of the world that God will use us, like He used Peter, to bring in a huge catch of souls for His heavenly kingdom.

Who knows? We never will until we cast out our “nets”—loving, compassionate words and actions, and the soul-saving, life-changing powerful message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

May God use each of us as His “fishers of men.” May He keep each of us from becoming preoccupied with our occupations, which lead us to fish for other things: earthly wealth, comfort, success, and pleasure. May He always lead us to use our earthly occupations for the good of our heavenly occupation as His “fishers of men.” May our attitude always be “I’d rather be fishin’”—not for fish or earthly things, but for men, women, and children to bring to safe shores of the heavenly home of our Savior, Jesus! Amen.