

LUKE 5:1-11 LABORING FOR THE LORD

¹ So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, ² and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. ⁴ When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net."

⁶ And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. ⁷ So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw it, 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.

Please raise your hand -- How many people here "work for the Lord"? (No hands.) Perhaps your "out-loud" answer would have been, "Only one—you, Pastor!" But what about the Bible passage, *Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)*? Everyone here works for the Lord. You may not get a check from the church, but you work under the Lord and for His honor. God gave Adam work in the Garden of Eden *to dress it and to keep it (Genesis 2:15)*. The Apostle Paul wrote, *If any would not work, neither should he eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10)*. The Lord expects us to work, the Lord blesses us through our work, He grants daily bread by our work. Each day, each of you works for the Lord and for His glory. God gives to each of you opportunities to labor as a member of His Kingdom. (It is sin that has made work a drudgery.)

Jesus was teaching the people the Word of God—the message of God's love and compassion even for sinners. Jesus was standing at the shore of the Sea of Gennesaret, or Sea of Galilee. "Gennesaret" means harp; the sea has the shape of a harp. The multitude "crowded/pressed" around Him as He taught God's Word. Does that happen any more? What if we had to set up chairs at church every Sunday—chairs in the aisles and all chairs across the front?! Jesus had a message that the people were longing to hear—God's love and pardon for the down-and-out sinner through the coming death and resurrection of His Son. Do you realize you are in that position? I pray that you all would realize your status 1) apart from Jesus, 2) with Jesus.

Jesus was "standing" as the people crowded up to Him. It was not conducive to good teaching. Do you suppose it was by chance that two particular boats were nearby? Not at all. Jesus knew exactly where this was going. He got into one of the boats and asked the owner to push it out a little. The owner was Simon. Simon already knew Jesus. In John's Gospel we read that Andrew had brought his brother Simon (Peter) to meet Jesus. Andrew and Simon were commercial fishermen. Here they are cleaning their nets after a night of fishing. Jesus did not "order" Peter to push Him out; He "asked" him—though He could have ordered him. "Asking" is a much more positive way of gaining someone's heart than "telling." If you ever worked for someone else, is it better to "tell" the boss that you are taking Thursday off, or to "ask" him if you may have Thursday off? Asking. Children, remember to "ask" dad, and not "tell" him.

While in the boat, but away from the shore, Jesus could address the crowd better. The shore would be sloped up, like an auditorium; also sound does carry well over water. Jesus could now "sit" and to teach—common style in those days.

When Jesus had finished teaching, He told (this time, not "asked") Simon to cast out the net again, in the deep water. Likely Peter was taken aback a bit. He knew fishing; that was his life. Fish were most easily caught by night when they came near the shore to feed. Now it was day, and Jesus had said "deep" water. Surely Peter and his companions were tired. Likely Peter and his companions were discouraged. How do you feel after working all day and accomplishing nothing? Or, fishing all day and getting skunked? Peter respectfully explained, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing;" "Master." Peter looked up to Jesus. He knew Jesus had power and wisdom that no ordinary human being had. He had seen Jesus heal his own mother-in-law and others, and drive out demons. Peter willingly complied.

Nevertheless, likely there were mixed thoughts going through Peter's mind. Likely, his logic told him this was a waste of time and effort. Do you ever feel that way about an assignment that comes your way in life—be it dealing with another round of personal sickness, or sickness for the children, or another round of harsh weather, or another blow to the local economy, or another landslide of sick morals in our nation—and you are supposed to bear up under it and deal with it? “Lord, this is pushing me to the edge.” Elijah the prophet felt, “Lord, I’ve work so hard, but it’s not working. Satan has had his way with Your people. Queen Jezebel wants to kill me. Lord, I give up. Take my life” (I Kings 19:1-10). ----- Satan wants you to feel discouraged and helpless too, that all is against you, that God doesn’t care anymore. But not so!

Think about this scene. While the Peter and the others were n washing their nets, they too were listening to Jesus teach the Words and Promises and Compassions of God, His love, forgiveness, and rescue. They were words that gave new life and hope to their hearts. All was not lost though they were failing sinners, though they had had no success the prior night. God loved them. There was forgiveness even for them. They were safe and were saved. They were ready to move ahead despite and misgivings, trusting Jesus’ words and direction to cast out in the deep. You too. As you labor under the Lord in every strife that comes, every strife that the devil sends to turn you away from your Savior and His forgiveness, trust Jesus’ Word and move ahead. Labor for Him. Build on the message of God and His Word. At Sunday services, for example, forget the thoughts, “I’ve heard all this before; these hymns are too old to be meaningful; the preacher always says the same old thing; there are more exciting thoughts for my mind than this.” But none more valuable.

Peter and the rest soon got the shock of their lives. The net suddenly enclosed so many fish that he motioned the others to come out with the second boat to help them. They filled both boats so full, that began to settle down into the water, “sink” (the words do not say they were “taking in” water over the edge of the boat and were “going under.”) Unbelievable! A great multitude of fish! Do you know the word “plethora”? There is plethora of stars in the night sky, a plethora of mosquitoes in the evening air. A plethora is a multitude. And do you know the word “poly-”? (Not the name “Polly.”) Poly- means plenty. For example, pentagons have 5 sides; octagons have 8 sides; polygons have many sides. Monogamy is being married to one wife; bigamy, two wives; polygamy, many wives. The Greek words say the nets had a *poly-plethora* of fish! Jesus grants success in the right way, at the right time, in the right measure.

Whatever your job, He grants the success that is best for you. But how does one measure success? First of all, stop comparing yourself with others. Under God’s hand a high school basketball team that has won 3 victories by the end of the year, may have had a much more successful season than the team that won 19! How does one measure success? The mother, who feels beleaguered by the responsibilities and demands of raising a family and sees no visible success, yet under the Lord’s hand bringing up children in Christ, has more success than the wealthy unbeliever whose children reach high places in society. Labor for the Lord. He grants success—perhaps success you will never see. Psalm 127:1-2 reminds us, *Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it: unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he gives his beloved sleep.*

All were astonished and marveled. Peter was humbled. *He fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”* He knew he did not belong in Jesus’ class, or in Jesus’ company. He was unqualified. When you look at the blessings that the Lord has given you—remember, you are not a self-made man. Humbly recognize the Lord’s blessings, love, and mercy. You too are unqualified. Peter fell at Jesus’ knees. (Note: Jesus was still in the boat, seated as before; and Peter in all humility fell at His knees.)

Jesus re-assured Peter, *“Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”* Jesus invited Peter and his companions to be full-time disciples/students of His, and to help “catch men,” to labor full-time for the Lord. That is the work of the Christian ministry, to catch men, not by force, not by guile, not by smooth talk, but by proclaiming the heart-warming and life-giving message of God’s grace in Christ the crucified and risen Savior. And whether you are a full-time pastor or teacher, laboring directly for the church, or not, the Lord also calls you to work for Him, whatever your station in life. You are not there by accident, but by the Lord’s leading.

So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him. Do you get that?! They walked away from the biggest catch they had ever had in life! They realized they had something better. They had heard Jesus teach God’s Word to the crowd that day, they saw His wisdom and power. Their hearts were eager to follow. No one forced them. They wanted to follow. You also, in your situation in life, hear Jesus’ Word of salvation and follow Him. Labor for the Lord, no matter what your calling in life. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in Him (I John 2:15).*