

## Lord, Make My Life a Miracle

### Luke Series #13

Luke 5:1-11

David Sunday

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Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 5. This is a remarkable story of a miraculous catch of fish. That story serves as a back drop or a parable to illustrate a greater miracle that Christ intends to accomplish through His Spirit, through His people, which is the ongoing gathering of multitudes of people into His Kingdom. Luke 5:1-11 shows us that He intends to use us in this process, in this miraculous gathering of the nations into His Kingdom. The Puritan commentator Matthew Henry pointed out that during this miraculous catch of fish, Jesus accomplishes four things:

- He shows His dominion over the sea and all that is in it.
- He confirms the doctrine He just preached on the boat.
- He repays Peter more than abundantly for the use of His boat.
- He gives us a sign that our labors in the gospel will be successful.

There will be times and places where we toil and catch nothing, yet we will be instrumental in bringing many to Christ through this gospel net. That is what Jesus is doing through this miracle. My aim is to encourage every follower of Christ at New Covenant, that you play a vital role in the advancement of Christ's gospel.

Look at verse ten where Jesus says something to Simon. Bear in mind that Simon is Peter; Jesus will later give him the name Peter. Sometimes we call him Simon or Simon-Peter and this is the same man who later becomes the great apostle—Peter. In Luke 5:10 Jesus says some powerful words to Peter. I pray that we will take this word personally. The second half of verse ten, *“And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.’”* May that word captivate our hearts as we think about, “Why am I here, why is our church here?” I think it is a great way to prepare us for what we are about to start again in six weeks. The first Thursday after Easter Sunday—in the first week of April—we will be starting Exploring Christianity all over again.

Exploring Christianity is a faith-filled effort. Teaching gospel truths, to teach about God and sin, faith, repentance, Jesus and love—all these things we take for granted. Our culture does not have biblical definitions for these things and in exploring Christianity; we are doing what Jesus was doing here in verses 1-3. The crowd was pressing in on Him to hear the Word of God; He got into a boat and started teaching. That is what we are going to be doing here on Thursday nights beginning the first week of April and I believe that God wants to use this passage to light a fire in us and kindle faith in us for how He intends to use all our efforts. I think God wants to say to us through this passage, “Do not be afraid, New Covenant Bible Church. From now on you will be catching people.” I think God wants you to take that personally. “Do not be afraid Dave and Micki. You will be catching men.” Put your name in the blank and ask yourself, “Do I really believe that?” Jesus is not expressing hope; He is not expressing a possibility. He is not saying, “Maybe sometime in your life you might actually be used to draw someone else to Me.” No. He is expressing a promise; a prophetic assurance. “You will be catching men. You will be used by Me. In all the places where I put you and all different spheres of life that you are in and through a variety of means, God will be using each and every one of His people to catch others with the gospel net, to bring them into His Kingdom.” There is confidence in Jesus’ words here.

I know that there are two topics a preacher can speak on that will immediately induce guilt in 90% of the congregation. Prayer and evangelism. Most of us are not satisfied with where we are at in these two areas. I also know that whenever a preacher stands up to preach about one of these topics, there is about 10% of the congregation that is saying, “Go get them, preacher! Let them have it!” Some of you are thankfully, very fired up about evangelism and you cannot figure out why a lot of God’s people don’t seem so fired up about it. You are right in many ways and we should experience conviction from the Holy Spirit if we are disengaged or apathetic in prayer and evangelism. But I have found that guilt is at best, a temporary motivation. We need to be encouraged that our inadequacies do not doom us to perpetual failure when it comes to our witness for Christ.

Let’s look at three reasons why many of us are paralyzed in our witness for Christ. This text helps us to overcome evangelistic paralysis. I want to speak to the 90%—and I include myself—who are not satisfied with our involvement in witnessing for Jesus and who want to change and grow and be different in this area. I think this text helps us understand why we get paralyzed, why we get stalled, why we stop. This text also gives us some great, potent motivation for why none of these is reason enough to disqualify us from the promise of verse ten. “From now on, you will be catching men.” Jesus is not prevented

from all our excuses and reasons. He is not prevented from making our lives a miracle in the catching of people for His Kingdom. As we look at this passage and see this miracle, I want us to be praying, "Make my life a miracle in the catching of others."

Let's look at three reasons for evangelistic paralysis:

1. Deals with the past.
2. Deals with the present.
3. Deals with the future.

## **1. Our Past Failures Discourage Us**

How many of you have attempted to let a loved one about Jesus and completely forgotten how you speak? You couldn't even make a comprehensible statement, let alone a clear witness. Or maybe you have ended up saying something that was really lame. Or even worse, it was wrong. You messed up the doctrine of the Trinity terribly and now you feel like a heretic and you don't know if you can ever speak for Jesus again. Maybe because of some failures in the past you have concluded, "I must not have the gift of evangelism and I don't think the Lord is going to use me in that area." How many of you have done your best to accurately, winsomely present Christ to others and it fell completely flat? There was no response or interest.

Last week, Dan Huff and I were at the home of some church members and we were having a conversation with one of their neighbors who had attended one the preview nights for Exploring Christianity in the past. I asked him, "What did you think of it?" Do you know what he said? "Not much. Not much." I thought, "Oh, what do I say now? Do we just fail? Is this the end of the conversation?" But later on, there was more opportunity to speak. It actually seemed like he was interested in speaking further. It became clear that God is not done working in this man's life. His wife sat across the table and one of the other members of our church was having a very good and meaningful conversation with her, indicating that God is at work here, that God is continuing His work. Sometimes what happens is we have failures or things don't go well and we decide, "I am going to stop now."

Put yourself in Simon Peter's shoes. You have been up all night fishing. It has been a night of futile toil. You are hot and tired and all you are thinking about right now is getting your nets cleaned up, going home for breakfast and then getting some sleep. You are not interested in fishing more. Then as you are bringing your boat in here stands Jesus, right at the edge of the lake where you usually dock your boat. You notice a great multitude is

gathering around Him. Luke 5:1 says, “...*the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God...*” because it was clear this man has a message from God. He has authority and power. His message is compelling and captivating the attention of multitudes. Then He looks at you and says, “May I use your boat?” You are not thinking about going back out there on the lake but there is a kindness, an authority in the Man that will not allow you to refuse His request. The next thing you know, He is in your boat. You are in the boat with Him and He is transforming it into a pulpit. The boat is becoming a means of evangelism, of gospel preaching. There are so many people on the shore that Jesus has to pull back and get a little distance so that they all can see Him in the boat, teaching the people.

Then, when He finished teaching, He adds a powerful illustration to His sermon. “Simon,” He says, “*Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch*” (John 5:4). Wow! If I showed up in Sean Gallagher’s classroom at Judson University and offered to teach architecture tomorrow, I think he would say, “Pastor, why don’t you stick to preaching the gospel and I’ll teach architecture.” That’s not what I am gifted to do. I imagine that Peter, the professional fisherman, had similar thoughts about Jesus and His advice about going and fishing in the middle of the day. Peter expresses his reluctance here in verse five, “*Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!* I’m exhausted. I have been out there all night long; I am not very excited about another fishing excursion and this is not a good time, Master. Fish don’t bite in the daytime; this place is all fished out. *But...*” this is important, the key phrase in verse five. Peter recognizes a power and an authority in Jesus’ words and he responds, “...*at your word...*” Get that! “...*at your word I will let down the nets.*” The NIV says, “*Because you say so, I will let down the nets.*”

Then the completely unexpected happens, this lake that seemed to be a place of futile toil the night before becomes this sight of an utterly unprecedented catch of fish. So many that they have to call all hands on deck, get another boat, the fish are overflowing the boats and they are starting to sink. The lesson is clear. The Lord Jesus Christ has dominion over the fish of the sea. He is doing what man, in his sin, failed to do. Remember the first command in Genesis? Man was to have dominion over the fish. Jesus shows that He has dominion over the fish of the sea but even more and deeper than this, Jesus is showing that He has authority over the capturing of multitudes of fish who are swimming far from God and bringing them into the gospel net—not to kill and eat—but to save and give life. Jesus is showing that what looks like an empty lake can become two boat loads of fish. What looks like a barren field can be transformed into a vast harvest. What looks like a heart of

stone in your neighbor can become a heart that is tender, radiant with God's glory. He has authority over salvation of multitudes.

One of the reasons many of us are paralyzed when it comes to evangelism—I am ashamed to say it—is because we are weary of it. We feel like we have tried but it didn't work. "I have toiled all night and I have taken nothing!" That is what we are saying to Jesus and because we feel like we have failed so many times and seen no fruit for so long, we have essentially given up. We don't want to get into the boat and go into the deep where the fish are. We want to stay in the shallows where it is safe and comfortable. What are we doing when we give up on sharing the gospel? What are we ignoring? What are we denying when we give up on sharing the gospel because we have failed in the past? We are denying the potency of God's Word. We are denying how powerful His Word is. His Word commands us to go out into the deep and let down the nets. His Word accomplishes salvation of those who believe. We are denying that power—that potency—in the Word of God.

Friends, the Word that Jesus taught from Simon's boat has the same power and the same authority today as it did when Jesus first taught it. The same power, the same authority. Unbelief says, "No, God is not going to use me." Unbelief is focused on me. Faith says, "Lord, You are going to use your Word and I am going to be faithful to share it." Satan wants us to believe we have a little god whose word has little power and it will only accomplish a little good so we will only take little steps to advance the gospel. But Jesus wants us to believe we have a big God Whose Word has enormous power and will accomplish magnificent good through us so that we will take big steps to make His Word known.

His Word and its power is where we need to focus, instead of our perceived failures. In fact, a lot of time what we think is failure is really not failure. If we have been faithful to speak God's Word, we have not failed. God's Word is potent.

## **2. Our Present Sinfulness Hinders Us**

There is another reason for evangelistic paralysis even more personal because we are painfully aware of our present sinfulness.

Simon Peter experiences this great catch. He manages the taking in of the fish. But you notice that he does not start running around giving high fives to his partners, celebrating and making a business plan with all the money they are going to be making off

all these fish. Instead, a realization is dawning on him. In verse five, what does he call Jesus? *“Master.”* Master is a term of respect. “You are Teacher.” Then in verse eight, what does he call him? *“Lord.”* In Luke’s Gospel, Lord is a term of divinity, God-ness. Peter is starting to realize that this Master is the Lord of the universe; the fish of the sea obey Him. I realize he doesn’t have a fully developed doctrine of Who Christ is yet, but as he looks at this God in his boat, he realizes that he is in the presence of the Holy.

As he sees the Holy One, what does he realize about himself? “False and full of sin, I am. From head to foot, my whole body, my whole being is tainted, polluted and corrupted by sin.” Peter realized this about himself. He not just thinking about some particular sin that he committed the night before, like maybe he swore in the boat and he is sorry about that. No, he is going much deeper than that; he is thinking about his whole nature being depraved and polluted by sin. He falls down at Jesus’ knees in verse eight and says, *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.* My condition puts me at a distance from You, it separates me from You.”

This is a profoundly important realization for Simon. It must happen to us as well. Before we can point sinners to Christ, we have to feel our own sinfulness. Before we can rescue fish from the sea of God’s judgment, we have to feel something of what it is like to be rescued ourselves. We need to know who we are in the presence of a Holy God and experience the sense that we don’t deserve to draw near to Him before God can use us to draw others to Him. It is very important that we know and resonate with what Peter is expressing here in verse eight: *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”*

But I think one of the reasons Christians can be timid and infrequent in sharing the gospel is that we can live as if this story ends right here. We can live as if this is the model of the Christian life. “Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” We forget that Jesus did not depart from Peter. How many of you are grateful that Jesus did not answer that prayer? He didn’t go away. The first words out of Jesus’ mouth were not words of condemnation; do you see them in verse ten? *“Do not be afraid...fear not trembling sinner, do not be afraid.”* How can Jesus say those words to Simon? Simon does not deserve to be welcomed into the presence of the Holy God. The only reason Jesus could say those words to Simon is because Jesus knows what He is about to go and do for Simon on a cross at Calvary. He is going to bear the curse of Simon’s sin and shame. He is going to atone for his sins and reconcile him to God through His death on the cross. Because of that He can say, “Don’t be afraid Simon. Draw near, don’t go away.”

Robert Murray M'Cheyne famously said, "For every look at self, take ten looks at Christ." I think this is one of the best pieces of advice I have ever heard and one of the hardest to practice. The natural inclination of our flesh when we realize our guilt is to focus in on me, on my sin and not to see the glory of my Savior. I think what God wants us to be preoccupied with is not our own sinfulness but His superabundant grace, glory, goodness and the perfection of what He has accomplished for us. When this becomes the awesome preoccupation of our hearts and lives, then we become like contagious bait for people. This is when the joy of our salvation starts to penetrate. The joy of the Lord starts to radiate from our lives and people notice the fruit of the assurance of sins forgiven and the sweetness of our conscience cleansed before God. When we are excited about being saved, our witness is compelling.

Do you remember Psalm 51:10, 12 and 13? David is repenting and he says, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me... Restore to me the joy of your salvation...*" What does he say right after that? When he gets the joy of his salvation back, what does he say is going to happen? "*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.*" This is the result of the joy of my salvation.

I want you to turn to John 21 and see a very similar miracle. There are many parallels but one distinct difference to see. Again, they have gone out fishing. Simon Peter says, "*I am going fishing.*" This is after Jesus has died cross and the disciples say to Simon Peter, "*We will go with you. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing*" (John 21:3). "Master, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing." Here we are again, a night of futile toil on the lake, on the sea of Tiberius." Look at John 21:4-6:

*Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, and "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish.*

Here we go again, almost like Déjà vu. "*That disciple whom Jesus loved (John) therefore said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'*" It is the Lord! And look how Peter responds this time. He does not say depart from me for I am a sinful man. No! "*When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea.*" Not to drown himself but to get as close to Jesus as quickly as he possibly could. And he lets all the other disciples drag the net full of fish back to the shore; he leaves them to do all the work. Because what? He wants to get close to Jesus.

What makes the difference? Jesus has now died for Peter's sins and risen for his justification. Now Peter is starting to see the beauty and the power of the gospel. It is starting to dawn on him; pieces are starting to come together. He is realizing, "This is my Savior! I want to get near Him." Friends, I think a lot of us are hesitant in evangelism because we are hazy in our awareness of the beauty and the power of the gospel in our own lives. We know we are sinful but we think because of our sinfulness we need to stay at a distance from Jesus. But when we are at a distance from Jesus, we are never going to be able to make Him very compelling to others. Instead, Jesus says, "Draw near. Look at what I have done for you." As we draw near to Him and rejoice in Him, we realize our sinful condition does not disqualify us from being used by Him. That is good news. Jesus uses sinners to become catchers of men.

### **3. Our Fear of the Future Paralyzes Us**

Then the third reason we experience evangelistic paralysis is our fear of what being a faithful witness will demand of us in the future. We are afraid. Luke 5:10: "*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.*" It is speaking of something that is going to be ongoing and continuous. "Over and over again, I am going to use you to catch people and bring them into My Kingdom. This is going to be the theme of your life now." For many Christians, that is not good news. That is scary. Fishing for men is a fearful thing. We are thinking, "What if I don't know what to say? What if they reject me? I could lose my friends. I could lose my job. What if the government is hostile? What is it really going to cost me if the Lord makes my life a miracle and uses me in the lives of other people?"

What is it going to cost? The answer is in Luke 5:11, "*And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*" What did they leave behind? Everything! Boats, fishing tackle, their careers, their old sins, their security, their safety, the right to call their lives their own. They left it all behind. It cost them everything. In the words of Phil Ryken, "We give Him everything, completely resigning all that we are and all that we have over to Him and He graciously returns whatever He wants us to use for His glory." How is anyone going to know that Christ has surpassing value to us if we are not willing to give up some things for Him?

Can you picture what it's like when they bring those boats onto the shore and fish are spilling out on every side of the boats. It is the dream of a lifetime for a fisherman to catch this many fish. They just run away from the boats, following Jesus. As they are

running away they are saying to all the people on shore, “Free fish today, take as much as you want. You can have it all. We don’t need it anymore, we are following Him. We are going after Him.” They left everything and what? They followed Him.

I think that is where the accent should lie on this sentence. I think we hear, “THEY LEFT EVERYTHING and followed Him.” No, it should be, “They left everything and followed HIM.” It was almost a no brainer! “We get to follow HIM! We get HIM in our lives. We are going to leave that behind so that we can follow Him!” The accent should be on what is gained—what we gain not what we lose. To follow Him means to be deeply, inwardly attached to Him from here on out. Wherever Jesus goes, we go and He goes with us. He is among us. He is doing the work of an evangelist, we are following Him. He is faithfully living as a perfect Disciple, we are following Him. His Spirit is in us and wherever we go, Jesus is there before us; He has gone and prepared the way. The reason Jesus could speak so confidently about the success of Simon’s ministry and say, “*From now on you will be catching men*” is because Jesus was not calling Simon to act independently. Jesus was inviting Simon into His work, the work that He was going to do through Simon. Is it any different for us?

I want you to picture something. Picture that it is Jesus preaching here today. It is Jesus in our midst. Jesus is addressing us in a very real sense. We are coming to the end of the service now and Jesus pronounces the benediction. When you think of the end the service, do you think the Lord is saying, “Okay, you guys go out there and work; I will see you back here next week.” Is that the way you think our relationship with the Lord is? No, what happens is Jesus gives us His blessing. Jesus feeds us, He shepherds us here. He nourishes us. Then He goes to that back door and He says, “Follow Me. Follow Me out into the deep where I am doing My work. I am at work out there in the world. I am at work in the nations. I am at work in your family. Wherever you are going, I am going before you.” If we have the mindset that Jesus is going with us—Jesus is going before us—I think it changes the way we think about all our fears about evangelism.

What if we start a new habit this week? What if everywhere we go we breathe a quiet prayer to the Lord? “Lord, I thank You that You are already here; I thank You that You are already at work. Lord, help me see what You are doing in this place. Help me be sensitive to what You are up to. Help me be ready to participate in a work that You are doing here.” If we have a mindset of readiness and a realization that He is already working and we are following Him, it might change our outlook. It might make us more in tune and more ready to share Him with others.

The antidote to my fears about witnessing is to realize He's gone before me. He is preparing the way. He right there with me. He's never going to leave me. His Spirit is filling me. He is giving me all the power I need.

I want you to think about your life and the people in your life. Ask the Lord to make you sensitive to what He is doing and to make you ready to be used by God.

Maybe there is someone here who is not even sure you believe in Jesus. His word to you today is that He wants to do for you what He did for Simon Peter. He wants to claim you as His own and make you a follower of Him today. Right now, you can pray to the Lord Jesus and say, "I want to know You; I want to follow You." There are people afterwards who would be happy to pray with you. Just take a moment and pray before the Lord.

Lord, I pray that You would be catching people for Yourself this week. Make us so full of joy in You that we are like bait, drawing people closer to You. Help us realize that You are with us and You have gone before us. You know the failures that we feel and that paralyze us. You know the way we see our own weakness and sin and how it keeps us from rejoicing in You and sharing You with others. You know the things we are afraid of; all of our inadequacies. Lord, none of these prevent You from using us. We know You intend to use us and pray that we would be aware and ready and alert to the ways You want to work through us in the lives of others. Lord, where we are sluggish and paralyzed, we pray that we would be enlivened and active.

God, for any here this morning who don't know the joy of following Jesus, I pray that You would be drawing them into the gospel net and winning them to Yourself. Thank You that today we can become followers of You when we turn from our sin and realize what You have done for us on the cross and believe in You.

Lord, wherever we are, we need You to lead us. We make this our prayer now; lead us as we offer our lives for Your service. Prepare us for Exploring Christianity in six weeks. May it be a time when many of our friends and neighbors will be touched by the message of the gospel. Lord, we pray that You would enable us to be faithful for You, to Your Word and that You would use us for Your glory in our community. We ask this in your Holy Name. Amen.

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## **New Covenant Bible Church**

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ [emily@sermontranscribers.net](mailto:emily@sermontranscribers.net)