

## Following Jesus in 2017

Luke 5:1-11

Patrick Havens

January 1, 2017

---

In Luke 5 we'll be looking at Peter's first encounter with Jesus, when Jesus called him to follow Him. That's also our theme today: following Jesus in 2017. Our eager ambition this year is to know Him all the more. We'll begin by reading the first 11 verses of Luke 5:

*On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."*

*<sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." <sup>11</sup> And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*

An old Peanuts comic strip shows Lucy, Linus and Charlie Brown lying in the grass looking up at the clouds. "What do you think you see, Linus?" asks Lucy. Linus points to the clouds and answers, "Well, those clouds up there look to me like the map of British Honduras in the Caribbean. And that cloud up there looks a little like the profile of Thomas Eakins, the famous painter and sculptor. And that group of clouds over there gives me the impression of the stoning of Stephen. I can see the Apostle Paul standing there to one side." Then Lucy asks

Charlie, "What do you see in the clouds, Charlie Brown?" Charlie responds, "Well, I was going to say I saw a duckie and a horsie, but I changed my mind."

Maybe you can relate to Charlie when someone asks you, "Who is Jesus in the Gospels?" There is so much more you want to see; and how do you take it all in? On the occasion that Luke describes in chapter five, Peter was not expecting Jesus to reveal Himself to him. But Jesus was pursuing Peter by revealing some of Who He was.

As we consider this story, let's pray that God will open our eyes to see great things about Him in the coming year.

Jesus, we ask humbly that in 2017 You will give us a much greater glimpse of Who You are. Even now, we pray that You will use this passage to give us insight. We pray this in Your name. Amen.

Maybe you've heard someone say, "It's easy to be a Sunday Christian." And that may be true, at least in some countries. Here in the West it's fairly comfortable. Most employers give you the day off. You put it in your schedule. You show up. It's just a standard habit. One pastor commented that this pattern was probably Peter's experience up to that point. Everything was on the side for him.

As the crowd pressed into Jesus, notice who was not on the front row. Peter and his friends were off cleaning their nets, away from the activity. But as the crowds pressed in on Jesus, He began to pursue Peter. If you were watching this chapter in something like "The Jesus Film," the camera would begin with a wide-angle shot. You'd see the Sea of Galilee in the background. You'd see the crowds, a couple boats, the fishermen cleaning their nets and Jesus on the shore. Verses one through three give us the "wide-angle" view. The crowds press in on Jesus, He gets into the boat and starts teaching.

But then in verse four the camera zooms in. Jesus is now face to face with Simon. As readers, we join their conversation. And isn't it like our Lord to make ministry personal and to pursue us? Jesus is not content for us to stay on the side. The Sunday-only Christian life isn't going to work. It's not enough for Him. He pursues us and wants us to be all in with Him. This is what it means to be a disciple. We are to come under the lordship of Christ. Seven days a week, we are to be followers of Jesus. It's now our new identity. It's who we are.

Immediately prior to this passage Jesus was in Capernaum. The people wanted Him to stay there, but He told them, "I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God in other towns." His message was about the Kingdom and His reign. That's the good news for His disciples. It means we've come into His Kingdom here on earth. That's what He desired for Peter.

This actually wasn't Peter's first encounter with Jesus. Andrew was the one who first told Simon about Jesus Who then went to Simon's house, where his mother-in-law was sick. When Jesus prayed for her, she was healed. So already Jesus was on Simon's heels. "You are going to follow Me." He's pursuing him in every way which is exciting.

Let's consider the big question: what does it mean to follow Jesus in 2017? Here are three ways we can grow in our knowledge of Jesus.

### **1. A disciple takes Jesus seriously.**

A disciple obeys God's Word. He accepts Jesus for Who He is. David Jackson, an author and pastor in the United Kingdom, said it's one thing for Jesus to preach from your boat. It's another thing for Jesus to be the Captain of your boat. After Jesus finished speaking, He said to Simon, "*Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.*"

Think about how challenging this would be for Peter. I mean, what was Jesus' reputation at this point? He was the Son of Joseph, a carpenter. Peter was the son of a fisherman. He's thinking, "My family has been fishing the Lake of Gennesaret for as long as I can remember. And You're telling me now to go cast my net into the lake—a net that is for night fishing. We're tired. I'm ready to go home. I sleep during the day; I fish at night." So he says to Jesus, "Master, we've toiled all night and caught nothing. This won't work." But notice, Peter is beginning to understand. He calls Jesus "Master."

Suppose you have friends who own a business and they tell you they're in a slump and having a really hard time. Normally, you might say, "I'm sorry to hear that. I'll pray for you. I hope it gets better." But what if instead you said this? "Hey, I'll tell you what. Open your doors tonight at 2 a.m. There will be a flock of people there to buy all your stuff."

What does that imply about you? Somehow, you're in charge of that market. Obviously, your friends would think you're crazy. We can feel a little of Peter's tension, but he's already seen Jesus. He's already starting to get a sense of Jesus' mastery. He realizes Jesus is not an ordinary person. One truth about discipleship is that when you're at your lowest point, that's when you learn Who is really in control of the world.

Isn't it perfect timing for Jesus to approach Peter on the worst fishing day of his life? "*We toiled all night and took nothing.*" It's almost like the Lord Jesus has set this up. The boats are out on the lake and He says, "Fish, stay away from the boats. I have something planned for this man tomorrow morning..." Peter's failure prepares him for what Jesus has planned. He doesn't claim anything great. "We've caught nothing." That's where Jesus choses to meet him.

For us too, it's at our lowest points where Jesus moves into our lives. Following Jesus is not something we control. Instead, it means giving our lives to the One Who does control everything. Our failures can lead us to the place where we actually come to the end of ourselves and take seriously Who Jesus is. Simon is at the end of himself, and he chooses to trust the One Who knows.

When the Lord broke in on me, I was a first-year college student. I was going nowhere fast and I would have kept God on the side—I guarantee it. But one day I was walking my bike back to my apartment after class when someone I remembered from grade school met me. He said, “Hey, there’s a meeting this week on campus. I’m going to it. Do you want to go? It’s a Christian meeting.” I thought, why not?

So I showed up—and the lights went on. I have not been the same since. The seriousness of Jesus came over me. The guy had mercy on me and offered to meet with me. He started teaching me about God’s Word and prayer. I got involved in a church. These were key things in the Christian life and it only took one day to change me. Maybe you’ve had that experience. As it says in verse one, “*On one occasion...*” One day something broke in. Somebody spoke. Some leading happened, where Jesus broke into our lives. \*

That’s the good news. And that’s what discipleship is. We come to end of trusting ourselves, and we see Someone greater than us. This is the difference between the crowd and Peter at this point. It’s interesting that when we read about the crowd in the Gospel of Luke, it’s a little ambiguous. They’re pressing in on Jesus to the point that He has to jump in a boat or they’ll push Him into the sea. And later in the chapter the crowd is pressing in on Jesus to the extent that they prevent a paralytic man from getting to Him. The crowd isn’t necessarily a good model of discipleship, yet Jesus looks at them with compassion.

Now we’re seeing how Jesus is pursuing Peter and his family and partners. There’s something so intentional happening here. So Peter says, “Master, we toiled all night...but at Your word, I will throw down the net.” Faith is beginning to be created in Peter’s heart. It sounds like Mary’s response. When the word of God came to her, she said, “How can this be since I’m a virgin? How could I be with child?” But then she said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to Your word.” Notice Peter’s statement, “...at Your word...” Peter is starting to take Jesus seriously. He says, “At Your word, I will follow You.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the 19th century British pastor, says this in commenting on this passage: “At Thy word has been the password of all good men from the beginning until now. Noah built an ark ‘at Thy word.’ Abraham leaves the land of his childhood ‘at Thy word.’ Moses

lifts his rod in the presence of Pharaoh ‘at Thy word.’” Spurgeon closes with this statement: “This ought to be the rule of all Christians for the whole of their lives: at Thy word.”

We’re seeing faith being created in Peter. And like Peter, the disciple is one who takes Jesus seriously. He’s one who obeys God’s Word. The follower of Jesus listens to what He says. Even when it seems impossible, when it seems so radical or countercultural, the disciple sticks with Him.

As another example, think about Job. After all the speeches and all the conversations, he gets to the last chapter and says to the Lord, “I don’t know what I’ve said. I repent.” He reaches the end of himself. It’s so healthy when God gets us to that place where we no longer argue, but simply say, “I’m going to follow You. I don’t know, but I’m going to follow what You say.” So let’s be praying that in 2017 we get to the end of ourselves and that we take God’s Word seriously, even if it feels crazy. He knows what’s best, regardless of what the culture around us thinks.

## **2. A disciple sees Jesus clearly.**

Jesus’ greatness is evident here in this amazing miracle in verses six and seven: “*And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 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.*”

What a great scene, right? Nets breaking. Boats sinking. Fishermen—who do this for a living—astonished and amazed. It’s like manna from heaven. They’re thinking, “Oh, man—this is the mother lode. We’ve never had a catch like this before in our entire lives.” It’s clearly an amazing miracle they’re experiencing.

And it gives them a glimpse into the identity of Jesus, a window into Who He is. His divine power is shining brightly right before them and it so humbles Peter that all he can do is respond in humility: “*But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’*” (verse eight). An amazing transformation is happening in Peter. Before he called Jesus “Master,” but now he calls Him “Lord.”

Interestingly, Luke is changing Peter’s name as well. In the first part of Luke’s Gospel he’s called Simon. Here he’s called Simon Peter. And in the rest of the book he’s called Peter. What’s significant about that? Simon needs to die. The Simon who found his identity in his job, the Simon who trusted in himself, the Simon who was relying on his own resources—that Simon needs to die. And he’s going to be ‘born again’ as Peter—a new man who takes Jesus seriously and sees Who He is. Peter is becoming the rock (Matthew 16:18). Jesus is changing him. But at

this point Peter is already grasping some of this. He realizes how high Jesus is, and all he can do is drop on bended knee, confessing, “I’m a sinful man, O Lord.” He feels unworthy.

It’s so good that he had that response. We can think of other possible responses he might have had—negative responses or excuses. “Well, Jesus, normally we fish pretty well. Normally we can do this thing.” He might have been embarrassed. Or he might have boasted. “Yeah, one time we really did catch a lot, Jesus. We really have done better before.” Or even twisting it. “Jesus, You’d be a great partner in this work. Would You like to be half-owner of my business? I’ll be a millionaire in no time.”

No, he’s feeling completely unworthy to be with Jesus: “Depart from me!” What does Jesus say, essentially? “No.” He’s right there and He’s not going anywhere.

When we read stories of people who claim to have had near-death experiences and met Jesus, none of them walk away humbled. But anyone who has ever met God in the Bible was immediately humbled. They were flat-out undone.

For example, when Isaiah meets the Lord, he says, “Woe is me. I’m ruined. I’m dead. I’m a man of unclean lips...” (Isaiah 6:1-6). Not to mention his other sins. Just the words he’d said made him realize he was so guilty before God. Anyone who meets God responds in this way. When we read our Bibles, we should pray in 2017, “Lord, may I see how great You are. May I see Your holiness, Your majesty, and may I be humbled. Open me up more to Your presence. Let me see more of Who You are. Let me see glorious things about You.”

That’s how you know you’re actually seeing Jesus clearly—when you’re humbled in His presence and aware of your sin. We see this also in Luke 15, where the prodigal son returns to his father feeling completely unworthy. “I’m not even worthy to be called your son.” But there’s a tension here. Even while he feels humbled, he’s about to experience the miracle of grace.

Think about what’s harder for Jesus: to fill these nets with fish, or to forgive a person. This is going to be the story later in this chapter with the paralytic. The people are surprised that He forgives sin and He asks them, “What’s easier? To say your sins are forgiven, or to say stand up and walk?” Which is harder for Jesus to do? Think about what Jesus had to do to forgive sins and embrace Peter. He went to the cross for Peter.

That’s what He’s done for our forgiveness, too. He’s experienced the Father turning His face away so that you and I would experience the Father’s love and embrace. When we feel like saying, “Go away, Lord,” instead He holds us near. This is what Peter is experiencing here. But the miracle of the catch of fish is also something of a parable. Isn’t that what Jesus is doing with Peter and these other men? He’s drawing them in to see Who He is. He doesn’t push them away.

The closer we get to Him, the more we need to be ready to be shocked by our blemishes, weaknesses and mixed motives. I mean, hold on. A lot of people have observed that when they come to Jesus, they actually feel worse. They're waking up to how bad they were before. Yet at the same time they have this profound experience of how much more gracious, loving and caring He is.

This must have gone deep with Peter. By the time we get to John 21, Jesus does this with Peter and his friends again. But it's interesting what changed. The first time, they had fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus is at the shore and says, "Throw your nets in." They didn't even question Him this time. They threw their nets in and pulled in an enormous load of fish. What does Peter do? He grabs his coat and jumps in the water, wading toward Jesus.

Think about what clicked in his mind. The first time he said, "Depart from me." Now he's racing toward Jesus. That's when you know grace is actually working in your heart. That's instinctive. That's when the gospel has become real to you. It is really functioning in our hearts when we as sinners run to Jesus. That's why the disciples were pursuing Him, and that's the good news of what we also can experience.

So we should be praying for this in 2017: "May I really come to understand grace. May I really comprehend Your gospel and what You've done for me. May I quickly run to You." But who else do we have to turn to?

### **3. A disciple joins Jesus in His mission.**

So following Jesus in 2017 means taking Him seriously, seeing Him clearly and finally, it's also joining Jesus in His mission, participating in His calling in our lives. This miracle of the fish is both an historical miracle and a parable, giving us insight into what Jesus is doing. Look at verse ten: "*And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.'*"

Right away Jesus connects the events of the moment to His mission. "You're getting to know Me, but guess what I'm about, Simon. I'm about catching people and I'm going to involve you in My work. As a matter of fact, you'll be shocked by the people who will believe in Me. They will be lepers, paralytics, widows. We're going to get the outcasts. We're not going to be living in palaces. But that's My heart. I'm going to show you this. Stay with Me. Follow Me and watch Me. I have a heart for these people. We're going to experience this together. You'll be fishing for and catching men and women."

If the analogy works, then that was a great catch they had just seen. The fish were so numerous the nets were breaking and the boats were sinking. So what's Jesus' big plan? What's His mission? How many people does He want to bring in? This is exciting! He wants to draw

numerous people to Himself. It may be chaotic and even scary to have your nets breaking and your boats on the verge of sinking all the time.

But Jesus is putting this before them: “Here you go, fishermen. Here’s My heartbeat: fish for people.” His point is not really the vocation, like being a pastor or a missionary; at the end, it does say they left everything and followed Him. But obviously what He’s talking about here for all of us is that our main identity is with Jesus in whatever occupation we have. We may be a Christian businessman or a Christian pastor or a Christian leader in the community. But wherever we are, our identity is now with Christ. And that’s going to be fearful. It’s going to feel socially awkward when we identify with Him. There’s going to be a security breach, so to speak, when we follow Jesus. There’s a sense of having our hearts gripped as we follow Christ in this world. But we are called to do this.

It’s interesting what a test this was for Peter in this moment. He had just experienced probably the biggest catch of his life, then Jesus tells him to leave it and follow Him. In John 21, they brought the fish in and probably didn’t have to leave them. But in Luke 5, they had to leave it all behind. Peter is learning at the outset to deeply trust Jesus with everything—and that’s fearful. That’s why Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid.”

As he follows Jesus, Peter will be continually growing in his understanding of Jesus’ most common feeling toward people: compassion. Jesus saw the crowd as sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). But Simon isn’t called alone. Jesus called a community of people to follow Him together. This is another reason we don’t have to fear His calling.

Two thoughts as we close: Peter is going to eventually learn that because of the gospel—because of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection—he doesn’t need to fear. Jesus went to the lowest place so we don’t have to fear that.

In a sense Peter doesn’t really see the catch while he was with Jesus, and at least a couple times they weren’t even allowed to minister in communities. Then in the book of Acts he begins to see the kind of catch he would bring in. It’s then the reality of the cross so grips Peter’s life that it becomes a model of what he was called to do. Likewise, his life is an example of what we are called to do and we don’t need to fear either.

The second thing we see in Jesus’ words— “Do not fear” —is this: Jesus says, “*I will make you become fishers of men*” (Mark 1:17). Throughout the time of the Gospels, Jesus was physically with Peter and the other disciples. But later He was with them—and now with us—through the Holy Spirit. This call to catch people is possible through the Spirit Who is with us to accomplish this. Catching people implies something about the nations—and the neighbors—we have: they’re in bondage. They’re trapped and lost. They need freedom. They need to be caught

and rescued by God. This grips the hearts of Jesus' disciples. So being a disciple means obeying God, taking Him seriously, seeing Him clearly and then following Him in His mission of rescuing people.

Above all, as we think about 2017, we need to ask how we should be praying. I think we should pray for greater fruitfulness in our lives. "Lord, You promised we would be fishers of men. Will You draw me into relationships this year? May one person who doesn't know You be drawn to You this year through me?" That's like fishing with a hook—just one person. But if we all pray that, that's quite a catch. That's like a full-net catch. So let's pray this year, "Use me, Lord. I want to follow You. You gave us this parable—this miraculous catch of fish. May that become true in me."

Remember the important dynamic of being able to run to Jesus as a sinner, knowing Him and seeing Him clearly. It's a combination of humility and confidence. That's what makes us powerful in our communities. Tim Keller put it this way: "If salvation is by works, there may be days when you feel confident, but you don't feel humble. Or if you've really screwed up, there are days you feel humble but not confident. But a gospel of grace gives you both humility and confidence. That powerful combination is what makes our ministry attractive and effective."

Jesus presses in to make us His own, even when we're not expecting it. He's going to do that this year. He reveals His power and compassion, even when we don't deserve it. He promises to be with us so that we can learn from Him.

Let's pray.

God, we thank You for Your goodness in our lives. You are wonderful to us. Jesus, thank You for not pushing us away when we feel so sinful. You dealt with that on the cross so that You can hold us. You're changing us. We're now learning that discipleship is not a program; it's who we are. It's who You're making us to be. We are Your followers. We're identified with You. We're Your people—Your family—and we thank You for that.

We pray that this year we might follow You boldly and humbly. We want to know You better and to be Your witnesses in this community. Thank You for Your heart for people. Your heart of compassion is way beyond ours. May we follow You closely. Draw us near, we pray. In Christ's name. Amen.

---

## 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](http://sermontranscribers.net) ♦ [emily@sermontranscribers.net](mailto:emily@sermontranscribers.net)