

Simon Peter

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to the scripture we read in the Gospel according to Luke in chapter 5, and we'll read again at verse 8.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell to Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man.

The Lake of Galilee figures very often in the ministry of Jesus. It was in Galilee, and I think within sight of the lake, that our Lord delivered what we call the Sermon on the Mount.

It was on the waters of Galilee that he walked on the water to the boat in which the disciples were having trouble because of the boisterousness of the weather and the sea, and they were struggling as the storm raged.

And it was to this lakeside that the Lord directed his disciples that they should meet him after his resurrection.

[1 : 13] Now, here we have an account of another incident by the lakeside, which occurred quite early in the ministry of Jesus, before he had gathered the whole company of his disciples about him.

He wanted to teach a crowd who had come to hear him, but there was no suitable pulpit, no suitable place where he might stand and be heard.

But there were a couple of boats there. The fishermen had vacated them and were at that time washing their nets. The fishermen were not in optimistic mood.

It's got to be said that almost certainly they were frustrated and fed up because they had a whole night fishing and they had caught nothing.

And the fewer nights like that they had, the better for them and their families. Well, Jesus interrupted their net washing and asked for the use of one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon Peter, who shortly would become a disciple of Jesus.

[2 : 36] He wanted that so that he could address the people from offshore. And after teaching the people, he told Simon to put out into the deep water and let down his net.

Well, this might seem just a little bit annoying to these men, who were sort of wounding their sense of expertise and their feelings of frustration.

But Peter put that aside, told the Lord of their unsuccessful night, and said, At your bidding, because you say so, Master, I will let down the net.

And they followed a truly marvelous catch that astonished them all. And this is not just a fisherman's boast.

This was actual reality. They did have a tremendous and unexpected catch. So we want to reflect on some of the lessons that this incident teaches us.

[4 : 03] And the first lesson is this, that the Lord is no one's debtor. The Lord is no one's debtor.

It's an indication of the poverty that Jesus accepted when he came into the world, that he required to borrow Peter's boat.

Well, you know the grace of our Lord, that for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. Well, these men were given an example of that.

But for the use of their boat, they were rewarded with two boatloads of fish. You see, though Jesus was poor and had to borrow, he is no one's debtor.

And that's an illustration of how God uniformly deals with his people. No one can ever say, God owes me.

[5 : 13] God is indebted to me. Peter tried that once. Remember after the rich young ruler had come to Jesus and Jesus spoke about how difficult it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom because they weren't willing to abandon all for him.

And Peter said to Jesus, We have left all and followed you. What do we get out of it? And the Lord reminded him, You don't make God a debtor.

There's no one who leaves father or mother or sister or brother or house or property for my sake and the gospels. But even in this age, we'll receive abundantly more and in the age to come, eternal life.

God is not indebted to anyone. No one who knows the grace of God can ever boast of what he has done or given to advantage and advance the kingdom of God.

Always, as debtors to God's bounty, we are conscious of being enriched beyond measure out of the fullness of God.

[6 : 30] Think of an Old Testament example. During a drought in Israel, God's prophet Elijah was sent to a secret place in the land where for a time he was fed by ravens and drunk out of a nearby stream.

But when the stream dried up, he was sent to Zarephath where he met a poor widow who was gathering a few sticks to feed the fire in which she was going to cook a last meal for herself and her son.

When Elijah asked for a morsel of bread and a little water, she had to tell him, I don't have any bread, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug.

And I'm gathering sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son. After that, we'll die. Then Elijah said something that might at first hearing sound, well, at the very least, insensitive, probably arrogant and indeed presumptuous.

He told the woman to do as she intended, but he insisted, first, first, make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me.

[8 : 14] And then, make something for yourself and your son. It seemed a pretty, it seemed to be making a priority claim in spite of the little that the widow had.

But then he made it clear that she would not lose, but rather gain to last, she would gain food to last her until the famine and the drought passed.

For this is what the Lord God of Israel says, the jar of flour will not be used up, and the jug of oil will not dry until the Lord brings rain upon the land.

And that is how it happened. God had made a priority claim to be sure, but he richly rewarded the one who gave at his request, for he is no one's debtor.

God gave a life to the world to the reality. You would have said so with regard to Saul of Tarsus, for example.

[9 : 33] He was a young man on the up. His contemporaries forecast a bright and prosperous future for him. But God called him to his service, and this service entailed a good deal of hardship and suffering and poverty and dire privation.

People who had known Saul in earlier times might have said that he got a bad deal. But that same Saul, who is Paul, insisted that he had been greatly enriched.

He counted all things but loss. Nothing could compare with the knowledge of Jesus Christ as his Savior.

And the righteousness that he bestowed, he knew that God is no one's debtor. Two boatloads of fish for the hire of a boat for a morning was pretty generous treatment.

There were others from whom the Lord borrowed. There was the owner of a colt on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem, and there was a man who provided a room, an upper room, for Jesus and his disciples to observe the feast of the Passover.

[11 : 06] We're not told how they were rewarded, but we can be quite certain that they were rewarded and that very richly. We've got to remember the problem, he who lends to the poor lends to the Lord and he will reward him for what he has done.

God is no one's debtor. of course, the story of Paul, the apostle, reminds us that God's rewards are not always given in material and temporal benefits, but who can put a price?

Who can put a price on a conscience void of offense toward God and man? Who can put a price on a soul that's at peace with God?

Who would exchange the hope of glory for material gain? Listen to what Paul says, even reviewing the hardships that he himself sustained.

Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. This is what lasts.

[12 : 27] Material gain is soon exhausted. When temporal riches are of no further use, the eternal reward endures.

God rewards the faithful eternally. He says to them, enter into the joy of your Lord. He is no one's debtor.

That's the first lesson. Now the second lesson we learn from this incident is this. Obedience is the precursor of blessing.

Obedience is the precursor of blessing. Let down your net for a catch, Jesus said to Simon Peter. Because you say it, because you say it, I will let down the net is Peter's response.

And that obedient response was followed by the blessing of a miraculous and abundant catch. It was as simple as that.

[13 : 39] But is obedience always simple? always simple. The Lord's command seemed to mock the futile efforts of Peter and his companions.

These were men expert in the art of fishing. Fishing wasn't just a sport to them, it was a way of life. And they regarded their expertise highly.

they were not likely to take kindly to instruction from a mere bystander. Especially when their feelings were sore and raw after a fruitless night's work.

But then this was no ordinary bystander. We don't know at this point just how much these men knew of Jesus at this time.

But they had sufficient knowledge of him to be very respectful to him and to recognize that he had a degree of authority. So Peter addresses the Lord very respectfully.

[14 : 56] But it's an interesting thing to see that the term in which Jesus addresses the Lord at this point, he says, Master, because you say so, I'll let down the net.

And the word that we translate master is one that signifies that he recognized somebody in authority. But when the whole incident is finished and he bows at Jesus' knees, he uses a different word altogether.

Depart from me, Lord. The word he uses there signifying that he recognized the total power, the totality of the power and authority of Jesus.

But knowing what little they did, they responded to his counsel and direction. And so they let down the net.

It may not always be specifically stated, as in the fifth commandment, which the apostle calls the first commandment with promise.

[16 : 08] But I think it's true to say that every commandment of God, every instruction that he gives, has within it a latent promise of blessing.

And that obedience to that instruction will procure blessing. all commandments are framed for our good and the glory of God.

Sometimes the Lord's direction is a deliberate test of obedience. It was so you remember in the case of Abraham when God told him to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

The instruction seemed so objectionable to natural affection. It seemed to mock pious conviction and it certainly seemed to stultify all evangelical hope.

But Abraham knew God's voice. Abraham knew that God is able to reverse death itself and to raise up his son again from the dead.

[17 : 31] So Abraham obeyed and obeying God he received an immense blessing. I swear by myself declares the Lord that because you have done this I will bless you and through you your offspring all nations will be blessed because you have obeyed me.

Now no one is going to pretend that the blessing obtained by Peter and his companions compares with the blessing that Abraham received but then neither was the test of obedience in the same category as that of Abraham.

What is demonstrated by the comparison is that obedience at whatever level honors God and God honors the obedient.

God honors the obedient he rewards the obedient he posits a causal connection between obedience to instruction and its reward.

He said to Abraham because you have done this because you have done this I will bless you but this doesn't mean that obedience earns God's blessing.

[19 : 08] The blessing is the reward of grace blessing is the reward of grace. It's not a payment it is a reward.

It exceeds and because it's not a payment but a reward it exceeds everything that we could ask or even imagine. No one can measure the generosity of God to those who faithfully serve him.

he rewards us on a scale that is beyond anything we could imagine. And that's the second lesson.

Obedience is a precursor of blessing. Then there's a third lesson a third lesson to this effect that God's control extends to all creatures.

God's control extends to all creatures and situations. I read somewhere that Jesus may have seen the signs of a shoal of fish when he told the disciples to let down the net.

[20 : 30] well maybe he did. But the question still has to be asked how did that shoal come to be just there at that time the time that Jesus wanted to reward the fishermen?

Just coincidence? At all? Just coincidence? that's the usual trite answer of those who don't like the idea that God controls our events.

But control them he does. And the control extends to all creatures people animals birds fish the elements of what we call nature.

Jesus himself told us that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of God. The fact that God's omnipotence controls all events is foundational to the believer's security.

We know that God makes all things work together for good to those whom he has called. We don't live in a holy mechanistic world.

[21 : 52] We don't live in a world which is sealed off from divine intervention. It is the fact of God's righteousness and faithfulness armed with omnipotence that secures order and stability in the world in which we live.

God's plan and purpose always move toward the consummation which he has intended. for as the psalmist reminds us all are his servants.

But we can't leave this topic without reflecting on the mystery that it involves and the fact that it confronts us with events that most people think deride the idea or the concept of a just and jealous and loving God.

We face the fact that the omnipotence which congregated a multitude of fish in the lake of Galilee also controls the movements heavenly, earthly, subterranean, and submarine.

The submarine quake which devastated so much of Asia not so long ago and brought death and misery to thousands of people was under the control of the Almighty.

[23 : 30] The hurricane that has so devastated part of the Gulf States of the United States was under God's control. And we have no right, we have no right in our ignorance to make our ignorance of why God allowed such things to suggest that it is because of some demonic ill will or powerlessness on God's part.

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? About a calamity on a much lesser scale Jesus declared, I tell you unless you repent you shall all likewise perish.

Sinful people, and I don't mean to suggest that those who suffer from natural disaster are more sinful than others. Sinful people such as all of us are, are too readily disposed to think that God owes us as a living, though he has plainly declared to us that the wages of sin is death.

God's control is universal. There's a fourth lesson.

Though omnipotence, though omnipotence is scary and terrifying, omnipotence generously exercised inspires worship.

[25 : 21] Omnipotence generously exercised inspires worship. And the first part of that statement we don't have to expand.

so the events that have shocked us in these past days, the seemingly absolute power of what people call the power of nature, so destructive, so devastating.

We can understand the cries of terror. We can understand the protests of those who feel devastated. We can understand when they tell us we have had enough and more than enough.

Depart from us, go away from us, oh God. We can't endure anymore. Yes, we can understand that perfectly.

For this display of naked power is terrifying, scary to the utmost degree. yet strangely enough, this is not how Peter saw the exercise of our Lord's infinite power.

[26 : 42] Peter saw power, but not just naked power. He saw omnipotence exercised graciously, bringing about a reward to his obedient subjects.

It still filled Peter with amazement, but it filled him with a sense, you know, what happened to Peter demonstrates how kindness can break us down more than any true words of accusation or condemnation.

Kindness breaks us down. And Peter saw it like that. He saw the power of the Lord exercise for them, and he realised we are not fit company, we are not fit company for this Lord.

And so Peter says, go away from me. You know, as Peter expresses it, he doesn't really know how to express what he feels, but he's got, he's troubled for words.

What he wants to tell the Lord is, I'm not fit company for you. But does he really mean the Lord to go from him? I think he's like the man to whom, who said to the Lord, when the Lord challenged him if he believed, he said, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.

[28 : 30] And Peter's like that at this moment. I'm not fit company, I can't, you are so pure, Lord, and I am a sinful man.

But he sees the omnipotence of Christ exercised graciously. So he's not, he's not in the sense in which the devastated people cry out in terror.

He is in a healthy sense, recognizing his own unfitness for the Lord who has been kind to him.

And he wants to continue with the Lord, but he wonders if that's possible. Though the display of omnipotence is terrifying, omnipotence exercised graciously inspires worship.

one last lesson. The experience of grace ensures a life that's focused on Jesus.

[29 : 47] The long-term result of this encounter with Jesus was that Peter, James, and John left everything and followed him.

One person became more important in their thinking and living than anyone else. Family interests, business interests, all interests were made subservient to sharing in the fellowship of work for the glory of the Son of God.

In all things, he was accorded the preeminence. And this measured up to Jesus' own word that anyone following him must be prepared to leave family and friends and fortune.

It may not happen as dramatically in every case as it did with the disciples, but over the centuries there are many cases where lives, where cases of spectacular reconstruction people's lives when they have perceived the worthiness, the all worthiness of Jesus as the Son of God and Saviour.

It happens in the case of everyone who receives the grace of God. It has to be asserted, of course, that experience of the experience of every disciple, everyone who with single-hearted interest, subjecting devotion follows Jesus Christ, knows that his life has been fully rewarded.

[31 : 40] An apostle like Paul could list a whole catalogue of troubles and afflictions and sufferings that he endured for the name of Jesus, but he could still boast of the super abounding joy that he had in the Lord.

So focus always on Jesus. This is perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from the whole incident. Focus always on Jesus.

you'll never then think too highly of yourself. You'll never become obsessed with the losses or disadvantages that you have sustained in your discipleship.

Focus always on Jesus and you'll know the good part that shall never never be taken away. The sheer wonder of his friendship, the deep shame of personal unworthiness, that may even make us sometimes say like Peter, I'm not fit to be in your presence.

Go from me Lord, I'm not fit to be in your presence. But oh, it'll be swallowed up, swallowed up in the sheer amazement that this Lord, whatever our disposition is, this Lord stays with us and stays faithfully with us all our days and into eternal glory.

[33 : 19] Let us pray. How great thou art, O Lord, how magnificent in power and majesty, enthroned above the highest heavens, yet thou art the God who comes down to us, comes down right beside us in our time of need, speaks to us the words that no man can speak, speaks to us and touches us that we may be healed in our souls, that we may have contentment of spirit.

Help us then to follow thee and to abide in thy love. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.