

The Day the Fish Jumped into the Boat

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In Luke 5:1-11, the Bible has a wonderful story about a teaching miracle that Jesus did at the Lake of Gennesaret. Before we go any further, I dare you to look at a map and find this lake. Luke is the only N.T. author to give it that name. Matthew calls it the Sea of Galilee, and John calls it both the Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Tiberias. So what's the deal? Gennesaret was a town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee that was originally called Chinnereth in the Old Testament, but in the first century influence of Greek language and culture, it was changed to the Greek name of Gennesaret. People in that area often called the lake by the name of this town, and Luke being a Gentile writing to Greeks used that Greek name for the Sea of Galilee. No trace of this city remains today, so why are you looking at your map for it?

The Sea of Galilee is an interesting natural lake, I can't think of anything like it that I have ever heard of. It is 682 feet below sea level with a depth that ranges from 80 feet to 200 ft. deep. It is 13 miles long and 4 to 7.5 miles wide, and surrounded by hills overlooking it. Its water supply comes from Mt. Hermon about 26-30 miles north of it. Mt. Hermon rises to a peak of 9230' with plenty of snow collected on it. The runoff forms the Jordan River which flows into the Sea of Galilee on its north side and out of the lake on its south side. The current running through the lake along with the depth and temperature make for excellent fishing. This is also the main water supply of Israel from Mt. Hermon down through Galilee into the Jordan River flowing through the east side of Israel. Although Mt. Hermon straddles the border between Lebanon and Syria, Israel captured the southern side of it in the 1967 war. It produces the water supply of Israel, and also has the early warning system for Israel's defense since it looks down on her neighbors.

The Catch, the Call, and the Commitment

Getting back to our story in Luke 5, we find Jesus at this lake teaching a large crowd the Word of God.

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Israel, Sea of Galilee (Lake of Tiberias) (Photo credit: Wikipedia)[/caption]

The enthusiastic crowd was pressing in on Him so He wisely took a fishing boat and anchored it just off shore to create some

space so the whole crowd could see and hear Him. This was no doubt the first ever FLOATING PULPIT. The hill along the shore provided a natural amphitheater for the crowd. When He finished speaking He said to the owner of the boat, "Simon, put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch". We know from John 1:40 that Simon and Andrew had been at Jesus' baptism months earlier, and they identified Jesus then as the Messiah. Simon respectfully answered that they had worked hard all night, but caught nothing.

Commercial fishing was very hard labor done mostly at night when the fish came up to shallower water to feed. They used huge dragnets as long as 300' with corks on the top and weights on the bottom. It was back breaking work to lift the nets up, row the boat, and throw the nets in the lake in a semi circle, then haul them in hand over hand, only to do so again and again all night. Simon had not slept and was physically spent, but more than that he was a professional fisherman and Jesus was a carpenter. Therefore it was only out of respect and faithfulness that Simon agreed to "let down the nets" after spending hours cleaning them.

Was Jesus concerned for their fishing business? No, this was a teaching opportunity for the disciples. What they really needed was a lesson in priorities and commitment. They had been "called" to service by Jesus months earlier at the Jordan River, but here they were back at their business. I take it they were just like us—they viewed service to the Lord as a good deed done by volunteers. After a little while, you go home and tend to your own business and family. They had not learned or experienced that Jesus requires us to turn over all of our life to Him. Paul said it well in Gal.2:20, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.."; then again in Colossians 3:17, "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ".

Peter knew that there were no fish, and that it was a waste of time, but because it's Jesus he complies. You can just imagine all the rolling of eyes, yawning, and grumbling as they loaded the boat with 1000 lbs. of nets and row out into the lake. When they finally let the nets down, the miraculous occurred—they didn't just catch some fish, but a great quantity such that their nets were tearing from the weight. It was the BONANZA, the big one that they had dreamed of—the BIG PAYDAY. They called for help' and both boats were so full of fish that they began to sink.

How could there be so many fish when before there was none? This was not a case of the fish not biting. They were using nets before—they just had not been there. The only conclusion reachable was that Jesus sovereignly controlled nature either by calling the fish to this location or just creating them. Either way it was a mind blowing experience for Simon Peter.

When Your Ship Comes In

On Sundays when I watch NFL football games, and the pro athletes make a big catch, what do they do? When their Bonanza, their "big catch" occurs, they pound their chest, strut around basking in the glory, and even point at the sky as if acknowledging that God has blessed them mightily and helped them win the big game. Naturally then, I expect Simon Peter to jump out of the boat, spike a big fish, point to the sky, and do a really cool dance there for the crowd that witnessed the event. Next, if it was me, I would load up the haul of fish and cash in at the nearest market, but the really big "payday" would come with my "book deal". I would hire an agent to negotiate a big advance along with movie rights; after all Simon had worked hard all his life, he was a self made man, and now his ship had come in. After hiring a ghost writer to enhance the book, I would go on the talk show circuit and let Oprah help me sell the book. Next would come meetings with producers for a major movie deal. I would insist on Tom Cruise playing my part. Somebody like Earnest Borgnine or Karl Malden could play Jesus. All in all, I should walk away with high "seven figures" and be set for life.

In spite of what NFL players might do, Simon had a surprising reaction to his big catch. Simon now saw himself and Jesus in a whole new light. Simon realized there was a massive distinction between himself and Jesus. Simon told Jesus to leave him because "I am a sinful man". This awesome miracle that Simon had just experienced brought Simon face to face with his own unworthiness. In fact that was what he was telling Jesus—depart from me because I am not worthy of you. Think of the irony, because Simon told Jesus to depart from him because Simon was not worthy, Jesus actually drew Simon closer to Himself. Simon learned something about Jesus and something about himself. He learned that Jesus is the righteous Lord of all creation, and he learned that he didn't have the right to even be in His presence much less to be favored by Jesus. Simon learned about grace when Jesus said in spite of Simon's sin, "Follow me...from now on you will be catching men." Now Peter and his partners learned the intended lesson—now they turned over the rest of their lives to Him. Verse 11 says they got out of the boat, left the fish, the nets, and everything "and followed Him."

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Jesus had invaded Simon's personal world---his lake, his boat, his nets, his business, his town. Simon worked at fishing, but Jesus was the Lord of the fish and the fishermen. Experiencing Christ's power flooded Simon with a sense of his own unworthiness and sin. Thus, feeling unworthy, he asked Jesus to go away, but Jesus called Simon to come closer. Most people work on their big deals and their life revolves around them, but Simon walked away from his big deal. He left behind the biggest haul of his life because his priorities were changed forever.

Conclusion

Will you surrender the command of your ship and let Jesus be captain? Are you willing to move into deeper water? The rewards may surprise you.

Did Jesus' prophecy about catching men come true? Not immediately, but later in Acts 2 Simon Peter preached his first sermon in Jerusalem and to his amazement 3000 people believed in Jesus as their Savior.

Jesus is not calling us all to drop everything and walk away from our business and family, but He is calling all of us to rearrange our priorities, and make Jesus the center of every area of our lives. We are not volunteers that come and go at our leisure. We are sold out to the One who bought our eternal lives. Like the poker player in Texas Hold Em says at that crucial climactic moment, I'M ALL IN.

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