

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“At Your Word I Will Let down The Net”

By Bobby Witherington

“Now when He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your net for a catch.’ 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” (Luke 5:4, 5).

These verses have to do with an incident which occurred early in the earthly ministry of Jesus. To get the entire story one should read verses 1-11 of this chapter. Also, inasmuch as Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20 apparently relate to the same incident, then these verses should also be read in order to get the complete picture of that which transpired on this occasion.

By way of background information, it should be mentioned that by this point in time, John the Immerser had already identified Jesus as ***“The Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world”*** (John 1:29). Moreover, John had baptized Jesus, at which time the Spirit descended like a dove and abode upon Him, and God the Father broke the silence, declaring that ***“this is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased”*** (Matt. 3:16, 17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:21, 22; John 1:32-34). Also, by this point in time Jesus had already preached in the region of Galilee and had performed many miracles. In brief, Jesus had ***“astonished”*** the people with both ***“His teaching”*** and the mighty works He performed (Luke 4:31-37). We are not surprised therefore to learn that ***“the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God”*** (Luke 5:1).

And this brings us to the incident described in Luke 5:1-11. Jesus was then standing ***“by the lake of Gennesaret”*** (v. 1), also known as the Sea of Tiberias, or the Sea of Galilee. Because of the crowd, Jesus got into a boat which belonged to Simon and asked Simon to ***“put out a little from the land,”*** at which time ***“He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat”*** (vv. 2-3). It is most likely that this arrangement provided a natural acoustically-oriented amphitheater in which to address the multitudes. Doubtlessly the scenic surroundings, as well as the flawless manner in which the Master Teacher spoke, made a lasting impression upon all who heard.

However, in all likelihood Simon Peter was not mentally prepared for what followed! When Jesus ***“stopped speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your net for a catch!’”*** (v. 4). Most any avid, but discouraged fisherman, could empathize with Peter at this point. Simon replied, saying, ***“Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net”*** (v. 5).

Let us remember that Jesus was known as ***“the carpenter’s son”*** (Mark 13:55). Peter was a fisherman by profession. Moreover, they had fished during the night, the more likely time to catch fish. In fact, they had ***“toiled all night and caught nothing”*** (v. 5). Having ***“toiled all night,”*** you can be sure he was worn out. And having ***“caught nothing,”*** you can be sure he was discouraged – evidently so in view of the fact that he fished for a living! One would not be greatly surprised if Peter had therefore answered, saying, “Jesus, you stick to your **preaching**, and we will take care of the fishing!”

But Peter did not take this approach. It is true that Peter first replied by reminding Jesus that ***“we have toiled all night and caught nothing.”*** However, his response was most positive, for he then said, ***“Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”*** It seems that He could not understand why Jesus made such a request. However, Peter did not question the One whom he respectfully called ***“Master.”*** Instead of hesitating, deliberating, remonstrating, or questioning, tired Peter promptly **obeyed!**

And you surely know the rest of the story! ***“They caught a great number of fish,”*** so many that they ***“signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.”*** In fact, both boats were so ***“full...that they began to sink”*** (v. 7)!

By now, the Lord had really gotten Peter's attention! Peter's initial reaction was to fall down before Jesus and say, "**Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord**" (v. 3). In saying, "**depart from me,**" Peter did not show disrespect for Jesus. Quite to the contrary, this was a normal reaction for one so aware of his own sinfulness, while standing before the Lord of infinite power and holiness. It reminds us of Isaiah, some seven centuries B.C., who was treated to a vision of the Lord's infinite holiness, and who immediately responded by saying, "**Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips. And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts**" (Isa. 6:5).

And this brings us back to Luke 5:10,11 wherein we read of Jesus telling Simon to "**not be afraid,**" and then informed Simon along with James and John, that "**from now on you will catch men.**" We are also pleased to note that these men then "**forsook all and followed Him.**"

Observations:

There are several approaches one could profitably take with regards to the practical applications that can be made of these verses. For example, one could discuss the success that accompanies the scriptural labors of those who sincerely heed the Masters challenge. Or an analogy could be made between fishing for fish and **fishing for men**. Or much could be said of the practical significance and modern applications that could be made of the statement, "**they forsook all and followed Him**" (v. 11). And surely there are times when the Lord's people should leave the safety of shallow water and really "**launch out into the deep**" in a determined effort to "**catch**" multitudes of precious souls in the gospel net.

But for want of space, we must now confine our remarks to the significance of Peter's statement, "**At Your word I will let down the net.**" The fact is this: Peter "**let down the net**" – not because he wanted to or could see the advantage of so doing – but because Jesus **told** him to! Peter was well aware of the failure and frustration of the previous night's efforts, when all available evidence and previous experience indicated that nighttime was the more fruitful time for catching fish. If they caught "**nothing**" during the night, any further effort in the day would be fruitless. Or so it seemed! But Jesus knew better! Yes, Peter had his faults. But on this occasion, he showed profound respect for the "**word**" of the Savior!

By way of **application**, one might wonder "why is it necessary to be baptized?"— especially when, to the carnal mind, there can be no apparent connection between one's body being immersed in water and his **soul** being cleansed of sin. While other replies might be made regarding this point, there is one main answer why a person should be baptized. Jesus, in His "**word,**" told us to be baptized (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, etc.) Or in such an evil world as this, one might question the practical wisdom of loving one's enemy. So why do it? Because of the "**word**" of the "**Master!**" (cf. Matt. 5:43-45). Or in an age when so many are "turned on" by lively instrumental music, fun and games, and church-sponsored recreation, many question the intelligence of those who refuse to become so involved. There is one primary reason – Jesus, in His "**word,**" commanded that we do all things in His "**Name**" (Col. 3:17), or by His authority, and absolutely forbade any attempt to go beyond "**the doctrine of Christ**" (2 John 9). Indeed, there are multitudes who do not respect the "**word**" of the Lord with regards to marriage, divorce, and remarriage (Matt. 19:6-9), but faithful followers of Jesus know better than to question (or go beyond) what He taught. And the list goes on. You see, there are numerous examples that could be cited with regards to why faithful followers of Jesus Christ do what they do, and why they avoid doing so many other "fun things" which might draw a crowd, make themselves popular, or supposedly enable them to get more enjoyment from life. But "the bottom line" is this; they respect and **obey** the "**word**" of the Savior! They may not always understand **why** the Lord required certain things and prohibited other things. But they know that it is the **Lord's right** to command and their obligation to obey. Generally speaking, it is not our obligation to know the **WHY** (unless it is revealed). But it is our obligation to know, and to obey, the **WHAT!**

Conclusion:

Much of the sin, heartache, chaos, confusion, and division so prevalent in today's religious world could easily be avoided – if only human beings would cease trying to argue with the Lord and simply get busy learning and obeying the "**word**" of the Lord. To the learned of that day, Peter (with his attitude toward divine authority) may have been regarded as a poor, uneducated, simple-minded fisherman. But he had enough sense to respect and to obey the "**word**" of Jesus. Do you? ■