

Forsaking All Else

Today, after our two-week detour into the Book of Mark where we joined with the Lord Jesus to experience with Him His sufferings, His death and then His blessed resurrection, we return now to our ongoing study of this precious Book of Luke.

And you will recall that when we left off Jesus was teaching the great crowds of people who had been drawn by the Holy Spirit to hear Him there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And their need to be near to Him was so great that He had to get into a boat in order to have room to teach them.

And we will pick up with our reading there in Luke chapter 5, beginning in verse 4. Read along and listen as I read.

⁴When He (the Lord Jesus) had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

⁵But 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." ⁶And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. ⁷So 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. ⁸When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

⁹For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be fishers of men." ¹¹So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him. (Luke 5:4-11)

Folks, for me, it is so very fascinating as I observe the Lord Jesus stepping forward into the ministry that God the Father had sent Him here to the earth to accomplish. Line after line, verse after verse, these scriptures reveal more and more to us of exactly who Jesus is, this God-Man, Son of Man, but also Son of God. And as He began to attract and call disciples to Himself, to learn of Him and to walk with Him as He would carry out all that God, His Father, had foreordained for Him to do, more and more is revealed about Him.

To say that Jesus was also fully human, just like you and me, with most all of the same frailties and needs as ours is a strange thought, but it is true in every way. He hungered, He thirsted, He became tired, and He was tempted to sin just as we are tempted, but He never wrongly gave into any of those weaknesses or failures. He simply responded to the matters of daily life in the way that man was intended to respond.

But with that being said, it is also obvious that Jesus brought other qualities and abilities into this life with Him. Recall that in the Book of Acts and in the Book of John and in the Book of Colossians we are told that Jesus was the very one who created not only everything that existed upon the earth, but also the very earth itself. And not only did He create it, but we are also told that it is in Him and by Him that everything is held together and sustained each day.

In the Book of John, chapter 1, we are told that

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the Only Begotten Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-5, 14)

And then, we are also told in Colossians chapter 1 that although Jesus was in the bodily form of a lowly man, He was still

¹⁵. . . the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

And in the Book of Acts, chapter 17, we are told that

²⁶ From one man he (Jesus) made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:26-28)

Folks, those words are truth that predominate all of the other thoughts that we might think and believe about Jesus. He was, and He is, from everlasting to everlasting, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all things.

So then, as we begin to see Jesus perform miracles such as this with the miraculous catch of fish, we should not wonder or doubt. For the one who created all things and holds it all together, a few fish in a net is no great task.

But it was "great" to Peter and to the others watching that day, a miracle beyond comprehension. And such things should always be "great" to you and to me. Because Jesus was and is "great" beyond our ability to comprehend. And all His works should continually astound us.

And that was one of the purposes of His miracles. He needed to impact the minds and hearts of these future disciples in a profound way, so that there would be an unquestionable belief and knowledge that He truly was the Son of God. And beginning here on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, His miracles did exactly that.

And yes, over the years to come their faith would at times falter, but all in all, the disciples truly did understand and accept Jesus for who He was. The proof of that is that almost every one of them chose to die a martyr's death rather than deny Him. And there are few people who would make that choice if they did not truly believe in Him.

Again, as we read about this encounter with Peter, James and John and of the miracle of the fishes, we can see that the miracle had its desired effect. An irresistible claim was placed upon their hearts and souls by God's Holy Spirit, a claim and a calling that the disciples would obey.

How do we know that? We know because of their response! These men immediately "forsook all" of the things that were important to them in this life, left it all behind to follow Jesus.

In those first moments, most likely none of them fully understood Jesus' words or this strange compelling force within them, but they followed anyway. And that is the mark of faith and the mark of a true disciple, to forsake the comforts and the amenities of this life in favor of a life with Christ.

And we see that taking place all through these scriptures. The great Patriarch, Abraham did that! He had no idea where God was calling him to go or what God was calling him to do, but he went anyway. He picked up his family and left the land of the Chaldees and journeyed towards Canaan, the future home of the Israelites. Abraham was a true disciple. And it is said here that "Abraham believed God and it was accounted unto Him as righteousness".

Now, here also, Peter, James and John did as Abraham did and believed Jesus. And their belief would also be accounted unto them as righteousness.

And we are told here that they "forsook all" to follow Jesus. What exactly do those words mean?

Some have ventured to say that the disciples abandoned everything, even all of their responsibilities, their business of fishing, their families and every other earthly pursuit.

But folks, in knowing and trusting all of the other truths written in these words of scriptures, we know that their abandoning everyone and everything probably did not take place in exactly that way.

Yes, the tenor and the content of their daily lives changed course immediately and completely. And yes, without doubt, the desires of their hearts changed. They abandoned their earthly ambitions and pursuits, especially all those things that us men count so dear and important

But truly Godly men would never abandon their responsibilities to their families. These scriptures tell us, yea they even "command" us men to love and to provide for our families!

Listen to these words in Ephesians 5!

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

And in 1 Peter 3:7, we are told

⁷Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:7)

And regarding our children, we are told in Proverbs 22:6

⁶Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

And in 1 Timothy 5:8 we are told,

⁸. . . if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8)

These responsibilities to family do not cease when we become Christian disciples or missionaries. In fact, they become all the more important.

But some might argue, quoting words such as those in Luke 14:26 that say

²⁶"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26)

But folks, we must understand that all of scripture is in one accord. It does not conflict with itself. A husband cannot love his wife as Christ loves her as Ephesians 5 tells us and at the same time hate her as these words of Luke 14 seem to say. And he cannot properly care for her if he completely forsakes and abandons her.

So then, how can these scriptures be reconciled with each other? Their reconciliation comes only through the intervention of the Holy Spirit who lives within each believer's heart. The Holy Spirit explains to a believer exactly what Jesus means when He says some "hard sayings", such as these that I read a moment ago that . . .

²⁶"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26)

In these words, Jesus is not speaking about the kind of emotionally charged hatred that we too often experience. He is instead speaking about how a man, or a woman is to value their loved ones "within their relationship to God". May I say that again! In these words, Jesus is speaking about how a man, or a woman is to value their loved ones "within their relationship to God".

All people, men and women alike must honor the first commandment and place no other "gods" before the one living and true Almighty God. But we could argue that our loved ones are not gods! And that is true. But we must be careful, else we can unknowingly elevate those dear ones to that level within our hearts and minds. It is all a matter of how we value them "within our relationship with God".

Consider this matter carefully for a moment. We can easily place someone or something or our jobs above God. And that puts that person or that ambition above God and it therefore becomes no less than a god to us. That is exactly what these scriptures warn us about, and that is exactly what the first commandment prohibits.

In our culture today, we men often abandon our families in favor of our work. And as we do that, we also often abandon our relationship with the Lord. Church becomes a drudgery to us, and our attendance becomes less and less important and less and less frequent.

In that manner of speaking, our work has become as a god to us. It dictates our working hours, our ambitions, even the value that we place upon our own self and our loved ones.

In the same way, wives and mothers can place too high a value and attention upon their husbands and especially their children. Yes, it is right to love and to serve them with all of your heart. But very often, that love goes in a wrong direction and God then must take second or third place to those beloved family members.

Again, we must be very careful! A "god" can take on many different forms and circumstances. The rule is, "if we serve it, it is our master and our god."

So then, as Jesus asked Peter, and the other disciples to come and follow Him, He was telling them to put all of the matters of their life into the proper perspective, Christ first, then their families and then their work.

But also, especially for these men, their vocation would also change. These men would become “fishers of men”.

So then, as Peter, James and John “forsook” all to follow Jesus, we can also understand that as they took up their new vocation, they did not completely abandon their responsibilities to their families.

Yes, their lifestyles and daily activities changed completely. And yes, they were going to be away from home more than they had been before, but there was no abandonment of their families.

Another question might arise, “but if these men left their nets, their employment, how would their families be provided for?”

Folks, listen! If God can provide food and water to the children of Israel for forty years in the wilderness, and if Jesus can feed 5000 people with five loaves and two fishes, then feeding and providing for a few family members is no great task.

May I add a thought that is not in these scriptures, but I believe is biblically safe to assume. And that is, I believe that it would be consistent with God's character to assume that no, Peter, James and John did not simply leave that massive catch of fish lying there in that boat to decay and go to waste. That catch of fish was a sweet gift from God, and its value would go a long way towards helping to support those men's families as they would travel.

So then, while it is not said here, it seems more consistent with the other scriptures to assume that God would have others within these men's business relationships, here in verse 7 called “their partners”, to tend to this great catch and also perhaps keep some of their fishing business ongoing to help support their families.

Again, my assumptions are not stated within these scriptures, and you may choose to believe otherwise. But I am personally comfortable with believing that God's calling of these men into the ministry did not include their complete abandonment of all their responsibilities, especially their responsibilities to their families, but also included making gracious provisions for their loved ones.

But you might ask, what about the emotional loss that takes place while those disciples walk about the countryside ministering and making other disciples? Folks, the Holy Spirit is filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. He can and will place all those things

within the hearts of wives and children while their husbands are away on missionary journeys.

Wives and children can live and grow up very normal and very happy. The only condition is that they must also surrender themselves over to Christ, surrender their thoughts, their desires and their emotions.

And to the degree that they do, then happiness and contentment will fill their lives while their husbands and fathers are away.

So then, to say that Peter, James and John, and soon to be others, "forsook all" to follow Jesus was very true, but it was no loss to anyone. It was instead an exciting and wonderful gain for them all. And that is the point of one last thought that I have for you before we close.

Any perceived loss on the part of Peter's wife and family would be far more overcome by the differences that would take place within Peter's heart. How would that be so? Well, there is a simple truth that is always present as someone comes into a relationship with Christ, and that is, "they are changed." When we surrender our hearts, our souls, our minds and our spirits to Christ, we begin to be changed into His image.

Peter would now become the Godly man and loving husband and father that he should have been all along, full of those blessed fruits of the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. So then, no, there is no loss in forsaking all to follow Christ. There is gain beyond measure.

Jesus said to Simon,

"Do not be afraid. From now on you will be fishers of men." ¹¹So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him. (Luke 5:10-11)

May we pray.