

the Holy Spirit wanted him to grant the request. Trusting the Lord to meet his own pressing needs, he gave her the money.

Two mornings later he received a warm letter of thanks from the widow saying that because of his generosity she had asked the Lord to shower the orphanage with gifts. That same day he received 12 ducats from a rich lady and two from a friend in Sweden. He thought he had been amply rewarded, but shortly afterward he was informed that Prince Lodewyk Van Wurtenburg had died, and in his will had directed that 500 gold pieces be given to the orphanage! Francke wept in gratitude. In sacrificially providing for that needy saint, he had not been impoverished but enriched.

We are not to give just so we can have material gain, but when God calls us to give of time talents and wealth, he will also supply us with more than we need.

There are people who go through life working for things which have no ultimate future. They make a living, make comfortable lives for themselves, engage in a few sports, love their family, watch TV and so on. Often they cling to the material things of life  
So many eulogies that I hear are lists exclusively of things people did, which will have no effect or meaning in years to come!  
Their lives are like the fishermen who toiled all night and caught nothing.

But to own Jesus as Lord, to obey his call, to follow him and become fishers of people...

That is when people will see the harvest of God's blessing.

They will be blessed and will be a blessing to others.

God speaks through Isaiah...

<sup>1</sup> *Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.*

<sup>2</sup> *Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.*

<sup>3</sup> *Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.  
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.*

Now I don't know whether that's obedience to the word from Jesus, but at least it's a response.

And the result is amazing!

Peter feels the weight of fish in the net, and beckons (rather than calling out across the water and letting those on the shore in on this new fishing spot) the others to come and help.

The result is that two boats almost sink with the catch.

Now Peter's attitude changes.  
He realises that something miraculous has happened, but he realises something else too.

This man Jesus, knows enough to be a very wealthy man.  
This catch of fish was like winning the jackpot, and Jesus could have cashed in on it himself.  
But Jesus had chosen between God and greed.  
He chose God, and he gave the catch as a huge gift to these fishermen.

Peter had loaned his boat and in response to Jesus, had received in abundance.  
He is left in awe of the holiness and goodness of the man he was sharing the boat with and becomes terribly aware of his own unworthiness and sinfulness.  
Peter addresses him now, not as "master", or "boss", or "chief" but as "Lord"  
And I suspect he feels some fear too  
for Jesus comes back with...  
*"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."*

Jesus' first command was to catch fish, and the obedience (such as it was) brought in a harvest.

The fish of course would die; but Jesus' second command is to catch people, and the Greek word "catching" contains within it the meaning "to catch alive"

And we might expect that in response to the second command there would be a harvest – this time of souls.

And Peter and his companions do respond to Jesus' word.  
Obviously the story is condensed for they would have left the fish to rot and their families to starve, but they do leave everything to follow Jesus – and it may be that Jesus has already provide for their families in anticipation of the task that he was calling the disciples to.

WE know in retrospect that they did indeed catch people, and that we today 2000 years later are a part of the catch.

But we are also part of the call too.

**Jesus still commissions all Christians to give of their time and talents and possession, to make his calling to catch people the prime focus of their lives.**

And to know that when he calls us, he also provides for us in abundance – that God is no-one's debtor.

I am reminded of the account of August H. Francke, the well-known German preacher of the 17th century, founded an orphanage to take care of the homeless children who roamed the streets of Halle. One day when he desperately needed funds to carry on his work, a destitute Christian widow came to his door begging for one gold ducat. Because of his financial situation, he politely but regretfully refused. Disheartened, the woman sat down and began to weep. Moved by her tears, Francke asked her to wait while he went to his room to pray about the matter. Seeking God's guidance, he felt that

In the story of the miraculous catch of fish, we see again the provision of God through Jesus.

### **A WORD ON THE STRUCTURE**

Kenneth Bailey draws attention to the way in which this account is carefully structured, and this sermon owes a lot to his observations.

If you look at the outline sheet in your bulletin you can see that there is an introduction giving the setting,

Then at the beginning and the end we see Jesus teaching the word, and then the disciples obeying the word to follow him.

Second from the top and second from the end we see two more corresponding commands where Jesus orders Peter to catch fish, and then to catch people.

Third from the top and from the end is Peter responding to Jesus' order to catch fish and then responding to Jesus' miracle by addressing him as Lord.

In this sort of structure the main point is in the middle – and this is the miraculous catch of fish – God's provision, through Jesus.

(The structure is broken up by an explanatory note added by Luke about the amazement of the others.

This sort of structure is common in Jewish and Hebrew writing, and can be found frequently in the letters of Paul

It helps, when you see it, to realise where the main point is)

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In the previous chapter we saw Jesus teaching his own people in the Synagogue at Nazareth.

Those people did not want to hear the word from God.

But on the shores of Lake Gennesaret (Galilee) the people come to Jesus because they expect to hear the word of God from him.

Here in the open air, amongst the nets of the fishermen, just finishing up after a fruitless night, the crowd gathers around the teacher.

So Jesus asks a favour of Peter (who owes him one because Jesus has just healed his mother-in-law – assuming Peter liked his mother-in-law!).

Peter would of course, under the obligations of middle-eastern custom have helped Jesus anyway.

So with Peter in the boat, probably steadying it with the oars, Jesus takes a seated position of a Rabbi and teaches the crowds. They are fed with the word of God.

I don't know how long that took, but I'm sure it was more than the 20 minutes we are used to, and could have been a few hours.

But at the end of it Jesus gives a word to Peter to put out into the deep and put down the nets for a catch of fish.

Now Peter is a professional fisherman.

He has been up all night fishing for nothing.

They had barely cleaned up their nets.

And he has just sat around juggling a fishing boat for a couple of hours.

Everyone knows that you don't go fishing at this time of day because the fish are hiding and they can see the nets coming anyway.

Also Galilee slopes away steeply into deep water, and the better catches are found in the shallower area.

And what's more Jesus is from the highlands around Nazareth, so what would he know about fishing!

So Peter's response rather than being, "Well since it's you we know something can happen." Is probably more like, "Well we'll put out into the deep just to show you who's right!"

**<sup>1</sup>Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret,**

and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

**<sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”**

<sup>5</sup>Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

**<sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup>So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.**

<sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

(<sup>9</sup>For he and all who were with him were amazed 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.)

**Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”**

<sup>11</sup>When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

For outline see Kenneth Bailey, “Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes” p137

**Setting**

**Word – Taught**

**Jesus Commands – Catch Fish**

**Peter obeys Jesus’ Word**

**Power of Word Demonstrated**

**Peter’s response – surrenders to Jesus as Lord**

**(Explanatory note added by Luke)**

**Jesus Commands – Catch people**

**Word obeyed – They followed him**

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On this day of harvest thanksgiving we appreciate the power of God to provide and the goodness and mercy of God in wanting to.

God can provide a whole universe with just a word.

It is striking just how many references there are to God speaking, and bringing things about with a word. And similarly with Jesus, he speaks a word and people are healed, spirits are cast out, a storm is stilled, water is turned into wine as an abundant wedding gift.

But the amazing thing is that God *wants* to help us and provide for us. We read that “the rain falls on the just and the unjust”. God’s love for people is so great that he loves those who reject him, and still provides for them.

If hell is the complete absence of God’s goodness and provision, then none of us experience hell in this lifetime – God’s love and generosity is never far from any one of us.