

Luke 5:1-11

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[0 : 00] Christian internet was very excited recently. You may have come across it. An apologist called Wes Huff debated a chap who self described as an expert in ancient texts and alternative histories.

! The guy was called Billy Carson. He's the founder of Forbidden Knowledge Inc. And the four is a number four. Forbidden knowledge. That should tell you something.

But it's fair to say that Wes Huff humiliated him in the debate. So much so that Carson walked out and Wes Huff was there and there was an empty chair. It was an online thing, a Zoom thing. And off he went.

Now, he did such a job that the video went viral and it propelled this chap Wes Huff into the podcast Stratosphere. And so much so that Joe Rogan invited him on his show to discuss the historical credibility of the Christian faith.

What an incredible opportunity. And it's a long, obviously, if you know anything about Joe Rogan's podcast, it's long. It's a wide-ranging discussion. But towards the end, like any good Christian apologist, Wes Huff asks Joe Rogan what he makes of Jesus. He turns the question on Joe Rogan himself.

[1 : 22] Here's how Rogan responds. He pauses and then he says this. It certainly seems like there's a lot of people that believe there's this very exceptional human being that existed. The question is, what does that mean? Does it mean that he was the son of God?

Does it mean he was this completely unique human being that had this vision of humanity and this way of educating people and spreading this ideology that would change the way human beings interact with each other forever?

Joe Rogan then goes on to wonder about what it would be like to see Jesus when he returns. What would it be like, that's the question he asks, what would it be like to actually be in the presence of Jesus?

Well, what we find in Luke 5 is that we don't need to guess. Over the next few weeks, Lord willing, we're going to take time in Luke 5, where what we see is Jesus coming face to face with different kinds of people.

These people get to see the whites of his eyes. They get to feel the warmth of his breath on their face when he's speaking to them. They get to hear his voice. And this evening, at the beginning of chapter 5, we see him among a group.

[2 : 37] Verse 2, there it is, a group of fishermen. So he's among a group of people who are hardy people used to physical work.

Probably uneducated men working in a small family business. Back in the good old days, that's the way it worked. Children weren't told to go and dream their own future into existence. They did what their parents did.

And it was much better for it. Skilled men with a lot of technical expertise.

But above all, these are actually just ordinary people living ordinary lives. This evening, what I want us to do is see what happens when ordinary people come face to face with Jesus.

Now, up to this point in Luke's gospel, he's been teaching and healing and has drawn a growing crowd. In verse 1, as he continues to proclaim the word of God, this crowd is getting hard to manage.

[3 : 35] So perhaps to allow more people to gather and to hear him, or perhaps just to prevent him being pushed back further and further until he ends up in the sea. The lake of Gennesaret is Luke's name for the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus spots a couple of empty fishing boats and heads across to them. Now, it's interesting that despite this growing crowd, despite that there's this preacher moving around and this growing crowd following him, the owners of these boats aren't bothered by the preacher.

Do you see that? They've just returned from a frustrating night on the water and are sorting their nets out for the next day. The tides wait for no man. Their families need to eat.

They need to have fish to sell. They don't want another night like last night, and therefore, that's the priority, getting the nets ready for the next day. Jesus asks the owner of one of these boats, it happens to be Simon's, if he can help him.

Could you push me out a little bit into the water in your boat so that I can teach the crowd? How did Simon feel? He wasn't listening to the sermon.

[4 : 41] He was cleaning his nets. He was probably hungry because he hadn't caught any fish. He was probably frustrated because he hadn't caught any fish. And he was definitely busy getting ready to go again.

And now here he is. He has to get up from his nets and go and help this enigmatic preacher. Now, there's clearly something that draws him because he does what Jesus says.

Perhaps he saw the healings earlier in Capernaum. Either way, he agrees to get in the boat to help Jesus to continue to teach. But it is as Jesus finishes the sermon that things get interesting.

And when he had finished speaking, verse 4, he said to Simon, Simon, put out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch.

So, the carpenter turned preacher asks the commercial fisherman to put out the nets for a catch of fish. Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing.

[5 : 47] But at your word, I will let down the nets. Master, we who know what we're doing, we who are experts in this field, have just spent the night hard at work trying to catch fish.

And I can tell you this, there's nothing doing out there. Plus, anyone who knows anything about fishing knows that once the sun is high, the fish go down deeper into the darkness. And they've washed their nets, which is itself a huge hassle.

The last thing that they want to do is unfold them again, put them in the boat and get out there.

Simon would rather get home. But he clearly respects Jesus. He calls him Master. So, he lets down his nets.

And in a moment, everything changes. And it changes for three reasons. First of all, he has shown Jesus' control. First thing we see is Jesus' control.

And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking.

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. They catch so many fish that these nets that were designed for this job couldn't cope.

[6 : 57] And so then they call the other boys who own the other boat to come and bring their nets and to help them bring in the haul. And both boats began to sink. A few fish, even a decent haul of fish, wouldn't have made the point.

Fishermen sometimes get lucky. The number is so great. And it happens at exactly the point that Jesus speaks that it is clear to everyone that this is a miracle. Jesus has literally called the fish out of the water.

He is demonstrating, as one commentator says, that he is Lord of the fish and the fishermen, the Lord of nature, the Lord of men, and the Lord of their daily work. And did you notice how Jesus performed the miracle?

It all happened by the power of his word. It was at his word that Simon lowered the nets, and it was at his word that they were filled to breaking. He speaks and creation obeys him.

Is this the Jesus that you know? Is he just a very exceptional human being that existed? Or is he the Lord who exercises complete control over the created realm?

[8 : 11] Now, that realization is something that we see in our culture today, that there is a growing engagement with. People are increasingly reckoning with the Jesus of the Bible.

But the question this evening is, what do you see? Jesus can whistle up hundreds, tons of fish from the depths of the ocean. What do you make of this miracle? And more personally, how will you respond to what you see here?

You will respond. How will you respond? Oh, it's just a fable. It's just one of those ancient stories like all the others. Oh, it was actually just a lucky day for the fishermen.

They'd got kind of caught up in other business during the night, and they went out and they went to a different place. That's where the fish were. And, you know, that kind of thing happens from time to time.

Well, Simon actually shows us a better response than that. Verse 5, he calls Jesus master and reluctantly does what he says out of respect. But look again at verse 8. Do you see the change? After the miracle, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

[9 : 23] Not master, but Lord. And he falls down before him. This is a man who sees clearly. In this moment, he sees clearly. And he is terrified.

Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. Have you ever met a commercial fisherman? Commercial fishermen spend long periods of time doing incredibly dangerous things.

They aren't easily scared. So why this fear? Well, Simon realizes that he is face to face with the Lord God of all the earth.

And in the presence of the Lord God of all the earth, Simon sees himself as he truly is, as a sinful man. What happens when that's the case?

He naturally then wants to get away from him. Or he wants Jesus to go somewhere else. Leave me alone. I want to be done with your presence here. I don't know. Do you ever find yourself talking to someone?

[10 : 21] Maybe you're talking about the state of the world as it is. There's lots of opinions on that, isn't there? And people are talking. And you introduce the idea of God. People are moaning about how awful it is.

Unreasonably, you know, there's lots going on that we should really be heavy hearted about. And that is difficult. And it is worthy of conversation and lament. But you introduce the topic of God in some way. And they say something like, well, I'll tell you this.

If God came in here now, I would have a thing or two to say about him. No, they wouldn't. They wouldn't say a thing. Because that's what happens.

Look at Simon. They'd be on their faces in terror. Wherever you turn in the Bible, start to finish. When someone meets God, they fall on their face. You remember Isaiah in the temple in Isaiah chapter 6.

He saw the Lord high and exalted, seated on a throne. And the train of his robe filled the temple. And the seraphim, the heavenly beings, they were calling to one another. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.

[11 : 21] The whole earth is full of his glory. What does Isaiah do? He cried out, woe to me, I am ruined. He didn't say, let me tell you a thing or two about how hard life is down here.

It's the same with the Apostle John. The Apostle John, he sees the vision of the glorified Christ. In Revelation chapter 1, he sees him. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

When confronted with holy perfection, the beauty and majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, Simon here, Isaiah, John, see themselves as they truly are.

And Simon falls on his face. He is exposed. He is undone. This is the turning point in Simon's life. And it is the same for anyone who sees Jesus clearly.

You cannot simply see. It's fair to say you can't see Jesus as Lord. You can't see him as the Lord of heaven and earth and not recognize your own sinfulness, your own weakness and failures.

[12 : 26] And notice Simon doesn't say, go away from me, I've done some sinful things and I feel bad about them. He knows that sin is at the heart of who he is. He is a sinful man.

Jesus is the Lord who controls everything. And that means he knows everything. He knows everything about you, right down to all the secrets that you keep from everyone else.

And it's the same for me. Jesus knows them all. And here Simon shows us what happens when we really grasp this. When we really grasp this, there is deep conviction of sin.

I want to say, if the way that you understand Jesus doesn't get you to this point, you haven't fully grasped who he is. If your understanding of Jesus doesn't bring you to your knees saying, depart from me, I am a sinful man, sinful woman, you haven't grasped who he is.

Until you see him as the Lord who controls his creation and that leads you to confess before him, you don't really know him. Simon is exposed.

[13 : 38] Like I say, it's understandable then he asked Jesus to go away. When we are laid bare before a holy God, we want to get out of his presence as quickly as we can.

That's what we want, but it's not, do you see what Jesus wants? Look at verse 10. First of all, we see Jesus' control. Our second point is then we hear Jesus' comfort.

We hear Jesus' comfort. Simon falls down and cries out, and Jesus said to Simon, verse 10, do not be afraid. Aren't those beautiful words?

In all of his terror, the first thing the Lord Jesus says to him is, do not be afraid. These are exactly the words that Simon would have wanted to hear in this situation.

By the way, it was the same for Isaiah and the same for John. Falling on our face before the sovereign Lord is the right response to his majesty, but he doesn't leave us in our fear. Jesus is too kind.

[14 : 41] He's too gracious to leave us fearing for our lives. It's natural that we would feel that we don't deserve to come into God's presence, but that's exactly why Jesus came.

Our guilty hearts instinctively want to push Jesus away, but verse 10 tells us that as the Lord who comforts, we shouldn't push him away. Instead, we should do the very opposite. We should run to him.

We should run to him and ask him for forgiveness, the forgiveness that he came to bring and that he alone can offer. Simon discovered what we need to hear, and that is this, Jesus never leaves a repentant sinner to flounder.

Whatever your past, whatever your track record with God up to this point, and I don't mean your track record in public.

I don't mean your track record when you manage to get your game face on and make yourself look shiny and respectable. I don't mean the respectable person that you present to the world each day.

[15 : 45] I mean your record before the Lord who sees the depths of your heart. He sees the hidden stuff. The self-interest, the pride, the impure thoughts, the stuff that you can manage to keep hidden from other people, he can see.

Your record, if you're honest, it's a mess. It's a total mess. It's the same for us all. Our hearts are full of sin. And to people with a record like that, who are undone by that realization, Jesus says, don't be afraid.

The wonderful fact at the heart of the Christian faith is this reassurance that our sin doesn't have the last word. Luke 5 isn't the end of the story.

There's a whole lot more to go. Jesus is on his way to the cross where he will die and rise for our sins. We don't get what we deserve. We're not disqualified from God's presence.

He has done everything we need. The life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus mean that when you see yourself as you truly are, he is the Lord who comforts. Don't be afraid.

[16 : 58] We're going to come to the Lord's table a bit later on in our service. That's at the heart of the message of the supper. He welcomes us to eat and drink with him.

Don't be afraid. He sought Simon out here. He went to find Simon. He performed a miracle in a context that Simon would understand.

He has met him in his world and done things that he would understand. In order to bring him into relationship with him, it's the same with you. Jesus makes himself known to everyone in a way that we can't mistake.

And when we humble ourselves before him in this way, he is tender with us. And that's true, whether it's the first time or the hundred and first time.

When we are open and unguarded about our sin, he says to us, don't be afraid. That is a wonderful thing. Well, Jesus isn't quite done with Simon.

[18 : 06] We see his control. We hear his comfort. And then thirdly, we also get Jesus' commission. Jesus' commission. And Jesus said to Simon, do not be afraid.

From now on, you will be catching men. Here is a new calling for this fisherman. He will now catch men and women for Jesus. The word used for catch here gives us an insight into the work.

The original is made up of two words, meaning catch alive. Catch alive. It's used a number of times in the Old Testament, usually negatively, I should say, to speak of the idea of rescue from danger.

And this is what Simon has been commissioned to do, to go and rescue people from danger. He isn't told, by the way, do you see, go and catch men. He's saying, you will now be catching men.

This will be his new vocation. His calling is to rescue men and women from the depths of their sin, bringing them safely to the shore of salvation. This is a commission given specifically to Simon as a disciple and an apostle.

[19 : 11] Luke describes him, do you see, verse 8, as Simon Peter for the first time in the gospel. What he's doing there is highlighting the fact that this is the man who would become Peter, the one on whom Jesus promised he would build his church.

And if you've been with us in the mornings, you'll know we've seen in the book of Acts how that promise, that calling began to be fulfilled. Even just take Pentecost at the start of Peter's ministry as an example.

He preached the gospel. What happened? 3,000 people were caught alive for Jesus. Of course they were. Of course the number was big. Why do we know that? Well, because of the size of the catch of fish.

That great hall was too big to carry. It served as a picture of how fruitfully evangelistic commission would be. It wasn't just big for the sake of the miracle. It pointed to something significant.

You will now go and be catching men in the way that we've just caught all of those fish. 3,000 and so on and so on and so on all the way through the book of Acts.

[20 : 12] And the church that this same Lord Jesus is building on Peter's foundation continues to grow today. Christ is keeping his promise. And where his name is proclaimed, men and women, boys and girls, will be caught alive and brought into a relationship with him.

It started with 11 disciples on a mountain. And now there are billions of people across the globe who have been caught alive for the Lord Jesus. And the mission continues.

And it will continue until the promise of the prophets is fulfilled. The promise of the prophets is that the whole earth is covered with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. What did Paul tell us this morning?

We should have confidence to go on speaking. Go on speaking for Jesus. There is no one for whom the Lord can't, his arm is too short to save.

There is nobody who is beyond the reach of the gospel. Paul was talking about the fact that he thought, you know, engaging with the imam in the mosque, nobody, he's never going to be converted.

[21 : 19] We think that all the time about all kinds of different people. They've got hard hearts. They're very much committed to worldviews that are very different, very opposed to the things of Christ. And yet, the Lord saves.

And he goes on saving. Coming to Jesus is coming to the Lord of every corner of the world. And as the church preaches his name, as you share the good news of salvation that comes through this Jesus with your friends, that rule will be acknowledged more and more and more.

Whether Joe Rogan and his ilk are convinced or not, whether the high profile people that are expressing an interest in the Christian faith actually come to faith or not is neither here nor there. The Lord Jesus rules and reigns, and people will be caught alive as we proclaim Christ to them. When ordinary people come face to face with Jesus, you see his miraculous power.

He is the Lord who controls. You see yourself as you truly are, sinful and in need of a Savior. And despite this, you hear his word of comfort and acceptance, and the promise that the gospel of salvation will advance and triumph.

[22 : 36] The question is, what are we supposed to do with this? Look at how the section ends. Jesus said to Simon, do not be afraid.

From now on, you will be catching men. And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. Simon is given the commission, but they all get involved.

You see that? When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. I take it that the they here is Simon, James, John, and all who were with him. In verse 9, the apostles and the rest.

And they drop what they're doing, and they follow Jesus. There was no, hey, what about the fishing business? There was no, I wonder what other people are going to say about this if we head off after Jesus here.

There was no, I hope it's okay with the family. I hope they're not a bit put out by this, us following Jesus thing. They pulled up their boats, they left everything, and followed Jesus.

[23 : 44] Genuine Christian faith involves this kind of commitment. Now, having said that, you've probably, many of you, maybe you heard those sermons where the preacher hammers this, you know, they go, they left everything, everything.

Have you left everything? Have you? Have you left everything? That kind of nonsense. There's none of that guilt manipulation here, is there? Jesus makes himself known, he invites them in, and they are delighted to follow him.

I mentioned the British Lions a couple of weeks ago, and there's probably a fair chance that I'll mention them again over the next while. But do you remember the videos that they showed of the players when their names were announced?

They had footage in their clubs when they were watching the squad being announced. Imagine the camera is on one of those players. Imagine, I don't know, Henry Pollock, right?

He's sitting there with his fingers like this, a clown. And his name's read out. And instead of that celebration, he did, you know, that we all saw. You saw his eyes roll.

[24 : 55] And the media say to him afterwards, you know, why did you roll your eyes when you were announced in the Lions squad? And he said, well, I've got a holiday booked for June, and I'm supposed to see the family in July.

Or imagine when they gathered for the admin day last week, and that little video of Andy Farrell laying out the training plan. And he says, this is what we're going to do. This is the strategy. And the camera pans, because Henry Pollock gets up out of his seat and walks out of the room, shaking his head. Someone says to him, what's wrong? He said, it's all a bit much, isn't it? It's all a bit intense.

That just wouldn't happen, would it? It would be absurd. Because he is delighted to be involved. He knows it's an honor. And he'll do whatever they ask him, because he knows it's a privilege to be there.

When you see Jesus as the Lord of glory, who controls everything, you see following him as a privilege and not a burden, you realize it's an honor.

[25 : 57] You realize that we get to be involved. We get to worship him. We get to come to the Lord's table. We get to sing his praises. We get to share the good news of him dying for our sins, rising again for our salvation, and his return that's coming to bring in the new heavens and the new earth.

We get to share that with people. What a privilege. What an honor. What a joy. When you see him as he truly is, you'll give up whatever it takes, because you're just delighted to be allowed to be involved.

Let's pray. Let's pray.