

## CALLED TO A HIGHER SERVICE

– LUKE 5:1-11. – FEBRUARY 11. –

**Golden Text:** – "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children." – Eph. 5:1.

OUR lesson relates to the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John to be our Lord's constant companions, and the training for their work as apostles after his glorification. A period of about a year elapsed between the temptation in the wilderness and the scene of this lesson on the Lake of Galilee. In the meantime some of John's disciples and others had accepted Jesus as their teacher in heavenly things and were more or less in his company. Peter, Andrew, James and John being amongst these. It was about this time that John was imprisoned, and Jesus' ministry seems to have become more vigorous thereafter.

As the narrative shows, Jesus was on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, and the public attracted to him – hungry for the word of life – pressed so closely as to inconvenience him, and he stepped into one of the fishing boats moored to the shore. It was Peter's boat, and our Lord requested him to push the boat a little from the shore, from which position he could the more easily address the large crowds on the shelving beach. Peter and his brother Andrew were managing one of the boats, and James and his brother John another of the same partnership, while hired helpers were also assisting (Mark 1:20.) They were cleaning and mending their nets, for they had been out all night; they were preparing for the next night's fishing, for at that time it appears that most of the net fishing is done. These fishermen and perhaps others in the same vicinity proceeded with their work while the Lord was preaching, no doubt giving earnest attention to his words at the same time.

## "LAUNCH OUT NOW"

When our Lord had finished his discourse he suggested to Peter that he take the boat to deep water and let down his nets for a catch of fish. The response was that no fish were to be expected – that they had toiled all night without results; but through respect to the Master, if he desired it they would let down their nets again, without having any expectations as fishermen that they would meet with any success.

The result was a net full of fish, the weight of which began to break the meshes of the net. Their partners were signalled to come to assist, with the final result that both boats were heavily laden with fish, so as almost to endanger their safety. When Peter noted the miracle performed he fell at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He realized that he was in the presence of one possessed of more than human wisdom and power, and correspondingly he felt afraid. Although he and his partners had known Jesus for now over a year, he had never before so thoroughly realized the wonderful power hidden in Christ.

A miracle was performed, however we may view it: we might suppose the creation of the fish on the spot, or the power of the Lord to at will bring a great school of fish to that vicinity, or the knowledge of the Lord that such a school of fish was in the vicinity. No matter which view we take, it would still leave the miracle intact; nor should we wish it otherwise, realizing that it is on a parity with others of Jesus' mighty works. Respecting the fishes of that lake we quote from a prominent writer as follows: –

"The Sea of Galilee was always famed for the number and variety of its fish. There are more than fifty kinds. The thickness of the shoals of fish in the Lake of Gennesaret is almost incredible to any one who has not witnessed them. They often cover an area of more than an acre; and when the fish move slowly forward in a mass, and are rising out of the water, they are packed so close

together that it appears as though a heavy rain were beating down upon the surface of the water."

### **THE OBJECT OF THE MIRACLE**

It is evident that this miracle was performed for the purpose of fully and finally convincing Peter, Andrew, James and John respecting the Lord's relationship to the Father, and his power of control in respect to things temporal as well as things spiritual. The lesson evidently had its designed effect, and our Lord clinched the matter by then and there inviting the four to become his permanent disciples – to become fishers of men. This was the opposite course from what Peter had suggested – that the Lord depart from them because he was perfect and holy and had direct intercourse evidently with the heavenly powers, while they were poor and weak and sinful, imperfect through the [R3720 : page 46] fall. Separation did indeed take place, but it was between the disciples and their earthly business, not between them and the Lord. "They forsook all and followed him." Similarly tests have come to all whom the Lord has called throughout this age.

### **MANY CALLED, FEW CHOSEN**

There was a great multitude on the shore who heard the Lord's teachings, but not to all of them did his message come with the same force and to the same end. Only a few were specially chosen and called. Doubtless there were elementary conditions in the hearts of these four that constituted them the ones ready and worthy to receive the special message. There may have been Israelites indeed in the multitude on the shore who were not yet ripe for the special invitation of discipleship, just as these same four who now forsook all to follow the Lord had been with him more or less for about a year, yet had not until now reached the place where they were ready to forsake all.

All down through the Gospel age the Lord's invitations have been extended chiefly to those in the humbler walks of life – not many great, not many rich, not many wise, not many learned, not many noble, hath God chosen, but the mean things of the world, the things not esteemed – mainly the poor of this world rich in faith. (I Cor. 1:26-28; Jas. 2:5.) The Lord's dealing is practically the same with all. He does not invite them at first to a full consecration, but rather gives them leading and instruction along lines of justification, and after they have grown in knowledge to some degree they have the privilege of forsaking all to be his special disciples, to be fishers of men.

One difficulty with Christians in general of all denominations is that this second step of full consecration is rarely brought to their attention. Under the false teaching that it is a question respecting heaven or hell that they must decide, the majority seem to feel satisfied that if they are reasonably decent, reasonably honest, they will escape eternal torment, and are not ambitious beyond this. They thus claim themselves to be, and are reckoned by others as disciples of Christ, whereas in reality they still belong to the multitude who hear with more or less of joy and bear witness to the wonderful words proceeding from the Lord's mouth, but who fail to attain the position of special disciples, not appreciating and not taught that to be the Lord's disciples we must "take up our cross and follow him." O, how necessary to the saints is the Truth! How wonderful the Lord's words, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy Word is truth!" Error can never sanctify, and in proportion as it is mixed in our minds with the Truth, to that extent is the latter diluted and lacking in power.

### **FORSAKING ALL TO FOLLOW CHRIST**

The narrative of our lesson would seem to imply that these four disciples had acted in a very irrational manner, leaving their boats and nets instantly without disposing of them or making

provision for their care; but Mark's account informs us that the boats were left in the care of Zebedee, the father of James and John, with hired helpers. Nor need we suppose that the Lord and these four who became so prominent as his apostles started away from that vicinity that same hour or even that same day. It may have required time to make proper arrangements for the fish, for the business interests of the partnership, etc. The same is true of us: we have duties in life which it would be **[R3721 : page 46]** wrong to abruptly cast aside and ignore, responsibilities to others and a stewardship. The "spirit of a sound mind" is to govern the Lord's people in all of their affairs, both temporal and spiritual.

The important thing decided at the moment and decided positively and permanently was that they accepted the Lord's invitation to enter the Father's service with him – fishing on a higher and grander scale, for men – gathering them into the Gospel net, with a view to their ultimate glorification as New Creatures in Christ and participants with him in the glory, honor, and immortality of his Kingdom soon to be established. Let us each remember the importance of a positive decision respecting our consecration to the Lord, our acceptance of service under him as our Master and Captain. Let us then as wisely as possible arrange life's affairs so as to be without carefulness respecting earthly things that we may the more readily and more completely give all of our time and energy to the most important of all works, the service of God, tidings of great joy for all people.

### **OUR GOLDEN TEXT**

However much we have heard of Jesus, however much we have rejoiced in the salvation which he died to secure for us, however much we have trusted in the merit of his sacrifice, we did not become his disciples until we had formally reached the point of giving our hearts, our lives, our wills to him – responding to his invitation, becoming followers of God as dear children under the

guidance and instruction of our elder brother, Jesus. The opportunity does not come to all of us in just the same form that it presented itself to the four fishermen of our lesson, and yet there is a similarity. With many of us, as the Apostle explains, it is the Lord's will that we should abide in the vocation in which we were when the message of grace first reached us. (I Cor. 7:20-22.) Not all are called to an open, public ministry, devoting all of time, talent, effort and interest to the Gospel message. The majority of the called the Lord evidently intends to instruct as his disciples while they are about their ordinary business, the duties and responsibilities of life.

With these, however, it is necessary that there be a forsaking of boats and fishing tackle, etc., in the heart from the moment that a full consecration is made to the Lord. We cannot serve God and Mammon. We cannot have two objects in life, both equally prominent to our attention. The Lord will not have it so with those who are to be his joint-heirs in the Kingdom. This class must appreciate the privilege of fellowship in his labor, sufferings and hopes of glory to such an extent that their hearts will no longer be in the ordinary affairs of life, their ambitions will no longer be for wealth or name or fame from the world's standpoint. All such ambitions and hopes we must "forsake" if we would be his disciples. He must be first, joint-heirship with him must be our ambition; otherwise our hearts would not be in a condition that would be pleasing to the Lord or that would not be single for his service; we would be of the kind described as double minded, unstable in all our works and ways. (Jas. 1:8.) Undoubtedly **[R3721 : page 47]** this is a difficulty with a large number of those who have named the name of Christ and professed consecration to him and his service.

### **"AS DEAR CHILDREN"**

It is high time that we learn that we cannot serve God and Mammon, and that we choose as between these. If we do not

choose the Lord and his service and place these first before our hearts' affections, we will be counted as placing the others first, – the interests of the natural man; and the Lord's appreciation of us and the reward he will give us will correspond. He has indeed blessings for all the families of the earth, but the special blessing presented in the exceeding great and precious promises of glory, honor and immortality are for those who love him supremely, more than they love houses or lands, business or wealth, family or kindred or self.

Our exhortation to all who have forsaken all to follow the Lord is that we do not look back, that we estimate that we have made the grandest bargain imaginable, that we are in the way for obtaining the grandest prize imaginable, together with association with our Lord in his wonderful work and with the divine approval.

This seems to be the thought of the Apostle when he urges us to lay aside every weight and entanglement that we may run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author of our faith, until he shall have become its finisher. Let us as promptly as possible, at the beginning of our Christian experience, settle once for all the matter of surrendering our wills to be followers of the Lamb; let us once for all arrange as wisely as possible our temporary affairs and interests in accordance with the reasonable demands of others respecting the same, and let us then faithfully persevere to the end of the race course.

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