

The Heart of Discipleship

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 5, verses 1 to 11. He said to Simon, And Simon answered, 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. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees and saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. And so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.

And 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.

This is the word of God. I was thinking, since I'm doing another one-off sermon, let's just connect it to the last sermon I preached and expand a little bit on discipleship.

[1 : 42] So I just sneak in a mini-series, a Moncori series, without him knowing. Isn't that good? And actually, it fitted well, because Thomas Davis preached on discipleship last Sunday night.

So I thought it makes sense. And I chose this story in particular because I find it so fascinating. I, of course, have heard it many times before as a child growing up in Sunday school and church.

But when I listened or read it about a year ago, it just, it did something to me. You know when a story does something to you and you just can't stop thinking about it?

So for the last year, I've reflected on this again and again. And I find, especially Peter as a person, fascinating. Because he is so honest, so genuine.

He's got a big mouth. He talks a lot. Maybe he reminds me of myself there. And he messes up badly. And we will see later why I like him so much.

[2 : 41] What we can learn from Peter. Discipleship, just as a reminder. What do we understand as discipleship? Last time we talked about the cost of discipleship. This time we will talk about the heart of discipleship.

Discipleship means following Jesus. What exactly does that mean? Jesus is not here in the flesh. What does following Jesus mean? It's hard to say. It will have individual outcomes and consequences for individual circumstances.

But generally, the Bible defines it as a denying yourself and picking up your cross daily in Matthew 16. It means losing your life in order to gain it.

And admittedly, that's a bit cryptic. It sounds a bit like not quite clear enough. What does that mean? But what it means for everyone is giving up the control of your life to God.

Last time I preached, I used this picture with the seat, the throne of your heart. Leaving your throne and letting Jesus sit on the throne.

[3 : 48] Surrendering the power of your life to Jesus. Letting him decide over your life. And that is a radical decision in many aspects. And in this passage we're looking at today, we will see that this is only possible, first of all, if we have experienced the living God.

If we have had an encounter with the living God. Secondly, if we hear the call to follow him. And then thirdly, we will look at what that does to you as a disciple.

How it changes you. How it transforms you. So first of all, an encounter with the living God. What do I mean by that? In this scene, in this story we've just read, we hear that Jesus is preaching from a boat to the crowds who are on the beach.

We're on the lake of Gennesaret, on the Sea of Gennesaret. And the beach line would have been a bit like a zigzag. So they didn't have microphones back in the day.

So Jesus stands on a boat. He preaches and the acoustics would have been better. And the boat belongs to a fellow called Simon. It's Simon Peter's boat.

[4 : 56] He's not Peter yet, Simon. And after Jesus is finished with his talk, he goes and he chats to Simon. And he gives Simon some fishing advice. Now, Jesus is giving Simon fishing advice.

But actually, he's giving him pretty rubbish advice. Because if you're a fisherman, you know that you don't go fishing during the day. You go fishing by night.

And what has Peter done all night long? Well, he's been fishing. And how much fish did he catch? Well, nothing. Zero. No fish at all. So Jesus now comes along. He tells him, go out in the deep.

Cast the nets out again. And Peter tells him that that doesn't make any sense. Okay? But at Jesus' word, he goes and he does it. And I can only imagine how annoyed Peter must have been.

Like, Jesus, you have no idea what you're talking about. But he goes and does it. And that's important and remarkable. And you wonder, why did Peter do it? And I think the reason is, first of all, you probably heard what Jesus had spoken while he was on his boat.

[5 : 57] But also, in the previous chapter, in Luke chapter 4, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. That's interesting. So Peter has already experienced Jesus and has met him, in a sense.

But he's not yet a friend. He's not considered a disciple. He's not following Jesus. But he goes out into the deep. He puts the nets out.

And then what happens is remarkable. Because as they throw the nets into the water, they pull them out again. And they're struggling. Because there's so many fish in the nets.

And they have to ask their mates, James and John, to come and help them. And they fill not only one boat, but two boats. So much that they're about to sink. Like, is there an explanation that can suffice for something that remarkable?

Something so extraordinary? I think it's unbelievable. Actually so unbelievable that it becomes believable again. Because if someone had made this story up, it would be a bad story.

[7 : 04] I mean, make it at least a little bit realistic, right? But this is actually helping me to want to believe that this actually happened. And also, if this truly happened, it's the only explanation for what happens next.

Because Peter does not jump around saying that he just made so much money. He just caught a lot of fish. He's not saying, ah, Jesus, come back on Monday and we do the same thing again.

No, Peter is shocked. He falls to his knees. His chin down on his chest, I imagine. You can almost feel the fear around him.

Kneeling in front of this stranger. In front of this man who, with his word, almost made two boats sink. Because of the large number of fish in the nets.

And I imagine Peter saying with a deep voice, Depart from me, for I am sinful. Do you see that verse? Depart from me, for I am sinful.

[8 : 09] This little sentence is what makes this account in the Gospel of Luke so unique. We read about this in other Gospels, but this sentence is unique to the account of Luke.

Depart from me, for I am sinful. Now, there is a German theologian, yet another one, called Rudolf Otto. And he wrote a really interesting book, a famous book, which is called The Idea of the Holy. Now, Rudolf, good old Rudolf, was not a Christian himself. He was very liberal. But he observed this in the Bible, the idea of the holy. And it's really, really helpful for us to understand what's going on here.

He describes something that he calls the numinous principle, the principle of the numinous. And this principle describes the fear and awe and anxiety that you feel when you are confronted with the superlative.

Now, what does that mean? All of you will know this. Do you know the feeling when you hang out with someone who is really, really smart? And you realize, man, I am not that smart.

[9 : 15] And you are confronted with your own inadequacy. Or you hang out with someone who is very attractive, let's say. And you think, oh, wow, I kind of feel a bit lower than them almost.

This is a very small-scale example of what is going on. You can see this principle when a 16-year-old teenage girl meets Taylor Swift. What do they say? They say, oh, my God.

Oh, my God. Because to them, it sort of is. Almost like a God. A person who is perfect in every aspect. Now, imagine meeting the person who actually is.

The one person who actually is perfect in every aspect. Because he is God. Because he is holy. Because he is entirely different.

In the Bible, we see this happening a few times. For example, Moses at the burning bush. Or Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6 in his vision. What does Isaiah say?

[10:15] He is in the throne room of God and he says, Woe is me. And in Hebrew, literally, that means I am undone. I am falling apart. Because he is in the presence of the Holy One.

And therefore, by contrast, confronted by his own inadequacy. He pronounces judgment upon himself. Because he is in the presence of the living and holy God.

In the presence of the entirely different one. And his sin becomes so obvious. He realizes he is not even remotely like God. And that is what is happening to Peter.

We are witnessing the very moment. Where Peter realizes that he is talking to the Messiah. To the Holy One. To the Chosen One. And what does he say?

Oh Lord, I am sinful. Depart from me. Go away. And I know that many of you will know what that feels like.

[11:15] Being confronted with your sin. Feeling so filthy and wretched. Compared to a God who is so good and pure. And you know what? That is scary.

And it does frighten us. And this feeling of being frightened once we meet God for the first time. Is known to a lot of people. And the mistake that we can make is to say.

Well, it doesn't feel good. And I don't feel comfortable. So therefore, it is probably wrong. And it is not good. And I am going to run away. Anyway, maybe you have experienced something like this. Maybe you are not sure if you want to keep pursuing God. Because, I don't know. Maybe you have heard a sermon that moved you. Or listened to a song that made you think. Or you experienced something that wasn't quite normal.

And it frightened you. But this story shows us that that is actually an appropriate response. Because it is frightening to be in the presence of the Holy One. What does Jesus say to Peter?

[12:19] Don't be afraid. Fear not. The first thing Jesus says to Peter is. Fear not. Often when people become interested in Christianity.

They find that there is some truth in it. There is some truth value. And that there might be a living God. It actually is true. And it scares them away. Often people shy back from letting Jesus sit on their throne.

Of their heart. Of their life. And instead what happens? People become religious. What do I mean by that? It might be surprising to hear that. People say, I don't want to commit to all of that.

I'll do a little bit of praying maybe. I'll do a little bit of Bible reading. I'll go to church every now and then. And that's actually the worst thing you could do in that situation.

If you are reluctant to give Him control over your heart. The things most precious to you. And you cling to your old life. If you cling to the things you know. And the things you don't want to let go. If this is you.

[13:23] Then listen to Jesus as He responds to Peter. As He responds to you this morning saying. Do not be afraid. I've got this. I've got a plan for you.

Or maybe you think. Jesus can't use someone like yourself. Or like me. I thought that for a long time. I'm not good enough. Maybe like Peter. You think you're sinful.

What would you want to do with someone like me? Maybe you think you're not good enough for Jesus. Jesus knows that Peter is sinful. Jesus knows that you and I are sinful. But here's the good news.

Jesus did not come for the perfect. He did not come for the righteous. He came for the unrighteous. He came for the sinners. The only reason. That you could say.

That you're not good enough. To be a follower of Christ. Is because you haven't actually understood. Why Jesus has come. If we would have been righteous already.

[14:22] If we would have been perfect already. Why is there a need for Jesus to come. And die on the cross. By saying that you're not good enough. What you're saying is.

That you think Christ's death on the cross. Isn't good enough. The fact. In fact. The only way. To become worthy. Of being a follower of Jesus.

Of being a disciple of Jesus. Is by admitting. That you're completely. Unworthy. That's the big irony. In Christianity. If you admit you're unworthy. You become worthy.

To illustrate that a little bit. Let me tell you about a man called. Keith Jarrett. He's a well-known jazz pianist. In 1975. He was invited. To play a concert in Cologne.

Now he was. He was requesting. A really nice. Big old grand piano. If you want to know. A Bersendorfer 290 Imperial. However.

[15:20] The opera house in Cologne. They messed something up. And instead. Of the big grand piano. Concert piano. They put the old. Smaller piano. There was a rehearsal.

Piano on stage. Now the piano wasn't. Very good anymore. The higher octaves. Were pretty. Tinny. The lower octaves. Were pretty weak.

Some of the keys. In the middle. Didn't even work. The pedal got stuck. Every now and then. So they called. A guy. Who was supposed. To tune the piano. And he was working on it. Hours and hours. And hours.

And he was saying. Just get a different piano in here. So they tried. But they couldn't. However. Keith Jarrett. The pianist. He finally arrived. He. Hadn't slept much.

The nights before. He was suffering. From back soreness. The restaurant. Where they wanted to get some food. Didn't have any food. So he was hungry as well. And he arrived. And he saw this.

[16:14] This rubbish piano. And he said. I'm not going to do that. But the events manager. She said. Please. Please do it. She begged him to do it.

The room was fully booked. A thousand four hundred people. Some people were ready to record the concert. So he said. Okay. I'm going to give it a try. And he sat on the piano. And for the next hour or so.

He just improvised. Just improvised. Trying to find out which keys work. How can I make the piano sound good. And all of this was recorded. And is what is now known as the most successful solo piano concert album of all time.

He played differently because of the piano. Now why do I tell you this story? Just in case you don't get it. You're not the pianist in this story. You're the weak. Out of tune.

Broken piano. But God. He is the pianist. He can play on you as a weak instrument. If he wants to. And if he wants to make a beautiful melody.

[17:16] And if he wants to use you for his purposes. Then you better believe that he will do that. He came for those in need. He came for those who didn't deserve him. He came to Peter.

And he came to me. And he came to you. And he's saying. Do not be afraid. He's saying. I'm going to take care of everything. Don't worry Peter. That was a long first point.

Second point. Peter is called by the living God. And so. So are you. We see that Jesus. Says something to Peter. Afterwards. That is unexpected.

He says. Peter from now on. You will be catching men. Which is. A weird thing to say in itself. Isn't it. But. That is Jesus for you. He contextualizes.

He knows. Peter is a fisherman. So he's using fishing terms. And also. I think. Jesus is hinting at something. We know from the Old Testament. I don't know.

[18:12] If many of you read. Ezekiel. A lot. I don't personally. But in Ezekiel. Chapter 47. Ezekiel is talking about. A vision of the new temple. And one thing that he describes.

In the chapter is. Water flowing out of the new temple. And becoming bigger. And deeper. And then he says this. Wherever the river goes. Every living creature. That swarms.

Will live. And there will be very many fish. For this water goes there. That the waters of the sea. May become fresh. So everything will live. Where the river goes. Fishermen. Will stand beside the sea.

From En Gedi. To Eniglime. It will be a place. For the spreading of nets. Its fish. Will be of very many kinds. Like the fish. Of the great sea. Fish. Of very many kinds.

Now that is what I see. In here. Today. Fish from different. Ethnicities. From different. Nationalities. All. In the kingdom. Of God.

[19:09] Jeremiah. 1616. God talks about. Sending fishermen. To catch the people. Who have gone astray. These are all. Old testament promises. This is God's.

Redemptive plan. Of salvation. To bring back people. Who are lost. Many people. Of very many. Different kinds. Peter. Perhaps. I don't know.

He was a Jew. He would have heard this. Being read in the synagogues. And he. Potentially knew. About this. He probably knew. The scriptures well. He would have heard the passage. Read in the synagogues.

And. And now he kneels. In front of the Messiah. The incarnated. Son of God. Who's calling him. To be his disciple. How wonderful.

And Peter goes. And he does it. He follows Jesus. He leaves everything. Faithful and obedient. Scared and frightened. For sure. But transformed.

[20 : 05] Through his encounter. With the living God. Do not be afraid. Jesus tells him. We talked last time. About. The cost. Of following.

Jesus. The call of it. How. How it. It costs you. Everything. Your whole life. Giving up. Control of your life. But. How it is. Worth. Every penny. Not penny.

We don't pay with money. But it's worth it. Okay. And it's all encapsulated. In this little phrase.

Follow me. Now. Peter went. He followed Jesus. We can read about that.

In the gospels. It's very well. Documented. Actually. So. After this encounter. With Jesus. And. And the calling. That Jesus gives him. Peter starts following him.

And. And we read. How that goes. Throughout the gospels. And. And there's a specific passage. I want to read. If you have a bible here. Could you turn to. John chapter 21. With me. John.

[21 : 01] Chapter 21. I can just. Tell you. While you're finding it. What has happened. In the meantime. Peter has witnessed. Jesus. Healing. And preaching.

And. Baptizing. And many coming to faith. Peter has witnessed. Jesus. Being accused. Of blasphemy. And being. Beaten. And mocked.

And killed. On a cross. They put Jesus. In a grave. And three days later. Jesus. Was raised. From the dead. And Jesus. Had shown. Himself.

To Peter. After that. And here. In this passage. John chapter 21. We read. About the second time. Jesus. Revealed himself. To Peter. Because there was more.

That needed. To be addressed. Because Peter. Actually. Betrayed. Jesus. Peter said. I will follow you. Even to death. And then. When a slave girl. Asked him. If you knew Jesus.

[21 : 56] He said no. Three times. So Peter messed up. Big time. Now. John chapter 21. Verse 1. After this. Jesus revealed himself. Again. To the disciples. By the sea of.

Tiberias. And he revealed himself. In this way. Simon Peter. Thomas. Nathaniel. Of Cana. In Galilee. The sons of Zebedee. And two others. Of his disciples. Were together.

Simon Peter. Said to them. I'm going fishing. They said to him. We will go with you. They went out. And they got into the boat. But that night. They caught nothing. Just as day was breaking.

Jesus. Stood on the shore. Yet. The disciples. Did not know. That it was Jesus. Jesus said to them. Children. Do you have any fish? They answered him. No. He said to them. Cast the net.

On the right side. Of the boat. And you will find some. So they cast it. And now. They were not able. To haul it in. Because of the quantity. Of fish. That disciple. Whom Jesus loved. Therefore. Said to Peter. It's the Lord.

[22 : 51] When Simon Peter. He heard. That it was the Lord. He put on his. Outer garment. For he was. Stripped for work. And threw himself. Into the sea. The other disciples. Came in the boat. Dragged the net. Full of fish. For they were not far.

From the land. But about a hundred yards off. When they got out. On land. They saw a charcoal fire. In place. With fish laid out. On it. And bread. Jesus said to them. Bring some of the fish.

That you have just caught. So Simon Peter. Went aboard. And hauled the net ashore. Full of large. Large fish. One hundred and fifty. Three of them. Sometimes. Scholars will say.

That this story. In John. Twenty one. Is actually the same story. As in Luke five. Now I don't think. That's true at all. Because radically. Fundamentally. They're very. Very different stories.

The story. That we read about. In John. Happens three years later. After Luke five. Okay. And we are looking at it. Because it really helps us. To understand. The first story better. Because it focuses.

[23 : 46] On Jesus and Peter again. Jesus had died. And was raised up again. What part did Peter play in it? I just mentioned it. Not a great part. He messed up. He had betrayed Jesus.

Three times. When it was most important. Three times. He said. He didn't know Jesus. Now Jesus. Had revealed himself. To some of the disciples. After his resurrection. And I believe Peter.

Had seen the resurrected Jesus. But here. In this account. We hear the story. About how Jesus. Had revealed himself. To Peter. Again. So Peter. And his friends.

Are hanging out. The disciples. And they're thinking. What are we going to do now? Jesus was dead. Now he's raised up again. We don't really know. What's happening. What is going on? So Peter says. Let's go fishing. That's what they did.

They're fishermen. And they go. And they go fishing. All night. They catch nothing. Kind of makes you wonder. Are they good fishermen after all? Not so sure. Suddenly.

[24 : 38] They see a man on the shore. Who says. You have to put your nets out. On the right side. Imagine you're Peter. And you think. As if that's the problem. Anyway.

They go and do it. What happens? Because. They catch. A lot. Of fish. The moment.

Where Peter realizes. It is Jesus. Who was standing on the beach. It's probably one of my favorite ones. In the whole Bible. What does he do?

He messed up. He was sinful. He was a bad person. He was a bad person. You remember the reaction. From the first time. Depart from me.

For I'm sinful. What does he do here? He runs to Jesus. He doesn't hide away. He doesn't say. Go away Jesus.

[25 : 35] I'm too sinful. He actually launches himself. Into the water. And he runs. Into Jesus. Open arms. He knows.

Jesus died on the cross. He knows. He's not paying the price. For Peter's sin. Quite literally. He knows. He's the one. Who defeated death. He knows. That the only way. He could ever be forgiven. Is by running. Into the open arms. Of Jesus. And that is how you know. If you've understood. The gospel. That is how you know.

If someone's a mature Christian. I often thought. Mature Christians. Are the ones. Who never sin. Who never mess up. That's not exactly true. Mature Christians. Are those.

Who run to Jesus. When they have messed up. Peter shows us. The heart of discipleship here. Running to Jesus. Even if you have sinned.

[26 : 32] Instead of telling Jesus. To go away. And Peter saw the fruits. And the fulfillment. Of what Jesus then promised him. Jesus called him again. On the beach. He asked him three times.

Do you love me Simon? Yes. Do you love me? Yes. Do you love me? Yes. For the three times. He had betrayed him. And he says. I will build my church on you. You are the rock. And Peter goes.

And in Acts. To read about his first sermon. Three thousand people. Come to faith. Peter couldn't do that. It's all God's work. It's a wonderful thing.

That God wants to use people. Like you and me. Sinners saved by grace. To accomplish his purposes. He wants you. To be a fisher of men. We don't usually experience miracles. Like Peter did here with the fish.

But that doesn't mean that we can't put our trust into God's word. Peter trusted Jesus before he saw the miracle. And later in his letter he writes. In 1 Peter 1 he writes.

[27 : 31] Though you do not now see him. You believe in him. And rejoice with joy that is inexpressible. And filled with glory. Obtaining the outcome of your faith. The salvation of your souls.

What Jesus is asking you today. Is to trust in his word. To have faith. And to obey. To not run away from him. But rather to run to him.

To launch yourself into the water. To find comfort and forgiveness in Jesus. He is calling you today. Saying. Will you follow me? Just like you did to Peter.

2,000 years ago. Let us pray. Lord. It is astonishing what we read in the Bible sometimes. And almost hard to believe. Yet we know it's true.

We know your word is trustworthy. And I just ask that you would make this a reality in our hearts. That we would know that we are unworthy.

[28 : 28] Yet you have been worthy. And you have given us your worthiness. That even when we sin. When we mess up. We can still run to you. In your open arms.

I pray that we would know that. Amen.