

The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: The Great Catch Of Fish

by Martin G. Collins

Forerunner, "Bible Study," February 2007

Isaiah prophesied that Galilee would witness a major part of the blessings of the Messiah (Isaiah 9:1-2). Since foreigners dominated it for centuries, the region was called "Galilee of the Gentiles." The prophet also mentions "the way of the sea," the name of a major international highway running through this region. Assyrian soldiers used this route when they invaded the northern Kingdom of Israel. Isaiah predicts that from Galilee the Messiah would arise and wipe away the gloom brought on by Gentile control.

In the account of Jesus' miracle of the great catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11), Luke calls the Sea of Galilee the "Lake of Gennesaret," a more ancient name that derives from the name of a small plain on its western shore. On this occasion, while standing in the boat in which Simon Peter had spent the whole—and very unsuccessful—night fishing, Jesus teaches those who wanted to hear the Word of God. Afterward, He tells Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." The man's reply is typical of an experienced fisherman: "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing." Shortly afterward, however, he changes his tune.

1. Why is Peter reluctant to obey Jesus? Luke 5:4-5.

Comment: Toiling for long hours trying to catch fish yet without results is especially exhausting and discouraging. Peter points out the obvious, but out of respect adds, "At Your word I will let down the net." Note that Jesus' command is for Peter to let down his "nets" (plural), yet he replies with "net" (singular). His obedience is half-hearted. Not completely understanding God's power in Jesus, he probably figures the result would be the same as his earlier lack of success. His unbelieving attitude exposes itself in poor-quality obedience. At this early stage, Peter is still learning about the power of the Creator to command His creation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16).

2. Is this great catch really a miracle? Luke 5:6-7, 9.

Comment: A large school of fish miraculously appears alongside Peter's boat just when Jesus says, "Let down your nets." Some may not view this by itself as a miracle. Yet, David writes: "You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen—even . . . the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas" (Psalm 8:6-8). As Creator, Jesus knows where the fish are in the Lake of Gennesaret, a power Peter obviously lacks. Christ, as the sovereign Lord of the earth and its seas, could have commanded thousands of fish to leap onto shore, but He directs them into the man's net. The combination of the precise place, time, and mass of fish following Jesus' instructions qualifies this as a genuine miracle, one witnessed by many.

Note that this first miracle of fish (Luke 5:1-11) happens at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and the second occurs near the end (John 21:3-11). Both miracles take place on the Sea of Galilee after a night of fruitless work.

3. How do people react to the revelation of the glory of the Lord? Luke 5:8.

Comment: This exhibition of supernatural power gave Peter proof of the Father's omniscience and omnipotence through Jesus Christ. With it comes Peter's recognition of his own appalling sinfulness, which he expresses by falling "down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!'" Peter realizes that he had been faithless.

Similarly, Job cries out: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). Seeing his corruption in contrast to God's holiness, the prophet Isaiah reacts with abhorrence: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). Finally, the apostle John responds in an extreme manner as well upon seeing the glorified Christ in a vision: "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead" (Revelation 1:17). Clearly, God's power is so awesome that it causes mere humans to feel as if they are coming undone.

4. What is Jesus' intended message to His disciples? Luke 5:10-11.

Comment: Jesus takes the opportunity of this miracle to call His disciples into a Teacher—student relationship with Him. He figuratively catches Peter in His net before commanding him to "catch men" for the Kingdom of God. Immediately, Peter, Andrew, James, and John leave their boats and nets behind and follow Him. They now understand that Jesus is more than capable of supplying their every need.

We are to apply this lesson in our own lives. When Christ speaks, it is always about obedience to God's way of life. In this case, His teaching affected the disciples' livelihoods. Worship and work form major parts of our lives, too, and in both we must consistently maintain righteousness.

Had Peter failed to obey Christ's command, he would have failed to experience both the miracle and the resulting blessing. No one serves God without being compensated for his service. When we serve, sacrifice, testify, or stand for Him, He will suitably reward our efforts. When God asks us to invest our time, effort, talent, or anything else, we must not resent the opportunity. No one pays dividends on an investment as abundantly as God does—"good measure, pressed down, and running over will be put into your bosom" (Luke 6:38).