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They Left Everything

(Part 1)

977-A

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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They Left Everything

The water was still, totally still. The reflection of the sun as it prepared to lay its head to rest was perfectly etched in the mirror-like covering of that sea. All was quiet, totally quiet. As we stood on the shore, we could not help but notice the peacefulness and the calm. Tied to a rock at the edge of the shoreline by a sturdy rope was a well built, oft-used fishing boat. The oars were resting atop the wooden boards that formed the shelf on which the fishermen sat. Lying on top of one end of the boat was a net, a much-used net, not only frayed in places, but actually broken through in places, as though it had been used to haul in a load beyond what it could hold.

The boat had been there for days. It had on the one hand, a hint of abandonment; and yet it appeared to have been left almost in a hurry. You could tell that when it had been used, it had been used well. If it could talk, it would tell stories, I am sure, of long nights at sea, and of frustrating hours waiting for the touch of one lonely fish. I know it could tell one story, a story of its most glorious day of all, a day in which the Living God actually used that little boat as a platform from which to talk to a crowd of searching people—the same day God used it to demonstrate the art of fishing.

That boat *cannot* talk, of course. *But if it could*, the story it would tell of that day would be one that would well explain why it sat there now, looking so deserted. That story would explain just where the fishermen had gone who had spent their lives and made their livelihood using that little boat. No, that boat can't talk, but the Bible can. And the story it tells of that little fishing boat and what took place on that shore has a message we need to hear. We can find that story in Luke, chapter 5,

Then it came to pass that, while the crowds were pressing about Him to hear the Word of God, as he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret he saw two boats moored by the shore, out of which the fishermen had come while washing their nets. And getting into one of the boats, which was

They Left Everything (Part 1)

Simon's, he asked him to push out a little way from the shore, and sitting down, he taught the crowds from the boat. And when He had left off speaking, he said to Simon, "Launch out to where it is *deep*, and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered and said, "Master, we have toiled all night and have taken nothing. Nevertheless, at your command I will let down the net."

Now when they had done so, they enclosed a huge number of fish. And their net began to break, so they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them; and they came and filled both the boats, so that they were about to sink.

And when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "*Depart from me*, for I am a *sinful* man, Lord!" For he was astonished, and all who were with him, at the haul of fish they had taken; and so were James and John, Simon's partners, the sons of Zebedee. But Jesus said to Simon, "Fear not; you will henceforth catch *men*." And when they had brought the boats back to shore, they left *everything* and followed him. (Luke 5:1-11 TLOCIS)¹

That last phrase, "they left everything," constitutes the title for this lesson and the next. It will be, strangely enough, two lessons about the practical issues facing the church today. Here is our outline:

- I- How to Draw a Crowd (verse 1)
- II- How to Design Facilities (verses 2-3)
- III-How to Develop a Ministry (verses 4-7)
- IV- How to Define Discipleship (verses 8-11)

You may well be wondering how *that* outline came out of this story. I don't blame you. I trust, however, that as it unfolds, you will see the principles unfold that Jesus was using in this crucial episode to teach His young church how to grow, how to build, how to minister, and how to disciple. It is a message vital to the age in which we live, and the story that little fishing boat would like to tell us is key in understanding that message.

I- HOW TO DRAW A CROWD (verse 1)

The setting for the story is the Sea of Gennesaret, more commonly called the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had been in Capernaum, preaching in the synagogue there, and a series of

¹ The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Speak in Harmony; by Johnston M. Cheney;

They Left Everything (Part 1)

unusual experiences had focused the attention of the people in the surrounding area on this amazing carpenter. On one occasion, a demon-possessed man had interrupted the worship service, and the demons in him began striving with Jesus. The Master promptly rebuked the demons as the congregation watched in awe. Needless to say, the story spread like wildfire throughout the region. Then Peter's mother-in-law came down with a serious sickness. The Master but spoke, and the woman's fever departed, and she arose and cooked supper for them. Once again, the word spread fast, and Jesus became a household topic.

All throughout Galilee, Jesus would preach in the synagogues; and the more He preached, the more the excitement grew. As today's story begins to unfold, the Master is standing by the Sea of Galilee, and the crowds, which by now were following Him everywhere, had grown to almost unmanageable proportions. It was a problem, but it was a problem many churches today would like to have.

So obsessed are so many in our age with the intriguing, but misleading fallacy of numbers, that it is common for churches to actually have staff members who do virtually nothing but devise plans and programs to draw a crowd. Computers are used. Advertising is used. Gimmicks are used. Buildings are built. Campaigns are unveiled. Slogans are devised. Christians are exhorted to "pack the pews". Contests offer prizes to the person or the Sunday School class who brings the most newcomers. The goal is to get more people to fill more chairs and give more money to buy more chairs. The poorer flocks tend to mimic Madison Ave. promotional tactics, only with such little success that it flatters neither God nor Madison Ave. The more uptown assemblies, however, will hire outsiders to come in and advise them on how to stir the flock and move the masses.

There's only one problem. It doesn't work. Jesus had a better idea. We read in verse one that "the crowds were pressing about Him to hear the Word of God." Jesus had a master plan for packing the pews. And the Master's plan worked. It still does. He simply, unashamedly, lovingly but authoritatively, preached the Word. He demonstrated, in fact, what Paul instructed Timothy to do in II Timothy, chapter four.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

They Left Everything (Part 1)

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season;
reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound
doctrine; (II Timothy 4:1-3a)

You can pack the pews with programs and activities. But the problem is, those who come will become enamored not with God's grace, but with man's methods. You can fill the church using sensational musical productions, flamboyant speakers, and well-planned high-profile activities. The problem is, that the people will stay so long as the aura stays. But let the excitement die down and the entertainment lose its luster, and the crowd will drift away, looking for new bright lights and bright new talent to tickle its imagination.

Use man's techniques and man's technology as the basis for your growth, and you will find that you will have created temporary interest in a system or even awe at a program, neither of which is eternal. My friend, you and I have only one thing to proclaim and only one person to exalt. His name is Jesus. His message is a Cross. His story is His Word. You lift up the Word of God and teach it without apology, without compromise, without retreating, but with compassion and love, and the crowds *God wants you to teach will come*. If those crowds are large, teach them. If only one person shows up, praise God and disciple that one. He or she is your ministry. Oh, if we could be reawakened to Scriptural concepts of church growth. The Word builds churches; men don't. They *pressed about Him*. They overflowed the place where Jesus was. Why? Verse one tells us: "to hear the Word of God."

They did then. They will now.

II- HOW TO DESIGN FACILITIES (verses 2-3)

So Jesus had a plan for church growth. He simply taught the Scriptures in love. Teach the truth without love and you will develop a small, even militant following, but have little impact in the world in which you live. You will develop a doctrinal haven to which closed-minded saints can come to reinforce their prejudices. Demonstrate love without teaching truth, and you will have a fellowship of excited saints who minister to needs, but who never seem to grow in grace. Eventually, they will either wander off on a doctrinal tangent that replaces truth with experience, or they will find a banner to fly and replace

They Left Everything (Part 1)

evangelism with social justice.

In either case, they will have, simply by allowing the balance of speaking the truth in love to shift in one direction or the other, missed the mark and fallen into the clutches of either mediocrity or heresy. The balance is *truth mixed with love = power*. Jesus demonstrated that throughout His entire ministry. Satan's objective is to find any tactic that will simply cause the pendulum of the church to shift to either extreme. Lose the balance, and you lose the battle.

Jesus was demonstrating that balance as He preached throughout Galilee early in His ministry. The result was a church filled with newcomers, many of them honest inquirers, many of them curious bystanders, but all of them honestly intrigued by this one who spoke with such authority, and yet with such compassion. Now He had a new problem. What to do with the people. And while His solution in this passage was hardly meant to be a blueprint for church planning, it does outline a principle, a principle we as twenty-first century saints would do well to examine carefully.

Now you and I would have handled this differently. We would have formed a sub-committee of the twelve, appointed Peter as chairman, told him to take up an offering among the masses that were so intrigued with the gospel (for after all, they needed a tangible way to express their commitment). We would have commissioned this newly-formed committee to draw up a long-range plan for church growth, and begin building the first of a series of multi-storied structures to house the mob of people that were sure to come as the ministry developed. First, of course, we would have to buy land. Lake-front property would be good, because the people seemed to like to gather around a lake. And plenty of trees would be needed, so the searching saints-to-be could park their donkeys or horses in the shade. In no time, we would have the finest facilities in all of Israel, and Jews from all over the land would flock to our beautiful edifice, rather than worship in that staid, conventional temple. Once they were there, staring in awe at the magnificent structures we had put together for our God, they would have no choice but to hear the gospel. And who knows? Maybe some of them, once inside, would come inside the Kingdom.

The question is, what if, once inside, the people find it

They Left Everything (Part 1)

comfortable inside and decide to join our ranks without joining the Kingdom? And couldn't all that money be better spent giving Paul and the others passage to take the message to the four corners of the earth, rather than just making us more comfortable within the four corners of a building? Good question. Anyway, let's see what Jesus did.

He saw two boats moored by the shore, out of which the fishermen had come while washing their nets.

And getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to push out a little way from the shore, and sitting down he taught the crowds from the boat.

(Luke 5:2,3 TLOCIS)

Jesus didn't focus his energy on how to make the troops comfortable. He was calling men and women into battle with the adversary, and an enlistment center need not be a country club. Jesus simply preached the Word, and when the people came, He used incredible creativity in making room for them to hear. He asked Simon Peter if He could borrow his fishing boat, that lonely little boat I told you about earlier, and He pushed it out a few yards from the shore so the people could have enough visibility to see Him, and hear well enough to understand Him, and He thus established the First Christian Church by the Sea. No expensive sound systems. No air conditioning other than that His Father provided free. No comfortable seating, unless you find jagged rocks by the seashore comfortable. But the people didn't seem to mind. I wonder why? Back to verse one. As the deer pants for water, they were thirsting for Truth. Jesus gave them truth. So they were willing to walk, stand, sit, swelter and sweat through hours of teaching. They were getting the one thing they wanted, the Word of God. The ones who were not hungry left. Keep preaching the Word and they will leave anyway. The ones whose hearts longed for Truth stayed. They would have stayed regardless.

Now this is not a condemnation of building programs, nor is it a blueprint for church planning. It is, however, a gentle reminder that we can easily, in the process of trying to attract the world, so conform to the world, that we lose our identity. If God grants you nice facilities to worship in, praise Him. But, Beloved, don't build those facilities to attract the people. Build them to house the people the Word has attracted. And don't violate scriptural financial principles to do so. That is not, as so many proclaim,

They Left Everything (Part 1)

“faith in action”. It is, rather presumption in action, and God does not honor presumption.

III- HOW TO DEVELOP A MINISTRY (verses 4-7)

Now in verses 4 through 7, Jesus, having demonstrated how to draw a crowd and how to house a crowd, demonstrates to His inner team how to develop a ministry. It is, like all we have seen thus far, diametrically opposed to the world’s plan. Again, Jesus used visual aids to the maximum, but his investment in equipment was zero. He simply took what the Father had provided naturally and turned a physical experience into a spiritual education. That is teaching. The potential of living parables. Jesus was the Master Teacher.

Now the most readily available teaching tool was a boat, that little boat that now stood so deserted by the seashore, as a matter of fact. So Jesus took that boat and took His disciples into the classroom of life and using something they were all familiar with to get their attention, He permanently etched in their minds a spiritual truth that hours of teaching could not have done.

He said, “Let’s go fishing”. This carpenter was going to teach some professional fishermen how to fish, and not to improve their vocational skills, though the principles apply to vocational productivity. He had in mind utilizing their fishing experience as a backdrop to building a ministry. They were fishermen. Not by accident, by divine appointment. God was about to unfold for them the greatest fishing expedition ever undertaken. It would last for 2,000 years or more, would involve millions of fishermen, billions of fish, and trillions of dollars in fishing gear, some of which would be totally unnecessary, but then that’s true of real fishing, too. Jesus was going to teach men to fish for men. In order to do that, He had to use the stage of life, and His primary prop would be our now lonely little vessel tied to that rock by that Galilean sea.

Jesus gave His orders quickly and precisely. He said, “Launch out to where it is deep, and let down your nets for a catch.” No seminar. No syllabus. No training films. No pep talks. Nothing wrong with any of that, but Jesus wanted to be sure that no one put their confidence in the methods or the system. They were simply to follow His direction and do what He instructed them to do. That ought to be simple enough, but it drives the flesh crazy.

They Left Everything (Part 1)

Then Jesus decided to take away any glory men might accrue for this project. He took the same people, the same boat, and the same net that had totally failed a few hours before at the same enterprise. Simon objected. That was his pre-Pentecostal profession. He objected on the basis that they had already tried to do themselves what Jesus was asking them to do and had failed miserably. Failure, you see, is a valuable asset to Lordship. But again, the flesh detests that concept. These same men had fished from that same little boat all night the night before, and had caught nothing. Nothing? Nothing! That is, incidentally, what the flesh profiteth...nothing!

Jesus said, "That's good, Simon, that means that by now you know that you cannot do what I am asking you to do." Simon answered, "Nevertheless, at your command, I will let down the net. If you say so, Lord, I'll do it, but I don't expect anything to happen." "Fine, Simon, just do as you're told." So these tired fishermen, already scarred with failure, with but at best the faith of a grain of mustard seed, let down those nets one more time. (only this time, at the Lord's command). The result? Well, if the law of supply and demand was working, the price of fish just fell to its lowest figure in history. Those well-worked nets, accustomed to holding enough seafood to satisfy the most ardent of fishermen, couldn't handle the catch. So they dumped into two boats, and both boats began to sink under the sheer weight of the haul. Same boats. Same nets. Same water. Same fishermen. Actually it was a poorer time to catch fish...and *yet there were so many fish, these professional fishermen couldn't even handle the load.*

The difference? Jesus. This was the Master's fishing expedition. He chose the time, the place, the men, and the method. Thus, the outcome became His responsibility. And beloved, when God is left to be responsible for His own business, His business does quite well. It was almost comical. Try to picture in your mind these professionals trying to look professional while both their boats were sinking hopelessly into that Galilean sea, all but buried beneath a mountain of squirming, smelly fish, which didn't even seem to exist twelve hours before. I know if our little boat could talk, it would have objected to this particular moment. I mean, God was taxing its facilities to the maximum, but then God does that. Then no glory goes to the facilities.

God apparently had two objectives. The first was to cause

They Left Everything (Part 1)

them to worship. That is always God's primary objective, for when men worship Him, they free Him to exercise His power, free from competition for His Glory. The second was to divert their attention to spiritual things. Once they had seen God do a miracle in the physical realm, He carefully warned them that this was not to be His prime objective in ministering. Anybody could fish for fish. They were being called to fish for men. And unless they saw tangibly that God was the only one capable of catching physical fish, they would never believe that the ministry He had called them to was His ministry, not theirs.

Needless to say, it worked. Simon Peter, Mister Self-sufficient himself, fell on his face before the Master and cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord". That phrase alone would be teaching material for a few weeks' studies. We'll look at it a little more in detail in the next lesson. The reason is given in verse 9,

For he was astonished, and all who were with him, at the haul of fish which they had taken; (Luke 5:9 TLOCIS)

That was the reason for the miracle. To cause them to worship, and to cause them to see life from God's perspective.

Now Jesus had them, at least momentarily, in the palm of His hand. And so He lovingly gave them their commission. "Fear not, you will henceforth catch men." Your clear-cut goal in life from this point forward has been defined. Your objective is singular—to bring men to Christ. How to do it is not your problem. When to do it is not the issue. Your training and your schooling are not the major issues. The major issue is, "Are you ready to change the focus of your life from that which is physical to that which is spiritual? Are you ready to give your life to fishing for souls? If so, follow Me. If not, you don't fit. I'll provide the fish; I'll provide the boats; I'll provide the nets. But I need men and women who are so yielded to My will that even if and especially if they have failed in the flesh, they are willing, at My command, to lower the nets and leave the catch up to Me. They will receive no glory. They will only receive the joy of having pleased the heart of God. Now, any volunteers?"

Verse eleven says it all; and verse eleven will be the basis for our next study. It reads like this:

And when they had brought the boats back to shore, they left *everything* and followed him. (Luke 5:11 TLOCIS)

Everything? Everything.

They Left Everything (Part 1)

So you see, that tiny little fishing boat, moored in the harbor of the Sea of Galilee has quite a story to tell. Sure, it's lonely. Sure, it misses the days when Peter and the others would, at sunset, load up their nets and launch into the deep, returning at sunrise, sometimes laughing, sometimes singing, sometimes complaining about the weather or the waves or the weariness. Sure, little boat misses all that. But, oh, what memories that little vessel has to fill its days with reminiscing. Memories of the day when God used it to teach the multitude. Memories of the day when God used it to demonstrate to a bunch of failures what real success is made of. Memories of the day when God taught His early Church how to draw a crowd, how to make do with what you have, and how to develop a ministry.

That little boat will never forget that day. Those disciples will never forget that day. Dear God, may we never forget that day, as well.

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