

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Three

IN THE GOSPELS: James and John

Burden to Impart:

The Lord Jesus not only wanted to call Peter and Andrew to follow Him, He also wanted to call their cousins and friends, James and John. Although James and John may have been the youngest disciples the Lord called, they later became apostles (sent ones) for the Lord. They both loved the Lord very much, preached His gospel, and were faithful to Him for the rest of their lives.

Memory Verse: "... He saw two other brothers, James ... and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father mending their nets, and He called them" (Matthew 4:21).

Facts to Teach:

1. Andrew and Peter had two cousins who lived near them in Galilee, James and John. They were partners in fishing as well as close friends (Luke 5:7, 10). Andrew and John seemed to be the more drawn to seek the Lord, for they had apparently left their hometown and were so touched by the preaching of John the Baptist that they stayed with him and became his disciples (John 1:37,42; Matt. 4:22 note 1).
2. John and Andrew met the Lord Jesus by the Jordan River through John the Baptist (John 1:35-37) and began to follow Him for a short time. Later, they returned to Galilee to continue their fishing business with their father, Zebedee (Matt. 4:21).
3. After His baptism and forty days of trial and temptation in the wilderness, Jesus went to Galilee to find His first few disciples, Andrew, Peter, James, and John. He first found Andrew and Peter and called them. He then went to their cousins, who were nearby, and also called them to follow Him.
4. James and John were mending their broken fishing nets when the Lord called them. Perhaps these were the nets that had broken due to the miracle the Lord performed when they caught so many fish that their boat nearly sank (Luke 5:1-11).
5. John was probably the youngest disciple the Lord called. In their youth John and James sometimes argued as to who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-34). They also wanted the Lord to promise them that they could sit in a special place beside Him when He entered into His kingdom (Mark 10:35-41). This upset the other ten disciples. The Lord called them the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). This may indicate that they were rather hot-tempered or impulsive.
6. Though they were young, John and James loved the Lord very much. The Lord one day told them that they would both be killed because of their love for Him (Mark 10:39). This did not cause them to be afraid or to leave the Lord. They followed Him faithfully all of their lives. John later became the writer of five books of the New Testament.

Reference Materials

SUBJECT: GOD’S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: In the Gospels—the Calling of Simon, Andrew, James and John to be Fishers of Men

SCRIPTURE: Luke 5:1-11; Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20

AIM: To help the children see that the Lord is calling us to be fishers of men. We should readily respond to His call.

MEMORY VERSES: Matt. 4:19-20

APPROACH: Ask the children if they’ve ever gone fishing. What do they think—is catching a fish easy or hard? What equipment would they need to catch a fish? When is the best time to go fishing—day or night? What did it feel like when they finally caught a fish?

BACKGROUND: Some of the Lord’s disciples were fishermen. Fishing was an ancient trade and an honored one. Since the diet of the common people at that time was largely of fish and bread, fishing was a big industry and many fishermen were prosperous and well off. Fishermen had unique personalities—they especially needed to be strong, diligent, and patient.

To catch large amounts of fish, the fishermen used special nets. One of the types of nets they used was called a seine (pronounced like “sane”). It could be five hundred yards long and twelve feet high. It had floats to hold up the top end and sinkers to hold down the bottom end. It was stretched out like a twelve-foot high wall and used to enclose (sometimes by two circling boats) large schools of fish. The fishermen pulled in the catch by the long ropes that were attached to each end of the net. (This may have been the type of net that Simon, Andrew, James and John used.) The nets were expensive and needed a lot of maintenance. When they were dragged through the water they accumulated seaweed and small rocks. Also, larger rocks at the bottom of the lake would sometimes rip the nets in various places. Thus, after a night of fishing, (fishing was done at night because the fish came to the surface at night to eat) the nets needed to be washed and often mended. The boats the fishermen used were large and sturdy, built to carry large amounts of fish and built to weather the frequent storms that unexpectedly swept over the lake.

The Sea of Galilee (also known as the Lake of Gennesaret), the place of today’s story, is located sixty miles north of Jerusalem. Though called a sea, it is really a lake. At the Lord’s time, and even today, it is noted for being filled with a lot of fish.

CONTENT: One day, Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee teaching the people the word of God. A crowd was pressing around Him to hear the word. He saw two ships lying by the lake but the fishermen were not in them. Simon and his brother Andrew were casting their nets into the sea, washing them after their night of fishing (Matt. 4:18; Luke 5:2); John and James, the Sons of Zebedee, were mending theirs (Matt. 4:21).

The Lord Jesus got into one of the ships, Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land. The Lord sat down and began to teach the people from the ship. After He finished speaking, He said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

At this point, Simon must have had a lot of thoughts. They had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. He also knew it was not the right time of day to fish. (Remember, fishing was done at night.) He knew all this, yet he was open. He told the Lord, “Master, through the whole night we toiled and caught nothing; but based on Your word I will let down the nets.”

When they did this, they “enclosed a great number of fish”. It must have been very great because their nets began to tear apart! They had to signal for their partners, James and John, to come and help them. They came and filled both the boats with fish, and the boats (though large and sturdy) began to sink!

Simon Peter was so deeply impressed when he saw this, that he fell down at Jesus’ knees saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord.” The Bible says that amazement had taken possession of him and all that were with him (including James and John, Simon’s partners) because of the catch of the fish which they took. The Lord told Simon not to be afraid and that from now on he would be catching men alive. When they brought their ships to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

APPLICATION:

1. Did you know that every single person in this whole world is a “fish”? Jesus wants to catch them all (1 Tim. 2:4) but He needs some fishermen, like you. It’s really not so hard. Just as in the Sea of Galilee there are a lot of fish around us. The most important thing to do is pray. Just one short prayer every day would do, even if you only say, “Lord, catch John.” This will set up the right conditions—the proper tide, the best time of day. One day the opportunity will come to offer some “bait” to your fish—maybe you can share a verse with him or maybe you can invite him to children’s meeting. This is where you have to be a little careful. Satan is like a crab—he will try to steal your bait (“...then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they would not believe and be saved” Luke 8:12b). We need to continue to pray.
2. Like the Galilean fishermen, we have to be strong. Sometimes a fish may put up a fight--like bluefish. Your arms will ache before a bluefish finally gives up. And, like any fisherman, we need to be patient. Don’t give up; don’t let go. Keep praying. Keep taking the opportunity to speak a little something.
3. Fishing for men is not our own labor. The Lord will gather many around us for us to catch. The Lord knew where the fish were that day in the Sea of Galilee. If we pray, He will direct us and guide us to the fish. We simply need to be open (like Simon Peter) and ready. Also, we need to realize that on that day on the Sea of Galilee the Lord was in the boat! As we fish, He is with us. We are not doing something without Him.
4. When the Lord called the disciples to follow Him, they readily responded. “And immediately leaving the nets, they followed Him” (Mark 1:18). If it had been us, we may have thought about all those fish. Wow, we can sell them and make a lot of money! But they left it all. This shows that they took the Lord’s call seriously. They left the fish. They left their prosperous business, and they left their dear families—all to follow the Lord Jesus and become fishers of men.

Reference: Daily Life in the Time of Jesus. By Henri Daniel-Rops. Hawthorne Books, Inc. 1962

Adapted from: Bringing Children from Adam to Christ in God’s Economy, Volume #4, Lessons #2 and #3 and the Church in New York City Children’s Meeting Lessons - 2/28/82; 2/11/90, 10/9/94; 9/24/00, 9/24/06