

Luke 5:1-7

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[0 : 0 0] Jesus. I guess there are three possible answers to that question. You could answer yes, you could answer no, or maybe you might answer, I don't know. The third, I don't know, could be the reply of somebody who genuinely, sincerely, is unsure as to what following Jesus means or involves. That may be where you are this morning. I'd suggest, tentatively, that the answer I don't know would, in most cases, maybe not in all, in fact, I'm sure not in all, would indicate that you're perhaps not following Jesus. But we can think about this a bit more as we continue. Now, this is an important matter, this matter of following Jesus and knowing if indeed that is what we are doing. I would argue that there is nothing more important for you than to follow

Jesus, to knowingly and consciously follow Jesus. Now, you might imagine that there are other matters that are more important. Some of you are students, you want to get a good degree, others want to find a well-paid job. You're in a job, but you want to get a better job or get a promotion. Maybe some of you are thinking about forming a family, and you have to find the right wife or the right husband. Maybe you already have a family, and you want to have a nice family, a well-constituted family, and that's really important. Maybe for some of you, in the matter of just how you live, you think that being a good person and being good in the manner that you treat others, that's really important, maybe the most important thing. Well, let me suggest that all of these things in comparison to following Jesus pale into insignificance. But actually, let's pause there.

As I was scribbling out the sermon, that's what I said. That's what I scribbled, that in comparison to following Jesus, all of these things that I've mentioned pale into insignificance. But that's wrong.

As I sat back, I said, that's not right. I think it's rather the case that in following Jesus, these things, as they occupy the place that they merit, take on far greater significance. It's not a case of ignoring all of these other things. Oh, they're not important. No, they're very important. But they take on far greater importance when they're in the right place, when they occupy the place that they ought to.

And where above it all, there is this overarching reality that we are doing all of these things as we follow Jesus, and in a manner that is consistent with following Jesus. Well, I want us to think about this, exploring the personal story of a man's journey in this matter of following Jesus. Not the whole journey, but one important part of it, namely, the beginning of the journey. We've read in Luke chapter 5, that passage, and the very last verse of what we read is as follows, "...so they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed Him." And of interest to us is one of the men included in the they of that verse, namely, Simon Peter.

[3 : 30] We're calling this the beginning of his journey, and in doing so, we're exercising a measure of poetic license. As I already mentioned in introducing the two readings, I think a very strong case can be made. A case can be made, and I would say should be made for considering this occasion recorded in Luke chapter 5 as distinct from and subsequent to the call accounts that we have in Matthew and Mark, one of which we read in Mark's gospel. They record the first occasion that Peter and others were called. Now, I don't want to dwell on this or on the implications of what we might call this twofold call, but I think it does serve as a useful backdrop in understanding aspects of Peter's encounter and call as described in this passage in Luke chapter 5 that will concern us this morning.

I've also called the events described as one man's journey in the matter of following Jesus. And given that it is one man's journey, it would be a mistake to assume or imagine that his journey will be identical to that of others. We're all different, and our circumstances are different, and so our journey will also be different. That said, there will be and there are common central elements that will be found in some measure in the experience of all who have begun to follow Jesus or who will follow Jesus.

Now, I'm not usually a great fan of alliteration, but today I'll make an exception and use as our template for following this account in Peter's story, identifying six stages that we can see as the story pans out. And let me just say what those are, and then we'll look through them one by one. We'll find that Peter is successively connected, connected to Jesus. He's courteous towards Jesus. He's convicted by Jesus. He's comforted. He's called, and he's committed. So, there you've got a whole bunch of seas to hang your hat on as you listen through this morning. First of all, we find Peter as a man connected to Jesus. Verses 1 to 3. Now, what we've already said concerning the other accounts of Peter being called in Mark's gospel is helpful here, because if indeed it is the case, as I'm suggesting that it is, that Peter had already not only met Jesus, but had known Jesus calling him to follow him, then that sheds quite significant light on how we understand this chapter. And certainly it would confirm that they, at the very least, knew each other. Now, I would argue that even if we hold a different understanding of the order of events, the passage itself, Luke chapter 5 by itself, would indicate that there was a prior knowledge, a prior connection between Peter and Jesus. It seems very unlikely that Jesus, for example, would commandeer the boat of a complete stranger. It's much more natural to understand this as Jesus asking somebody he knew, somebody he was already connected with, the use of the boat for the purposes that we've read of. So, Peter is already connected to Jesus in some measure. They know each other. But Peter has yet to leave everything and follow Jesus. We've read that he followed Him, but it is,

I think, significant how in Luke's account you have it described in a different way. They left everything and followed Him. That's not language that you find on the previous occasion. So, Peter is connected to Jesus. He knows Jesus. There is this existing relationship, if you wish. I wonder, is that not true of many today. Of course, we know that in our society today there are multitudes who have no such connection even of that kind. But I think there are still many who do, those who enjoy some existing connection with Jesus and with the message of the gospel, but little more. I would suggest that everybody here this morning is at least connected to Jesus in this measure. You wouldn't be here, presumably, unless there was some kind of connection to the person of Jesus and the message of Jesus.

So, Peter is connected to Jesus. That's the first thing we can notice. But we can also move on as we just read through the passage and describe Peter as courteous in his relationship with Jesus. Verses 3 to 5, we find different ways in which that is true. I think, in fairness, the word courteous, though accurate, probably doesn't do full justice to the attitude of Peter to Jesus. But I needed a word that started with C, so you'll bear with me if it isn't maybe the most precise word to use. Well, we notice his courtesy or his respect for Jesus in at least three ways in the course of what we're told, and that's these following verses from verses 3 to 5. First of all, we notice the favor afforded. Peter grants to Jesus this favor, the use of his boat. We read there in verse 3, he got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. And it's so obvious that that's what happened that we're not even told. Peter was more than willing to grant Jesus this favor that he asked of him. And so, there is a courteous respect towards Jesus, even in that simple act of kindness, we might call it. Then there's also the respect granted by Peter to Jesus. Peter addresses Jesus as, as master. This is an interesting term that Luke employs, that Peter employs, and that Luke records.

[10:15] It's a term that's only used by Luke. It's less specific than rabbi, but certainly implies some recognition on the part of Peter of the authority of Jesus, master. Master, if you have said so, and then we know what continues. So, there is a real respect there that we can detect on the part of Peter towards Jesus. But then especially, the obedience rendered. Jesus presumes to give advice in the realm of Peter's expertise. And you can imagine how that might have been just a little grating for Peter, especially in the light of a long night's unsuccessful fishing. And yet, what does Peter say and do? But because you say so, I will let down the nets. And as we were thinking about with the children, each of us and the church at large could learn so much, and we could save ourselves from so much pain by following Peter's example. We do well to obey even when we don't understand. Now, don't misunderstand me. It is important in the measure that we can to understand the whys and the wherefores.

And so often we are given the information that we need to understand why God commands us to go in a particular direction or to do something or not to do something. But even when we don't understand, it's always wise to do what God says. Well, we can see the respect that Peter has for Jesus in the obedience that he renders to Jesus. I wonder if you can relate to Peter and his attitude to the Lord as evidence by these words and actions. Perhaps you also have a genuine respect for Jesus. You're ready to help in some measure in the work of the gospel, in the work of the church. You speak of Jesus with respect, and in a measure you genuinely try to obey the Lord's commands. And all this is good, but it's not enough. So let's move on and find Jesus, rather find Peter, as the story unfolds, also convicted. This is really the heart of the account before us, and we have it in verses 6 to 9. And what happens in the account is remarkable in anybody's book. A huge haul of fish that requires the assistance of a second boat.

And even then, the weight of the fish is such that both boats begin to sink. But even more remarkable than the events, even more remarkable than the miracle that led to these events, even more remarkable is the reaction of Peter to the miracle that he witnesses. And we have his words record as for us there in verse 8. Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. Go away from me. This is the Jesus that he already knows, that he respects, that he is courteous to, and yet here, the Jesus he had welcomed onto his boat.

And yet here he is saying, go away from me. Depart from me. Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. I think we can distinguish different movements, if we can use that word, that climax in this convicted cry of Peter. Firstly, there is the miracle itself. And even before engaging in any analysis of what's going on or what it implies concerning the identity of Jesus, it is a remarkable event in anybody's eyes.

The miracle itself is worthy of awe and astonishment. But it was also, of course, as with all the miracles, a sign, a signpost pointing to the identity and the authority of Jesus, of the author. With this miracle, Jesus was demonstrating his authority over the seas and all the created order. Even the fish in the Sea of Galilee obeyed him and swam in the direction that he wanted them to swim, right into the nets that Peter cast into the lake. This was a demonstration of divine power and authority that was intended to confront the disciples with the biggest question they or you will ever confront. Who is this man?

[15 : 02] Who is this man who does such things? Who is he? And notice one more detail. This is a miracle that Jesus performs in what we might call their territory, in their area of expertise. It's as if Jesus is saying to Peter and the others, I'm in charge in your world. I'm not just in charge. I'm in charge in your world. Where you think you're in charge, I'm in charge. So we have the miracle itself. We have something of what it suggests concerning the author of the miracle. But then, of course, we have Peter's reaction. A reaction that demonstrates that in some significant measure, Peter has grasped who this man is, not clearly in full measure, but in significant measure. In a moment, his eyes flashing with astonishment from the matter of the miracle to the author of it. He is conscious that he is standing in the presence of divine majesty and an infinite power. Jesus somehow, and in a way that Peter far from understands, is divine. And Peter, in some measure, is beginning to get that. But then we have another movement. And this is not all clinically chronological. A movement from seeing Jesus to Peter seeing himself. Hand in hand with seeing the glory and majesty of Jesus. Peter sees his own abject sinfulness. Is this not the experience of so many as recorded in the Bible? We think of Isaiah and Ezekiel and their terrifying encounters with God. And does Peter's experience not echo the experience of Job as it's recorded for us in chapter 42 of the book of Job. We may. You may recognize that you're a sinner, but you cannot by self-examination alone appreciate the exceeding sinfulness of sin. To bring that about the God of infinite majesty and glory and perfection must be seen and recognized in the person of Jesus Christ. And then the cry issues from the heart, depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.

This experience of Peter helps us to consider a serious matter and a very practical matter in this whole business of coming to Jesus as our Savior. I guess we could pose the matter in the form of a question. What comes first? Is it that first we have a sense of sin that drives us to Jesus as the one able and willing to forgive our sin? Or is it that what comes first is an appreciation of the glory of Jesus that produces that sense of sin, which will then, of course, drive us back to Jesus as the one who is able to forgive us? Well, I guess there's not a black and white answer to that question as we've already suggested. This is the story of one man's journey. But I would say this, and perhaps applying it to the matter of communicating the truth of the gospel to others as we would do so, be it in preaching or in conversation, I would say this, that the most powerful way of exposing sin in the heart is not banging on about sin, but making known Jesus, a much more effective way of bringing people to an appreciation of their own need and of their own sinfulness. I could illustrate this or try and illustrate this, albeit inadequately, by asking you to imagine you were walking alongside Marshall College and the attached Greyfriars Kirk, which is really part of the same complex before the renovation.

Those of you who live in Aberdeen or have done for the last five years will know what I'm talking about. So just imagine you were walking along and we're seeing that very impressive complex, but this is before the renovation, Marshall College and Greyfriars Kirk that is attached to it. I wonder if you were walking along at that time, would you have seen anything that distinguished Greyfriars Kirk from the rest of the complex in any great measure? I suggest not. You wouldn't have seen anything particularly different about one part of the complex to the rest of the complex. Maybe if you're an architect, you might have seen things that you think, oh, that's interesting. But the likes of us, we would walk by and say, well, it's just all the same. But what if you were to walk along today?

You leave church this morning and head in the direction of Marshall College. I have no idea where that is. But anyway, whatever it is. And you're walking alongside and you're looking up at it. Would you see a difference between Marshall College and Greyfriars Kirk? Well, you certainly would. And your reaction would be, what a filthy building Greyfriars Kirk is. It looks disgusting.

It's obscenely filthy. Now, why would you notice that? Well, you notice that because Marshall College, following the renovation is pristine in its cleanliness and the contrast is just dramatic.

[20 : 55] It's almost painful to see just how shabby Greyfriars Kirk looks in comparison to the purity, if we can use that word, of Marshall College. I'm not referring to what goes on inside.

No allusions to our esteemed council workers and all the work that they do inside the building. But there's a contrast, isn't there, that you wouldn't have noticed before. The filthiness of Greyfriars Kirk is only evidenced in contrast to the cleanliness of the college, and in some measure, so too with sinners. We can't really appreciate how sinful we are until our sinful condition is seen in the light of the majesty and purity of Jesus. And so we find Peter, a sinner at the feet of Jesus, stricken to the heart, self-condemned, confessed by his own lips, miserable and guilty, unworthy of fellowship with God, at the feet of Jesus, defenseless, without any plea, without any claim.

Is this a sorry sight? Far from it. There is no better place for a sinner to be. And of course, this is not the end of the story, because convicted Peter soon becomes, immediately becomes, comforted Peter, indeed comforted and called, and we'll deal with Peter comforted and called together. For his call really forms part of the comfort, the consolation that Jesus grants to him.

How does Jesus comfort Peter? Well, I think there are two aspects to this. First of all, you have the tender encouragement to not be afraid. Jesus immediately comforts Peter with these words, don't be afraid. There's no desire on the part of Jesus for Peter to stew for a while, while he thinks very carefully about just how sinful he is. You know, we sometimes think of, as parents, we maybe do that. We say, I want you to go away and think about how bad you've been, and then come back and we'll have a chat. Well, there's maybe a place for that in parenting. I'm not making a point about parenting. But here, Jesus doesn't want Peter to stew in his misery as he considers how sinful he is. No, immediately he says, Peter, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.

I know what you've discovered. I know what you're seeing inside, but don't be afraid. Don't be afraid of what? What was it that Peter was not to be afraid of?

[23 : 33] Well, certainly, Jesus was saying, don't be afraid of me. Yes, I am altogether pure and glorious and majestic. Yes, that's true. But I love you. I love you, Peter. And don't be afraid of your sinful condition. Yes, you are a sinner, but I have come to secure your forgiveness and to forgive you.

Now, of course, Peter didn't understand all of these things at this precise moment. You know, there's little merit in recognizing your sin and then remaining gripped by fear.

Fear will not in itself bring any resolution, but the one who bids you not to fear, he can relieve your fears, remove the cause of your fear.

There's a tender encouragement to not be afraid, but the comfort of Jesus also involves the exciting call to service. Peter was not only gripped with fear, he was gripped with a sense of his own unworthiness. Hence, this cry, depart from me, go away from me. I'm not worthy to be in your presence.

There's more than fear. There's this intense sense of his own unworthiness. And the call to service that immediately follows the words, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. From now on, you will catch men.

[24 : 58] The call to service addresses this sense of unworthiness. Jesus is saying to Peter, listen, my friend, you are useful to me. You are struck and overwhelmed by a sense of your sinfulness and your unworthiness. But I consider you useful. I have a job for you to do. Have you experienced this comfort, this consolation in your own life? Have you discovered not only your sin, but the reality that you need not fear your sin? Don't fear your sin. Rather, flee from your sin to Jesus, who has dealt with it on Calvary's tree and who is able and willing to forgive you even this morning if you would come to him. He'll forgive you and welcome you and dignify you with a call to service in his world. In the case of Peter, and indeed for all followers of Jesus, this service involves the great task of sharing with others the good news concerning Jesus that they too might be brought in to his band of disciples. Peter comforted and called. But then, finally, let's draw things to a close by finding Peter as the one we could describe as committed. Verse 11, so they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him. This is how the account ends. I wonder, was that a difficult thing to do for Peter and the other disciples? I think we imagine that it must have been a very difficult thing to do, even the language, to leave everything and follow Jesus. That must have been so difficult. And in the measure that we think that it was very difficult, well, we admire the disciples for their great commitment. But I wonder, and I throw this out for you to think about. I'm not stating anything definitively. But I wonder, was it so difficult? In the light of what Peter had seen and heard and experienced of Jesus, I suspect there is nothing he would want to do more than leave everything and follow Jesus. You see, the heart of the matter is an encounter with Jesus that transforms everything and ensures a commitment that is not self-generated and consequently very fragile, but a commitment that is grounded in an appreciation of the worthiness of Jesus to be followed and trusted.

And that is why Peter and the others are so ready to leave everything and follow Jesus. It's not about any confidence in their ability to follow. It's in the worthiness of the one they are going to follow.

He has secured their faith, their trust. Well, as we do draw things now to a close, let me end by asking the question with which I began.

Are you following Jesus? Following Jesus begins with an encounter with Jesus, an encounter that enables us to see something of who Jesus is and something of who we are.

And as we are brought low by that somber discovery, certainly of who we are, Jesus then graciously lifts us up as He says, Don't be afraid.

[28 : 41] Don't be afraid. From now on, from now on, it's a new start. It's a new beginning. From now on, it's a new life for you. Don't be afraid.

I have big plans for you, good plans for you. Follow in me. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word.

Lord, we thank You for Your Son, Jesus. We thank You that the eternal Son of God, the Creator of the universe, became flesh and dwelt among us. We thank You for the life that He lived.

We thank You for the death that He died in the place of sinners. We thank You that He is indeed worthy of our trust, that He is indeed the one who calls us, and with good reason, to leave everything and to follow Him.

And we pray that we would gladly do so. Lord, we confess that sometimes it's so difficult for us to believe, to obey, to trust.

[29 : 39] And we ask that You would help us if indeed that is something that we are struggling with. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now let's sing to God's praise as we draw our service to a close this morning.

We'll sing from Psalm 51. Sing Psalms. You'll find that on page 67. Psalm 51, and we'll sing verses 1 to 9.

The tune is Ottawa. O my God, have mercy on me. In Your steadfast love, I pray. In Your infinite compassion, my transgressions wipe away. Psalm 51, verses 1 to 9.

We'll stand to sing. Psalm 51, and we'll sing.

Psalm 51, and we'll sing.

[31 : 24] Psalm 51, and we'll sing. Psalm 51, and we'll sing. Psalm 51, and we'll sing. So your words are glorified, and your word is justified.

Psalm 51, and we'll sing. From my heart, I have been sinful.

Such the nature I receive. Sinful from my first beginning, may my colors will conceive.

I have been sinful. I have been sinful. I have been sinful. I have been sinful.

Thank you.

[32 : 52] Thank you.