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They Left Everything

(Part 2)

977-B

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Everything He did was meaningful, but simple. Everything He said was compassionate, but authoritative. Every place He went, lives were changed. This incredibly humble, decidedly powerful, unbelievably loving man changed the course of history each time He so much as opened His mouth. He walked like a man. He ate like a man. He slept like a man, but when He talked...He talked like God. His name was Jesus...Emmanuel...God with us. As we continue our journey in His footsteps, we begin not only to see the plan of God unfold, we continue to see how God behaves when He inhabits the life of a man. And we begin to get a glimpse of how God's power will reveal itself when it is set free in us.

His ministry was just beginning. And yet, even now, the crowds were becoming so large, and the press of the crowds so intense, that the problem of what to do with all the people who came was already a priority. What an impressive problem to have. And what an impressive solution He had. Jesus hadn't printed any promotional brochures advertising His latest campaign by the sea. He hadn't bought any ads on Israeli television heralding this miracle-working carpenter as the Son of God. He hadn't even offered any copies of His latest book to all who would write in and ask for tape number 56. He hadn't done anything...but preach the Word of God.

And when the people did come, He didn't panic and form a building committee to make sure they could accommodate the crowds. He didn't send the disciples out to Rent-A-World to haul in extra chairs or even to buy cushions for the rocks. He simply looked around, realized that the crowds couldn't hear Him or see Him, borrowed a boat that wasn't being used, pushed it out a little way from the shore, sat down in the boat, and began to teach the Word of God. He was not there to entertain. There were others in Israel who no doubt could entertain. He was not promoting His church. He had no plans to promote anything. If anything, He would make the challenge so difficult and the way so clear that those who would have promoted cringed in

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disbelief. No, He only came to teach the Word of God and to demonstrate through the life the Father would live through Him, that the Word He taught and the life He lived were inseparable and thus the death He died was inescapable.

In our last journey through the Scriptures, we took a glimpse at a lonely fishing boat as it sat moored by the sea of Galilee, oars and net seemingly abandoned, the waves quietly rising and falling on its sides, its once everpresent owners nowhere in sight. And we asked ourselves, "Why?" We found the answer in Luke, chapter five, where we read the story of an amazing day in the life of that little boat, a day in which God Himself sat in it and taught, the very same day in which God used that little boat to teach, of all things, a group of professional fishermen how to fish, only to tell them that now they were going to fish for men.

Our look at that eventful day by the sea continues and concludes with this lesson as we take up where we left off on our outline: They Left Everything – Part 2. (Scriptures are from The Life of Christ in Stereo.)

I- How To Draw A Crowd (Matthew 5:1)

II- How To Design Facilities (vs 2-3)

III- How To Develop A Ministry (vs 4-7)

IV- How To Define Discipleship (vs 8-11)

III- How To Develop A Ministry (verses 4-7 continued)

When last we were together, we watched in wonder as Jesus, having finished speaking to the multitudes, took His inner circle and decided to give them a lesson on how to fish. To do so, you remember, He carefully chose a pattern of failure, so that as He superimposed His grace upon it, there could be no mistake about the source of their success. He chose the same men and the same boat and the same lake and the same nets that had toiled totally in vain the night before. In fact, to be sure there was no mistaking what constitutes success in the ministry, God had made sure that the night before was a complete failure. Not one fish had they caught. They were frustrated. But don't you see, *there are times when God must simply allow the natural wells of life to dry up so that we will not be prone to share His glory with the world.* Had they had only a fair night, this miracle would have indicated that *God can help.* He let them draw a big zero so this miracle could prove that *without God they could do nothing.*

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And God does that in our lives, too. Sometimes the very things we pinned our dreams on dissolve before our eyes. Sometimes the ministry that seemed so incredible begins to fade, because we were beginning to share in the glory. Sometimes that job that had become our god simply ends. Sometimes that bank account we had begun to trust in, simply runs dry. Sometimes that person whose life we had begun to deify either is taken from us, or revealed to be less than we believed him to be, so that we can understand that “no flesh can glory in His presence.” God is not being cruel, Beloved. He is demonstrating the very depth of His love. He is allowing our nets to come out of the water empty, so that *when He is ready to reveal Himself to us*, it will not even dawn on us to try to share His glory.

Jesus was teaching us the secret of a successful ministry. A successful ministry is one in which the one doing the ministering has no expectations based on his own natural talents or abilities. He has no expectations based on prior performance. He has no expectations based on the world’s concepts or the world’s plans. He is simply available to the Master Fisherman, who is likely to take him into waters where no fish are being caught, in a boat that of itself is nothing special, and at His command, simply tell him to lower the nets. That’s the tough part, waiting for His command.

Successful ministries are not fabricated on drawing boards; they are formed in prayer closets. They are not the result of the wisdom of men, but of the surrender of men to the will of a sovereign God, whose heart beats to a different drummer and whose glory will not be shared with man. That’s why for every hour pastors and elders spend hassling over budgets and haggling over buildings, they ought to spend at least an equal amount of time agonizing on their knees over the souls of those whom God has placed within their grasp.

That’s why for every hour spent in committee meetings, church leaders ought to spend an equal amount of time in prayer meetings. Otherwise, the fish we catch will be construed to be the result of our efforts, our planning, and our expertise. But you will have to search long and hard to find the church whose priorities match God’s. I’ll tell you why. It’s easier to hassle over budgets than it is to agonize in prayer. It’s easier to sit in planning meetings than it is in prayer meetings. It’s easier because the level of spiritual warfare diminishes when man is

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doing his own thing.

After all, why should Satan bother to hassle a church board whose main concerns are temporal? Why should the enemy give a high priority to battling men in the ministry whose ministry glorifies them? No, the warfare comes when the leadership comes to the battlefield. Jesus was demonstrating His formula for success in the ministry. He takes a team of failures who know they are nothing apart from Him, and takes them where He wants them to go, and tells them at His command what to do. Their job, then, is to spend the bulk of their waking time listening for His command. Bathed in the Book, God's man ought to be more at home on his knees than at his desk, more at home pleading with God than he is pleading with men. A successful ministry is made up of men whose calling it is to fish for men, but whose priority it is to let God show them how.

III- HOW TO DEFINE DISCIPLESHIP (verses 7-11)

Having demonstrated how to draw a crowd, how to design facilities, and how to develop a ministry, Jesus now describes how to define discipleship. And that description, so vivid in its context, will occupy the remainder of this study. It is found in verses 7 through 11. To refresh our memories, we will read it once more, beginning with verse 7:

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."
(Matthew 5:7-11 TLOCIS)

Scripture has revealed for us, in these few brief verses, what ought to happen, then, when men respond properly to God's call to the ministry. They ought to become disciples. And the process unfolds in a natural format, as we see in this passage. Outlined, it might look like this,

A- They Fell Down (verses 8-9)

B- They Rewrote Their Goals (verse 10)

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C- They Left Everything (verse 11)

D- They Followed Jesus (verse 11)

A- They Fell Down

Verse 8 capsulizes the first prerequisite for discipleship. It says from

And when Simon Peter saw it: [that is, what God had done] he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord.*" (TLOCIS)

There you have the primary purpose for miracles. Miracles were not designed to ease our life physically, though some of them do. It is popular today to invoke man's authority over God by demanding of God that He perform certain miracles "in Jesus' name". In the first place, man does not have authority over God; God has authority over man, so it is not in us to determine when or if a miracle is God's will based solely on the fact that we have a "need". Secondly, when God does perform a miracle, be it physical, spiritual, or emotional, it is primarily for the purpose of causing man to be overwhelmed in His spirit at the holiness of God, and thus overwhelmed at the sinfulness of men. Thirdly, God's stated goal in doing great things in the physical realm is to demonstrate in the physical realm the great things He desires to do in the spiritual realm. If we fail to make the "spiritual switch", we are likely to focus on the circumstance and totally miss the lesson itself.

I believe the sin of ingratitude is at the heart of it all. Somehow we come to believe that we deserve God's best, and that somehow includes what we consider the world's best, so long as we live on planet earth. That, of course, overlooks the fact that Jesus, Paul, John, Peter, and all the others, while on this earth, suffered every conceivable form of affliction, tribulation, and persecution, even unto death. No, God is not a genie we rub when we want business to pick up, finances to improve, or sickness to disappear. He is capable of doing all of the above... but at His choosing, not ours. I believe that *because we often do not adequately fall at His feet in adoration and awe when He does perform miracles, we see a diminishing evidence of those miracles in our daily lives.*

What God is after is worship. He wants men to see Him for who He is, and thus see themselves for who they are. When they do that, they can be emptied of self and filled with Jesus. Until

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they do that, they are candidates for presumption and are likely to fail to grasp the real meaning of what God has done. Jesus didn't multiply the fish so their fishing business would be the biggest in town. Nor did He multiply the fish so they could be the best-fed disciples in town. He simply used the fish to demonstrate that He was the provider and sustainer of everything, and that apart from Him they could do nothing. He wanted to use physical fish to teach them and us that we are to become fishers of men. If you major on the miracle, you miss the message. The message is: fall down before God; you are a wretched, sinful man, and yet He plans to use even the likes of you to fish for men. The very thought of that ought to cause us to fall down before Him in utter adoration and praise. Discipleship begins with worship. Worship begins when God's people see God's provisions as so supernatural and so undeserved that their very unworthiness throws them to their knees. How many times have you prayed for someone or something, and God has supernaturally answered that prayer, and you have either failed to thank Him, or have responded in such a matter-of-fact manner that your heart did not even burn within you at the thought?

Beloved, if the great Creator God of Heaven and Earth whose ear is never heavy that it cannot hear, has actually stopped to see that your personal request is granted according to His will, that is reason for your whole life to stop...and for you to fall down in utter abandonment before Him, crying, "Lord, depart from me... I'm not worthy of your love. I am a sinful man." That is what miracles are meant to do. That is what answered prayer is meant to do. And if you and I but yawn and say, "Thanks, God, I expected that," we ought not to marvel at the loss of power and the absence of discipleship that follows.

B- They Rewrote Their Goals

But Jesus said to Simon, Fear not; you will henceforth catch *men*.
(Matthew 5:10b TLOCIS)

God's favorite words of love to man is "Fear not!"

Why was Simon afraid? Simon was afraid because He was in the presence of a Holy God and was unworthy to be there. Why was He not to be afraid? Because that Holy God had revealed Himself not to overpower Simon, but to empower Simon for a ministry. Simon could have responded in one of two ways: he could have gained a swelled head that God could use him to

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catch so many fish, or he could fall down in utter amazement that God could use *even* him. Paul gained a thorn in the flesh, according to his letter to Corinth, because God knew he might well respond to such revelations with pride. It is man's natural response to being used of God. Simon's response in this passage is the response God is looking for.

Now once God had Simon's undivided attention, and self was adequately gone, at least for the moment, He lovingly explained to his normally outspoken friend just what it was He had in mind with the little fishing episode. What He had in mind was a visual reminder that would never be erased from Simon's eyes, that *what God was after was people*. His ministry would not be focused on things or activities or facilities or even evidences of His miraculous power. His ministry would focus on one thing—people.

People would be Paul's joy and His crown, too. People would be the one thing God would give His life to. People would be the one thing God would give His life for. People. Not projects, people. The purpose of the gospel was singular: that men and women and boys and girls be rescued from an eternal hell and a life of spiritual impotence on their way to hell by being brought to life through faith in Jesus Christ. If you build a building, the only way to measure that building's value is not by what the real estate is worth, but what it's worth in transformed lives. True, you can't always measure it, but then we don't always try, do we? If you develop a ministry, the key to its future ought not to be how much money you raise, or how much of a following you gain. The only valid measuring stick ought to be *to what measure does that ministry lead to the transformation of the souls of men?*

Jesus was saying "Simon, rewrite the priorities of your life." Fish are no longer number one. Your pleasure is no longer number two. Your success is no longer number three. Your goals in life should now be: people, people, people, in that order. Measure the value of the time you invest, the money you invest, and the ministering you invest by the only yardstick Jesus ever used: people. They rewrote their goals. Their prior ambitions went up in smoke at the feet of almighty God who now stood before them in human form. Now all that was left was to do *whatever it took to please His heart*. They rewrote their goals accordingly. Have you?

C- They Left Everything

Having come to a state of total awe at who God was, and having come to the inescapable conclusion that God wanted them to trade in the entirety of their future for a life of fishing for men, they then did the only thing they could do that would be in keeping with the pattern God was establishing as He broke open for them on that seashore His incredible plan for their lives. What they had been meant nothing. They were worthless sinners standing before a Holy God who was calling *even the likes of them* to a ministry called people. The success of that ministry was not up to them. They had just seen that visually demonstrated to perfection. The yieldedness to that ministry was up to them. They had a choice to make. They could rationalize that surely God did not intend for them to do anything so brash as change their entire lifestyle, abandon their profitable professions, and just walk away from a whole life of achievement to do something as intangible as fish for men. They could. And they could get lots of counsel from their worldly friends to confirm that course of action. The problem was: that was where Jesus was heading; He was actually going to give His life away for people who didn't deserve it. They had to either choose that course or watch Him walk away.

It wasn't that every man was to be called to leave his profession. Of course not. But every man called had to be willing to leave his profession, and his reputation, and his recreation, and his bank account, and anything else that God might deem to be in the way. Many would not have to give up all of that; some would seem to not give up any of that; but God was calling all men to be willing to leave everything.

Each man, strangely enough, would know when and if and what God was calling him to leave behind. You know. I know. We don't like to think about it, but we know. Simon knew, too. He was to leave that priceless, precious little boat with the well-worn oars and the ragged net, that was his potential to make a living by bringing home the fish. Simon knew. That's why that little ship stands there, so forlorn right now. Simon knew. And so overwhelmed was he at that moment at who God was, that *he left everything. Everything.* You say, "How do you know?" The Bible says so, that's how I know, and that's how you know. It says so in Greek; it says so in Hebrew; it says so in German; it says so in French; and it even says so in English. It says, "*They*

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left everything.” “Everything” translated into modern English means everything. “Left” translated into modern English means “left behind; walked away from; abandoned in favor of something else.” *They walked away from everything they owned and every dream they had, in order to walk in the steps of this stranger of Galilee.* They left Everything. Everything. Everything. Period.

D- They Followed Jesus

Jesus, of course, isn't just calling us to leave everything to have nothing. He is calling us to leave the unimportant to find the important. He is calling us to leave the crumbs from the scrapheap of life that men call good, in order to feast at the banquet tables of eternity on what God calls good. He is calling us to walk out of a life of pathetic darkness into the grandeur of unceasing light. He is asking us to turn our backs on the temporary to experience the eternal. He is asking us to give up hell for heaven—heaven in the reality of the life to come, and heaven in our hearts, a reality in the here and now. So they left everything and followed Him.

Be careful before you glamorize that last statement. I'm not at all sure Simon and the others knew what they were getting into. In fact, I'm sure they didn't. They left everything to follow this one who could turn water into wine, heal the sick, feed the hungry, and fill an empty fishing boat with a lake full of finny friends. So they followed Him. Only down the line a little way, did they begin to realize just what it was they were following Him to. They were looking for a crown. They never dreamed it was made of thorns. They were looking for Him to be lifted up. They never dreamed it would be on a cross. They were looking for a platform from which to preach. They never dreamed it would be from a prison. They were looking to be seated at His right hand; they never dreamed that a cock would crow, and a heart would break at the realization that when the heat was on, the troops all forsook Him and fled, except for this one, who would follow Him only far enough to curse and deny he'd ever known Him.

They didn't understand where He was going, but they wanted to go. So they left everything and followed Him. What Jesus is calling you to do is, in effect, no different than what He called those men to do...with one exception. You know where it is He's leading you. You know what it is He's giving you. You know why it is He's calling you. You have the completed canon of Scripture,

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and you know.

To follow Jesus means to walk in His steps. To walk in His steps means following Him to heaven, yes. But the road map to heaven must needs go through Samaria. And through the slums. And through the hospitals. And through the mission fields. And through the battlefields. Yea, and even through the valley of the shadow of death. He says, "Fear not; I will give you men for your life; people for your treasure... follow me." But to follow Him means suffering. To follow Him means crying. To follow Him means weariness. To follow Him means...Oh, God, could it mean...a Cross?

Beloved, to follow Him *must* mean a Cross. Yours may be different from His, but He has quietly carved out the essential of discipleship:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

Now you know why that little boat sits idle in the harbor. The one to whom it once represented a treasure has given his heart to someone else. He has left everything. Everything. Everything. Through the dark shadows he has passed; through a million valleys he has gone; now bathed in the sunlight of eternity, he looks back from the hallowed halls of heaven and shouts at us through the Scriptures, "My dear pilgrims, would you like to know what the greatest moment of my life was? The greatest moment of my life was that incredible day on the sea of Galilee when we brought those boats back to shore, and left everything... everything... to follow Him!"

We hear you, Simon. What did you say? You're asking, "What are we going to do?"

Only time will tell, Simon. Only time will tell.

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