

Lesson #6

“THEY STRAIGHTWAY LEFT THEIR NETS”

[Luke 4:14-32; 5; 6:12-16; Matthew 10]

By Ted Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Two hundred and twenty-two pages of the New Testament contain the synoptic gospels. Two hundred and twenty-five pages record the acts and the epistles of the apostles. Of course all that the twelve write and do springs directly from the life and mission of the Savior, but it is interesting to observe that half of the book we always regard as the register of the mortal life of Christ is a record of those who labored with him in establishing his kingdom on the earth.

The Savior could have convinced everyone of his divine nature and holy mission by the majesty of his power. One day he will. “And there is none to escape; and there is no knee that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated.” (D&C 1:2) With regard to that day, Elder Maxwell wrote:

And, if you sense that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, why not do so now? For in the coming of that collective confession, it will mean much less to kneel down when it is no longer possible to stand up! (Neal A. Maxwell, “Why Not Now?” New Era, Apr. 1975, 6)

But in the meridian of time, conversion would come by invitation, not compulsion, and it was a work that the Savior would not do alone. He desired the assistance of many laborers in the work, for the benefit of those who would hear the word and for the benefit of the laborers. And so, in his day, and again in ours, he has called his disciples to stand by him and with him the promulgation of the truth to every nation, kindred, tongue and people (see Mosiah 15:28). The first to be called during his own ministry were the twelve. This lesson will focus in the calling of these men and on their mission as “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world.” (D&C 107:23)

I. JESUS ANNOUNCES THAT HE IS THE MESSIAH

Following his forty-day fast and his communion with God, and his confrontation

with the Adversary, the Savior “returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about” (Luke 4:14).

What pattern did the Savior establish almost at once as a way to bear witness of his mission to the Jews in Galilee? “. . . he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all” (See Luke 4:15). Notice that verse 16 tells us that he went into the synagogue in Nazareth on the sabbath “*as was his custom*” (Luke 4:16), and that while he was there he stood up to read from the scriptures. The Jewish practice of the day was to stand while reading the scriptures, but to sit while teaching or explaining (see Luke 4:20).

As was mentioned in the first lesson this year, the passage Jesus chose to read was a favorite Messianic text of the rabbis, one they accepted almost universally as pertaining to the coming of their Messiah.

Whether Jesus chose to read this passage or it was the assigned passage for the day makes no difference, for when the Savior had concluded his reading, he sat down and said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). The meaning of his declaration was not hidden from those at the synagogue, nor was it meant to be. He has just announced, “I am this Messiah.” This is an announcement Christ made many times in the course of his mortal ministry. It was never his intent to keep his identity a secret. Between John 3 and John 17, the Savior says over a hundred times that he was sent by the Father.

But when the Savior delivered this testimony in Nazareth, he was not among strangers. Although he had been born in Bethlehem, his youth had been spent in this community. The people knew him well. “And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?” (Luke 4:22) It is not difficult to imagine their incredulity. Jesus knew of it and expected it. He spoke to them, giving voice to their own thoughts:

And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb,
Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum,
do also here in thy country.

And he said, Verily, I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own
country. (Luke 4:23,24)

Nor would he be accepted here. Even though other communities had praised him (Luke 4:14,15), his fellow Nazarenes would reject him. He spoke to them in warning:

I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;

But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.

And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:25-27).

His point of course was that earlier generations had rejected the messengers of God and these messengers had accordingly offered some of the blessings of the kingdom to the Gentiles. And such a thing could (and would!) certainly happen again. What was the reaction of those in the synagogue to this warning to Israel? What was the reaction to his favorable attitude toward the gentiles? “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath” (Luke 4:28). What did they try to do to the Savior in Luke 4:29?

And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.

But he passing through the midst of them went his way (Luke 4:29, 30).

Why were they unsuccessful? Perhaps Luke 24:15,16 and John 8:59 offer an explanation of his ability to pass “through the midst of them and go his way.” He went back to Capernaum. Matthew 4:13 implies that he went to Capernaum to live.

II. JESUS CALLS HIS 12 APOSTLES

Read Luke 5:1-11. Here Peter and Andrew and James and John “forsook all and followed [Christ]” (Luke 5:11). This is not the call of these men to be apostles but to be his disciples. All four had been disciples of John the Baptist. Note Peter’s testimony in Acts 1:21, 22 that the apostle chosen to replace Judas should be selected from “these men which have companied with us all the time . . . beginning from the baptism of John . . .” They had heard the Gospel and had been baptized. John the Baptist had introduced them to Jesus (see John 1:36-42). Now the Savior called them to keep company with him, but not yet as apostles.

There is a great lesson in the manner of this call to be disciples. The Savior found these fishermen washing their nets. After each period of fishing the nets were washed, repaired as necessary, stretched, and prepared for use again. Luke means for us to know that they have finished fishing for the time being. Generally this fishing took place at night (as was the case in this instance) when cooler temperatures brought the fish closer to the surface. Peter told the Savior “Master, we have toiled all the night . . .” Luke 5:5)

The Savior used Peter’s boat as a platform to teach. This would have been an ideal arrangement. The Savior could be both seen and heard, but safely removed from the crowds seeking to be near him.

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught (Luke 5:4).

These fishermen, who did this for a living, must have been convinced that the fish were elsewhere. They had concluded a fruitless night without a single fish in the nets, and had already begun the process of cleaning up and putting things away. Peter expressed his concern: Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing . . .” He then expressed his faith: “nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.” (Luke 5:5) Clearly Peter knew the Savior and knew some things about him, just as he knew some things about fishing. “Lord, we have just spent an unproductive night, we have let down our nets a hundred times, and retrieved them empty every time.” And then this powerful declaration of faith: “But if you want me to, I will let down the net again. Just tell me where and when.”

And this is the lesson: “Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.” Consider Peter’s attitude and what we should learn from it as you review some other examples:

Naaman, the Syrian general (2 Kings 5) who was told he could be healed of leprosy by bathing seven times in the Jordan River. I am confident that the Leprosy did not leave or even begin to leave until the seventh time. But in that immersing, it all washed away. Every rotted, ragged piece of diseased flesh was gone, “and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child.” (2 Kings 5:14) But it did not happen until he “let down the net” the seventh time.

Nephi went back to Jerusalem to get the plates (1 Nephi 3,4) and found it

almost impossible. Laman tried first, and his life was threatened. The four brothers tried to buy the plates with the family treasure and were robbed and marked for death. Laman and Lemuel were ready to quit. But Nephi “let down the net” again and went back one more time. He had no plan except to go where the plates were, because his mission was to get the plates, and he went “being led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do.” (1 Nephi 4:6)

Alma went to Ammonihah (Alma 8) to preach and was reviled, spit on, cast out; He left for the city of Aaron and was stopped by an angel he knew who told him to go back to Ammonihah and try again. “I was just there,” he might have said. I did not catch a thing!” Instead he went back “speedily,” letting down the net once more at the word of the Master.

I knew a couple who had resisted the best efforts of good home teachers for many years. The net had been lowered time after time after time and had always returned empty. But the home teachers were not allowed to nor inclined to wash and repair the nets and go home. They let down the net again and again. Finally, after years of unproductive fishing, one or two tiny fish appeared in the weaving of the net, and the multitude of fish thereafter increased until we were all astonished at the results.

The lesson, at least in part, must be that some answers take time. Some problems aren't solved the first time we pick up a pencil. Sometimes we must trust the Lord and his servants. And “let down the net” again and again. But when solutions come, they often don't come gradually. After a whole night of empty nets, in one attempt they caught so many fish the net broke and two boats were at the point of sinking. We must have this attitude in any assignment of calling that comes from the Lord. We must be willing to go back one more time, to get into the river one more time, *to let down the net one more time.*

I think we must not leave this account without noting that the Savior called these disciples when the nets were full, not empty. A day or a week or a month of unproductive fishing might have increased the willingness of these men to follow the Savior. But when the Savior finally said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19), these great men “forsook all [those fish, and the nets and the boats] and followed him” (Luke 5:11).

Some time later, Christ met Matthew (he is called Levi in the book of Luke) “sitting

at the receipt of custom, and he said unto him, Follow me” (Luke 5:27).

Matthew’s response, like that of the fishermen, sends a message thundering across the ages. “And he left all, rose up, and followed him” (Luke 5:28). Have we been as responsive as these men were to the call of the prophets? How many times have we been told, for example that there is a great need for more couples to serve missions?

There is an urgent need in the Church today for missionary couples, not to go first-contacting or teaching the discussions, unless you want to do so, but for meaningful missionary service in all of the activities of the Church throughout the world (Richard G. Scott, “Why Every Member a Missionary?” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 36–37).

What might you have to forsake to accept such a call?

Look at these verses for other types of reactions by those called to follow.

Luke 9:57-62;

Luke 14:16-24;

Luke 14:33;

Luke 18:18-25

Jesus also called other men to follow him and to be his disciples. You may wish to read the entries for *disciple* and *apostle* in the Bible Dictionary of the LDS edition.

Finally, the time came to choose from the disciples his twelve apostles. Why was it necessary for him to call men from among the disciples to be apostles? Review the following scriptures:

Matthew 9: 36-38: But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, *The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few;* pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest (emphasis added).

Matthew 16:19: And *I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom* of heaven (emphasis added).

Mark 3:14,15: And he ordained twelve, *that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach . . .* (emphasis added).

Acts 1:22: Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained *to be a witness with us of his resurrection* (emphasis added).

Ephesians 4:11-15: And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, *for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive . . .* (emphasis added).)

What did the Savior do in preparation for making this selection of 12 men?

And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” (See Luke 6: 12)

Mark this verse and consider the implications. Even the Son of God, when faced with a critical decision, *prayed all night!* He must have been concerned that his decision please his Father and that he not make a mistake. Surely this shows us a pattern. Even at the end of his mortal ministry, when the Savior began to feel the agony of the weight of the sins of every living creature, “he prayed more earnestly.” (Luke 22:44)

Matthew 10 contains a record of the instructions and commission of the Savior to the 12. What do the following phrases tell us about the calling of an apostle?

(Matt 10:7) “As you go, preach”

(Matt 10:8) “Heal the sick”

(Matt 10:8) “Cleanse the leper”

(Matt 10:8) “Raise the dead”

(Matt 10:8) “Cast out devils”

(Matt 10:8) “Freely ye have received, freely give”

(Matt 10:9) “Provide neither gold nor silver nor brass in your purses”

(Matt 10:16) “Take no thought how nor what ye shall speak . . . for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you”

(Matt 10:25) “It is enough for the disciple that he is as his master”

(Matt 10:26) “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul”

(Matt 10:30) “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered”

(Matt 10:40) “He that receiveth you receiveth me”

Blessings are promised to those who follow the Twelve Apostles, both in Matthew 10 and in other passages and declarations of the twelve apostles. Elder Spencer W. Kimball said:

“No one in this Church will ever go far astray who ties himself securely to the Church Authorities who the Lord has placed in his Church. This Church will never go astray; the Quorum of the Twelve will never lead you into bypaths; it never has and it never will.” (CR, April 1951, p. 104)

Boyd K. Packer quoted Karl G. Maeser on this subject:

On one occasion [Karl G. Maeser] was leading a party of young missionaries across the Alps. As they slowly ascended the steep slope, he looked back and saw a row of sticks thrust into the glacial snow to mark the one safe path across the otherwise treacherous mountains.

Something about those sticks impressed him, and halting the company of missionaries he gestured toward them and said, "Brethren, there stands the priesthood. They are just common sticks like the rest of us—some of them may even seem to be a little crooked, but the position they hold makes them what they are. If we step aside from the path they mark, we are lost" (Boyd K. Packer, BYU Speeches, March 23, 1965, p.10).

The gospel writers give the names of the Twelve, and those names are significant. But it is more important for us to know those who serve in this holy calling in our own day. The following story has assisted a great number of young men and women to learn the names of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in the order in which they were called.

I wrote this story in **INK** during a **MONSOON** so I had to write it **FAST!** A back-**PACKER** had a load of **PEARS** which he was taking to great **HEIGHTS**. He was also carrying a gun and an **AX**. **WELL**, he didn't slip because his boots had **NAILS ON** them. He found some **OAK** trees full of **MALLARD** ducks and he decided it was **WORTH** a **SHOT**, even during a **HAIL** storm in **HOLLAND**, so he started **FIRING**.

I once handed blank papers to my students in a Seminary class and invited them to write the names of every vocal star and singing group they could remember. One boy wrote over 100 in the time allowed! Then I asked them to turn the paper over and write the names of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve in order. This same boy wrote the name of the Prophet (spelled wrong) and he was done. How important is it to know them? Consider this story:

Once, in company with Elder Gene R. Cook and the mission president, we traveled in a very remote region on the Altiplano, or high plain, in Bolivia. We had traveled much of the day in a four-wheel-drive vehicle. We had crossed an arm of Lake Titicaca on an ancient ferry. We followed mountain roads first built by the ancient Incan Indians.

Once, we had to build a stone ramp to emerge from a river bed which formed something of a road in the dry season. Lifting stones at an altitude of more than thirteen thousand feet is no small task.

We came eventually to our destination, Huacuyo. It is really not a village so much as houses scattered about the mountains, as high, I suppose, as men live anywhere on earth.

There we found what we were seeking—a little adobe and stone chapel. The few Saints in the region had built it themselves with no help from the Church.

The distance and forbidding terrain made this, I'm sure, as remote from Church headquarters as any place on earth.

The chapel had a dirt floor and rude hand-hewn benches. The interior

walls had been whitewashed. Hanging on the front wall were three pictures: the President of the Church and his two counselors—the First Presidency.

I repeat the words of Paul:

“Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, ... knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” (2 Tim. 3:14; italics added.)

Even in that remote little branch the members could identify those who hold the keys of authority (Boyd K. Packer, “From Such Turn Away,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 34).

CONCLUSION:

Take a moment to reflect on your personal relationship with the Twelve. What experiences come to mind when the counsel of one of them has blessed your life or the life of a member of your family? Have you made a record of such experiences in your journal so that your children and your children’s children will know of your faith in them and testimony of their divine calling?

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