

JESUS IN THE BOAT

The most successful lawyer in history was Sir Lionel Luckhoo. If you go to the Guinness Book of World Records under "Most Successful Lawyer" his name is there. As a defense attorney he won 245 murder trials in a row either before a jury or on appeal. He died in 1997 at the age of 83 after a distinguished career.

What kind of skill do you need to achieve this level of success? You must have such tremendous analytical powers that when the prosecutor presents what appears to be an air-tight case against your client that you are able to find the flaws. You must be able to know what to ask to make a case fall apart. You must know what constitutes reliable and convincing evidence. All this was true of Sir Lionel Luckhoo, twice knighted by Queen Elizabeth. He became a noted diplomat and a member of the highest court in his country.

One day someone asked him a question that is at the center of our faith, "Did Jesus really rise from the dead?" They asked for his legal opinion of the resurrection? So, he applied his powers of analysis to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He spent years studying the historical record. Here was his conclusion;

"I say unequivocally that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt."

After studying world religions and looking at the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, on November 7, 1978 at the age of 64 Sir Lionel Luckhoo accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. Addressing audiences worldwide, including Presidents, Kings, Parliaments, Cabinets, Bar Associations, and the United Nations, he stated:

"The bones of Muhammad are in Medina, the bones of Confucius are in Shantung, the cremated bones of Buddha are in Nepal. Thousands pay pilgrimages to worship at their tombs which contain their bones. But in Jerusalem there is a cave cut into the rock. This is the tomb of Jesus. It is empty! Yes, empty because He is risen! He died, physically and historically. He arose from the dead, and now sits at the right hand of God."

Today we are starting a new series called Walking with Jesus. For the next few weeks, we are going to be looking at events from the life of Jesus. Today we want to talk about the calling of the first disciples. The starting point for a relationship with Jesus is faith. How do you begin a relationship with Jesus? You invite Him into your boat.

Luke 5:3-11 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

You start a relationship with Jesus by inviting Him into your life. We see from this story 4 things about starting a relationship with Jesus;

1. Invitation – interest

The first stage is just interest. Peter was a fisherman, so for Peter that meant he let Jesus take him fishing. Jesus came and he connected with Peter where he was. He was a fisherman. So he goes to the lake, the Sea of Galilee. He goes to where the boats are. He connects with him where he is.

That is what Jesus does. He connects with you where you are. This is not the first time Peter had met Jesus. Months before he had met him by the Jordan river.

John 1:38-42 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 Come, he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. 40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

This is the invitation that Jesus gives everyone, come and see. If you are interested in finding out more about Me then come and see, come and get to know Me. For some this may be just an intellectual interest. For others it is a relational interest. Maybe you have seen the difference that Jesus has made in the life of someone else and that has peaked your curiosity. Whatever the reason, Jesus invites you to come.

Maybe that is why you are here today. You have just come to find out more about Jesus. You are welcome here. Take the time you need. Read the Bible. Pray and ask Jesus to reveal himself to you. I have seen this so often. People who just came to church because a friend brought them or they just wanted to check it out. Feel free to hang around and kick the tires! Come and see. The first step is invitation.

2. Revelation – huge catch of fish

The second step is revelation. That just means that God makes himself known to you. That is what happened here in the life of Peter. Look at the story again;

Luke 5:4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

Peter understood who Jesus claimed to be, but it was probably not until this moment that it became real to him. It was this moment when he realized who Jesus really was. This is the epiphany, the revelation, the ah-ha moment. It can happen in a lot of different ways with different people.

For some people it is like Peter. God shows up and you realize that you have to respond to what has happened by either accepting or rejecting. Sometimes this is rather mundane. Other times like with the Apostle Paul it is very dramatic. You might remember the road to Damascus and he actually saw an appearance of Jesus on that road and was blinded by that vision.

For some it is just a parent explaining the truth to us. Other times it is a simple experience. Years ago, I saw the movie *I Can Only Imagine*. It is the story of Bart Millard, the lead singer of the Christian music group Mercy Me. It tells about his difficult childhood with an abusive father. Bart is saved through the ministry of a local summer camp. When he gets older, he has the opportunity to sing *Amazing Grace* in a local church service that is on the radio. The father will not go to the church, but as he listens to his son sing and then hears the message, his heart is transformed.

For me it was the testimony of a camp counselor. His simple story of faith and restoration moved my heart and was an ah-ha moment in life. Sometimes it may be just a phrase that somebody says or a verse from the Bible or a song or sermon you hear on the radio. Sometimes it's a sermon. All of a sudden you realize there's something to this. There's something that you have been missing.

In Seminary I heard the story of a guy that was saved at a Youth for Christ event. He went forward to receive Jesus. After the speaker asked him what it was in his message that had caused him to finally understand that Jesus was the truth and he said it was nothing about the message. The guy had simply been standing in front of the Youth for Christ banner so that all the guy could read was You for Christ and he started thinking, "Yes, me for Christ" and that was enough.

Invitation and then revelation.

3. Expectation – fear

The third step is often fear. The reality of what being a Christian and a life of faith means begins to sink in.

Luke 5:8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken

Peter had this moment of revelation. He suddenly realized that Jesus was who He claimed to be. When confronted with God's holiness it often reminds us of our own failings. It is natural to feel that way. If you look through the Bible, it's the response when people encounter who God really is. It's the first response that they almost always had.

When Moses met God at the burning bush, he hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Exodus 3:5-6 Do not come any closer, God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Isaiah saw the vision of God in the temple and his first reaction was fear.

Isaiah 6:5 Woe to me! I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Maybe you were young when you came to Jesus but it was only after that the reality of your decision struck you. There was a time in my own life when the reality of my own calling became real to me. I fought against it. How does Jesus respond to Peter's fear? He reassures Him that He is in control.

Luke 5:10 ... Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."

Jesus tells Peter that He has a plan for him. God knows we are broken. He knows we are sinful. It is not where we have come from that God looks at, but where we are going to.

Two Texans were trying to impress each other with the size of their ranches. One asked the other, "What's the name of your ranch?" He replied, "The Rocking R, ABC, Flying Circle, Four Square, Rolling Fields, Rainbow's End, Silver Spur Ranch." The questioner was much impressed and exclaimed, "Whew! That's sure some name! How many head of cattle do you run?" The rancher answered, "Not many. Very few survive the branding." As a believer in Jesus, we have been branded in a sense – marked by God and called to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes this calling comes at a heavy price. E.g. coming to faith in Kuwait.

Invitation, revelation and expectation.

4. Celebration - faith

The last step is faith. Not just faith to believe that Jesus is who He said He is, but faith to live for Jesus and follow Him no matter what. Peter said yes to Jesus and followed Him.

Luke 5:11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

This was the moment where everything in Peter's life changed. It was a crossroad moment. We have those kind of moments in life. When you hear the two words "Marry me," that is a this-changes-everything moment. You have to make a decision. You have to say yes or no. It's the Y in the road. Depending on what you say your life is going to go this way or that way.

The two words "follow me," are the same. Maybe you have been a follower of Jesus for a long time, but maybe you are listening today and you have never made that decision. Jesus is asking to get into your boat and to push out from the shore. It is decision time. This is a Y in the road. Am I going to say yes or am I going to say no? What does that mean, to follow Jesus?

We know from the bible what following Jesus meant for Peter. His life was forever changed. Ultimately, he would die for his faith. What does it mean for us? Ultimately it will also cost us everything. But what we gain from giving Jesus our lives is a new life in Him. A life far better than anything we could have asked or imagined before.

Back in 1944 Dr. W.A. Criswell became the pastor of North Shore Baptist Church in Chicago. At the time it was the largest Baptist Church in North America. One day he was invited to the home of one of his deacons who served as the superintendent of the Sunday School. His name was James Kraft.

James Kraft was the founder of Kraft Foods. He told Dr. Criswell that as a young man he had a desire to become a successful cheese salesman. He began in Chicago as a young man with a little buggy pulled by a pony named Paddy. After making his cheese, he would load his wagon and he and Paddy would drive down the streets of Chicago to sell it. As the months passed the young Kraft began to despair because he was not making money, in spite of his long hours and hard work.

One day in 1903 he pulled his pony to a stop and began to talk to him. He said "Paddy, there is something wrong. We are not doing it right. I am afraid we have things turned around and our priorities are not where they ought to be. Maybe we ought to serve God and place Him first in our life."

Kraft then drove home and made a covenant that for the rest of his life he would first serve God and then would work as God directed. In his own words, that day he “made Jesus Christ his business partner.” He gave 25% of everything he made to the church.

That night he told Dr. Criswell, “I would rather be a layman in the North Shore Baptist Church than to head one of the greatest corporations in America. My first job now and always is serving Jesus.”