

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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I AM GOING FISHING

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. (John 21.1-3 NASB)

Without doubt, countless sermons have been preached on Peter and the other six disciples going fishing and catching nothing until the Lord appeared on the shore. According to John, Jesus made three appearances to His disciples after being raised from the dead, and this account is the third one. Jesus had told them to go to Galilee and wait, and so they did. Surely, the resurrected Christ knew and watched their every movement. In His resurrected life before His final ascension to the throne, Jesus appeared and disappeared at will. He could see them, but they could not see Him unless He manifested Himself to them. He knew what they needed, especially Peter who had denied Him three times.

Some might speak critically of Peter in his hour of waiting. Why wasn't he praying and fasting or doing something religious while he waited? Why was he wasting his time fishing? But what was he to do? He was not a man who sat about idly. By trade, he was a fisherman; that was all he knew to do in his own strength and ability. Was he being disobedient by going fishing as he waited? When his Master appeared on the shore, Peter and the others did not receive a direct rebuke for having gone fishing all night. However, the Lord did use the opportunity to challenge Peter over his love and devotion. It was what we call a "teachable moment." Actually, there are many things to be gleaned from this third manifestation. Why were there only seven disciples? What is the significance of the 153 fish in the net? What was Jesus trying to establish in his questioning Peter over his love for Him? What is the meaning of the saying that went out that John would not die?

Peter was a leader. He did not ask the others if they wanted to go or even if he should go. Instead, he stated emphatically: "**I am going fishing.**" We can only imagine that there was neither doubt in his voice nor any hesitation in his determination to apply his trade at that moment. Today, we can look at the record and know what lay ahead for Peter and the others, but they did not know. How could they? They did not even understand that, according to Scripture, their Master had to rise from the dead until they actually saw the empty tomb and He manifested Himself to them.

What compelled Peter to go fishing? As he waited, was he depressed, or perhaps bored, or maybe even anxious as he contemplated what lay ahead for him and the others? After all, he had just passed through a period in his life that few men experience. He had walked with the Savior of the world who, by his own admission, is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He had heard Him speak with great authority as He did and spoke only what was given Him by His Father in heaven. Peter had denied this One who had performed great miracles in his presence. He had witnessed the death and then the manifestation of the resurrected Christ. As he waited on the Lord, Peter had no clear direction of what to do or where to go. Surely, he had many questions and doubts. So he did what was most comfortable to him and what he knew best. He went fishing. After all, Peter was not like the Lord. He

did not have the ability to do any great works at that moment; the day would come, but it was not that day. He had no special anointing. All Peter knew to do was to fish.

I have no doubt that this was all the doing of the Lord, for He wanted to teach His disciples, especially Peter, something of great importance. What was the lesson? When I read this story, the word that comes to my heart is what Jesus spoke to His disciples as recorded in John 15.5: “**Apart from Me you can do nothing.**” Paul gave the positive side of the equation when he wrote: **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me** (Philippians 4.13).

Truly, the lesson for Peter was the same as for the others, but let us remain with Peter in our discussion. Jesus was teaching him that from then on, he could do nothing apart from Him. His life was no longer his own, and the things that he knew how to do in his own strength would no longer be possible, for his life had been given to the Lord Jesus. Peter was one of the men given to Jesus by the Father (John 17.6).

Later, Jesus would tell Peter that at the end of his life, someone else would gird him and bring him where he did not want to go (John 21.18). Jesus had prayed to His Father as He faced the cross that they were no longer of the world, even as He was not of the world (John 17.16). Henceforth, Peter and the other apostles, including Paul, could do nothing apart from Christ Jesus their Lord. Jesus proved the point by holding back the catch that night. They fished all night and caught nothing. It wasn't until the Lord appeared on the shore and told them to cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat that they had such a huge haul of fish that it should have broken the net, but it did not. Surely the net had been cast on the right-hand side sometime during the night but with no success. But when the Lord of all, the very Creator, appeared, there was a dramatic turnaround in the situation. Of course, this catch spoke of them becoming fishers of men, but this is so obvious to most that I need not spend any time trying to expound on the matter.

What might not be so obvious is the lesson that we can do nothing apart from the Lord. Oh, you might see it in this account, but have you personally experienced it so that it has been written on your heart so that you dare not touch anything or do anything unless you know the Lord is in it or leading you through it or commanding you to do it? You see, going fishing without the Lord will not yield anything of value, if it yields anything at all. I realize that those who take the label of evangelical might think I am referring to “getting people saved,” but I am not. In principle, I see going fishing as applying to anything that we attempt to do without the Lord, including trying to save others. Going fishing is like saying, “Lord, I am going out on my own in this thing.”

I believe with my whole heart that for those of us who are the Lord's and are truly going on with Him, desiring nothing but His will, there will come a day, or many days, in which the Lord makes us wait. We wonder: where is He; what is He doing; what am I to be doing? We want to yield to His will, but we do not know what it is at the moment. We commit our ways to Him, but there seem to be only walls in our way. So, we cry out day and night; but we receive no answer. It is as if heaven is silent to our plea. Like Peter, we go fishing; we do the things that we know best. Unfortunately, some of the things may not be the best things that we can or should do. We are tempted on all fronts to throw in the towel and give up, and perhaps return to the ways of the world. The wait seems like an eternity as we cry out: “Where are You Lord? I am fishing and making no progress!”

If you have experienced something on this order, let me encourage your heart. It is an honor and a privilege when the Lord deals with us in such a manner. He is not far from us. In fact, He is with us and observing our every move. He knows that we can do nothing apart from Him, but in His love, He wants this truth to be indelibly written on our hearts. It is important, even vital, for our spiritual growth. It was for Peter's growth, and it is for our growth as well. Just as He manifested Himself to Peter and the others, so He will manifest Himself to us. Do not grow weary, for the Lord is good to those who wait for Him; and then we will know the power of doing all things through Christ.