Lesson One — Monday, June 15, 2015
Be Fishers Of Men

Jesus was a master at taking lessons from life and applying them to His subjects. He did this several times with His disciples.

In Luke 5:1-11, early in the ministry of Jesus, He was by the Sea of Galilee and entered into Simon’s boat, asking him to push away from the shore so He could teach the people. After finishing, He instructed Simon to let down his nets for a catch. Simon countered by saying that they had fished all night but caught nothing. After letting down their nets, they drew them in, catching enough to break their nets. As they called their partners and pulled in all the fish, their boats began to sink. This caused Peter to say, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” The miracle deeply impressed the men with the power of Christ. It was then that He told them, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” They then immediately left everything and followed Christ.

Fishing was a common commercial enterprise on the Sea of Galilee. During New Testament times commercial fishing businesses were conducted by fishermen who owned their ships, took hired men into their service, and sometimes joined to form partnerships (Mark 1:20; Luke 5:7).

God often went to men who were already accustomed to hard work. For example, Moses was busy with his flocks at Horeb, Gideon was busy threshing wheat by the wine press, Saul was busy searching for his father’s lost donkeys, Elisha was busy plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, Nehemiah was busy bearing the king’s wine cup, etc. Fishermen were hard workers but often crude in manner, rough in speech, and rowdy in their treatment of others (John 18:10).

The Bible contains numerous figurative uses of fish and fishing. Human helplessness is compared to fish taken in a net (Ecclesiastes 9:12; Habakkuk 1:14). Fish caught in a net symbolized God’s judgment (Psalm 66:11; Ezekiel 32:3). Jesus compared the kingdom of Heaven to a net thrown into the sea and loaded with fish of many varieties (Matthew 13:47). The parallel of catching fish and converting men was simple and beautiful. Four of Christ’s twelve disciples were fishermen. Because it is like a net thrown in the sea, we need to try and teach others.

When we examine the life of Jesus, we come to understand why He came to Earth (Matthew 18:11; John 12:46). But Jesus did not set out to seek and save the lost by Himself (Luke 10:2). Jesus Christ needs you to be a laborer in the field (John 4:35-38). The only way you can do the work Jesus desires is to get out there and labor and not neglect the task.
In approximately A.D. 30, Jesus spoke the words recorded in Mark 16:15-16. In approximately A.D. 62, Paul stated that the gospel had been spread throughout the known world (Colossians 1:23). How was the great growth accomplished in the space of about 32 years? The growth was accomplished through the church as the agency in the work of evangelism. The church is the sowing agency and the agency by which laborers are sent into the vineyard (Matthew 13:3-9; 20:1-16; Acts 13:1-3). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:14-15). The growth took place when the converted become the ones doing the converting (2 Timothy 2:2).

There is no more urgent need in the church today than for Christians who can and will talk to people about their soul's need and about Christ who satisfies that need. No greater and more enduring work can be undertaken than that of winning souls for the Master. It is a work that endures for eternity. Let's look at several reasons why this great need of converting people to Christ must be met.

First, the great need must be met because all men are in sin. All men have in common the need for salvation (Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 2:1-2, 12). Many times in business, a company may market a product that is only needed by a small percentage of the population. But with everyone being in sin, all need salvation. The gospel can provide that salvation (1 Corinthians 4:15; 15:1-4; 2 Timothy 1:10).

Second, the great need must be met because of the terror of the Lord. The terror of the Lord in the day of judgment was enough to persuade Paul to teach the gospel to the world (2 Corinthians 5:11). You believe the first part of Mark 16:16, but do you believe the part that promises condemnation? You should continue to remember that it "is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). You do what you can to help people avoid falling into the punishing hands of God.

Third, the great need must be met for the future of the church. If any congregation is going to grow numerically through evangelism, there must be members willing and able to teach. Consider a few examples: The churches of Macedonia (2 Corinthians 11:8-9), the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:2-8), the church at Philippi (Philippians 1:3-5; 4:14-20), the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3; 14:27-28), and the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-5). Too often, congregations become apathetic about teaching the lost. When this happens, congregations stand to have their candlesticks removed (Revelation 3:14-16). A lot of churches grow because of members who transfer from one location to another, but we cannot be satisfied with that kind of growth. Satan works very hard to help us make excuses that sound good. Satan may get us to say, “I can't do personal work,” “I don't know how to do personal work,” “People don't want to listen to the Bible,” or “I don't have time.”

Fourth, the great need must be met because of scriptural commands and examples. You should fulfill this need because the Lord has commanded you to do so (Matthew 28:18-20). The command to go and teach is just as important as the command to partake of the Lord's Supper on Sunday. Not only do we have various commands in the scriptures, but we also have wonderful examples. Jesus and the apostles were involved in evangelism (John 3-4; Acts 8:5; 11:20; 16:13).
Fifth, the great need must be met because of self-preservation. Jesus used the example of the barren fig tree to show the need to produce fruit (Luke 13:6-9). Anyone who does not bear fruit will be pruned (John 15:1-6). Part of the teaching process involves warning others of their sinful state with the hope that they will repent (Acts 18:6; Ezekiel 3:18).

Sixth, the great need must be met because of the value of the soul. Every soul should be of extreme value to you because there is nothing worth more than the soul (Matthew 16:26). Your soul is viewed as being so valuable because it has been redeemed by something far more valuable than silver and gold — the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Seventh, the great need must be met because of the joy of conversion. There is no greater joy than to see our children walking in truth (3 John 4). The angels rejoice when one returns to God’s fold (Luke 15:3-10).

Are you helping to fulfill this great need? As we proceed through the week, priority will be given to emphasizing that we are fishers of men too. Many people die every day and I suspect that most die in a lost condition. Take every opportunity possible to try to save someone from dying in a lost condition. The invitation of Jesus was, “Come and learn of me.” The charge that followed was, “Go, and teach.” Remember, everyone has talent to do something (Matthew 25:14-30). You should find what you can be doing towards this crucial goal and then do it.