

Subject: *The Important Work of Evangelism*

Scripture: *Matthew 4:18-22*

The Bible describes the blessed work of evangelism in several ways: witnessing, preaching, sowing and reaping, and guiding (story of Philip and the Ethiopian). But here Jesus used the image of fishing.

1. Concern for the lost

Reaching the lost must be a priority. The important thing in the church is to keep the main thing the main thing. If we are not careful we will major on the minors.

- “Oh my friends, we are loaded down with countless church activities, while the real work of the Church, that of evangelizing and winning the lost, is almost entirely neglected.” - Oswald J. Smith

Have we forgotten what it means to be lost? Ephesians 2:1-5, 12-13 describes it this way:

- Dead in trespasses and sins
- Living by the world’s values
- Living under the devil’s deception
- Doing what seems and feels right
- Deserving God’s wrath
- Without Christ
- Outside of God’s family
- Having no hope
- Separated from God

We should have a concern, a compassion for the lost.

- “Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you are not saved yourself. Be sure of that.” - C. H. Spurgeon

2. Contact with the lost

Even if we don’t have a real concern for the lost God can still use us. Remember Jonah? God used Jonah to save the whole city of Nineveh. God proved that He can use us even if we have a rotten attitude, but we must make contact with lost people. We must go where the fish are. Dr. Roy Fish, long time Professor of Evangelism at Southwestern Seminary, said “Fishing for men inside the church building is like fishing in the bathtub. It’s very convenient, but you don’t catch much.”

3. Communication to the lost

Fishing is something we can learn. We learn by doing. Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” He taught them by example. Think of some ways we can fish. We can preach to groups of people. We can talk to people one on one. We can write letters and send cards. We can use gospel tracts wherever we go. There’s no limit to the ways we can fish for men. *Acts 20:20-21*²⁰ *And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,*²¹ *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.* Paul fished in public places and in private homes. He adapted his approach to the people he was with at the time. *1 Corinthians 9:20-22*²⁰ *And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under*

*the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;*²¹ *To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.*²² *To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.* We see different methods in Acts. He went into the synagogues and taught the Jews out of the scriptures. He reasoned with them on consecutive Sabbath days until some of them were saved. He used a different approach with the Gentiles. He talked to them first about God, that He is the one true and living God and all others are idols or false gods. Then He told them about Christ as God's Son and the gospel message. He used a different approach, but the same message. **Romans 1:16** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

4. Cooperation with other believers

The Bible speaks of different methods of fishing (hook and line, nets). The disciples fished mainly with nets. James and John were brothers and fishing partners. The same was true of Andrew and Simon Peter. Later on it was Paul and Barnabas, then Paul and Silas. Jesus send the disciples out two by two. Every Christian needs a prayer partner and a fishing buddy. It may be the same person or a different person.

5. Commitment to the work

When these four men heard Jesus say, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men," they knew what He meant. Fishing was an occupation, not a hobby. They didn't fish when it was convenient. Fishing meant long hours and patience. It meant casting nets, hauling nets, sorting fish, cleaning and mending the nets. It meant going out in all kinds of weather, facing sudden storms. It meant hard work.

- "Why are so few people coming into the Kingdom? I will tell you—there is not a definite effort put forth to persuade a definite person to receive a definite Savior at a definite time, and that definite time is now." - Billy Sunday

The Parable of the Fishless Fisherman Fellowship:

The fishermen were surrounded by streams and lakes full of hungry fish. They met each week to discuss the call to fish, the abundance of fish, and the thrill of catching fish. They got excited about fishing! Someone suggested that they needed a philosophy of fishing, so they carefully defined and redefined fishing, and the purpose of fishing. They developed fishing strategies and tactics. Then they realized that they had been going at it backwards. They had approached fishing from the point of view of the fisherman, and not from the point of view of the fish. How do fish view the world? How does the fisherman appear to the fish? What do fish eat, and when? These are all good things to know. So they began research studies, and attended conferences on fishing. Some traveled to far away places to study different kinds of fish with different habits. Some got doctorates in fishology. But no one had yet gone fishing.

So a committee was formed to send out fishermen. As prospective fishing places outnumbered fishermen, the committee needed to determine priorities. A priority list of fishing places was posted on bulletin boards. But still, no one was fishing. A survey was launched to find out why. Most did not answer the survey, but from those who did, it was discovered that some felt called to study fish, a few to furnish fishing equipment, and several to go around encouraging the fishermen. With so many meetings, conferences, and seminars, they just simply didn't have time to fish.

Now Jake was a newcomer to the Fisherman's Fellowship. After one stirring meeting of the Fellowship, he went and caught a large fish. At the next meeting, he told

his story and was honored for his catch. He was told that he had the special “gift of fishing.” He was then scheduled to speak at all the Fellowship chapters and tell how he did it. With all the speaking invitations and his election to the board of directors of the Fisherman’s Fellowship, Jake no longer had time to go fishing. But he soon began to feel restless and empty. He longed to feel the tug on the line once again. So he canceled the speaking, he resigned from the board, and he said to a friend, “Let’s go fishing.” They did, just the two of them, and they caught fish.

The members of the Fisherman’s Fellowship were many, the fish were plentiful, but the fishers were few.” Like Jake said, “Let’s go fishing.” Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”

6. “Catching” the lost

Our goal is not just fishing, but catching. Every time you go fishing, you don’t catch fish. That’s why they call it fishing instead of catching. But when you go you expect you will catch some. Suppose there’s a couple of guys who get in the boat and threw their nets in the water and then take up their empty nets and go back to the shore. Someone says, “How’s the fishing?” “Didn’t catch a single fish, but we had a good influence on ‘em.” No fisherman is going to be satisfied to influence fish. Paul said, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). Ever watch these fishing shows and how they catch them and then release them. We want to keep the ones we catch. We want them to learn and grow in Christ and then go fishing with us. Jesus says, “You catch ‘em and I’ll clean ‘em.”

Maybe some of us feel like Peter when he said, “We have fished all night and caught nothing.” Jesus told him to go out and let down the nets again, and he did, and he caught more than a boat load of fish. Don’t be discouraged. Keep on following Christ and keep on fishing for men. Be not weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.