

EVANGELIZE
OR
FOSSILIZE

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HERBERT
LOCKYER



WHITAKER
HOUSE

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Scripture quotations marked (RV) are taken from the Revised Version of the Holy Bible.

**EVANGELIZE OR FOSSILIZE:
The Urgent Mission of the Church**

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To Dr. Will H. Houghton,

president of the Moody Bible Institute,
who personifies the evangelism of Dwight L. Moody,
whose vision brought the institute into being.

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PREFACE

At first sight, it might seem as if the title of this book is somewhat drastic. Can it be true that if we fail to evangelize, we will inevitably fossilize? What is a fossil? It is a relic of a former condition. While on the West Coast, I saw some fossilized trees. There they were, still resembling trees, but they were dead and cold, for natural forces had turned them into stone.

Truly there is nothing so tragic, so hard, and so icy as a fossilized church or Christian. Nothing can keep the Christian warm, fresh, and alive like evangelism. Soulwinning is a safeguard against a dead, barren orthodoxy.

That the church's expansion depends upon her evangelism is the testimony of the ages. Failing to save, she cannot survive. Lack of evangelism ultimately means extinction.

It is the sincere prayer of the writer of these pages, therefore, that the Master will be pleased to use what is written in this book to stimulate the desire of God's people to gather in the lost, lest judgment fall upon a guilty world.

Some of the messages in this book were given at the memorable thirty-second Founder's Week Conference in Chicago, Illinois, which stands out, in the opinion of many, as one of the greatest conferences ever held under the auspices of the Moody Bible Institute.

—Herbert Lockyer

CHAPTER 1

THE CALL TO EVANGELIZE

“And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon [Jesus] to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”

—Luke 5:1–11

The miracle of the draught of fish is an example of the Master’s way of using what was at hand to illustrate and enforce the truth

that He desired to proclaim. He had power to touch life at every conceivable point and to produce spiritual lessons for the profit of His hearers. He often employed the things that are seen to explain and emphasize the things that are unseen.

Here He is shown as loving the sea. The music of the waves reached the depths within His soul. The sea was His. He made it; therefore, it obeyed Him. He could search the depths within the sea, and so He used a physical fact as a symbol to illuminate a spiritual truth. Understanding the sea, He was well able to penetrate the depths of the human heart. And so we turn to this well-known narrative, where our Lord commandeered a boat and fashioned it into a pulpit, and laid hold of a draught of fish to illustrate the possibility of taking men alive.

There are three introductory thoughts that should be emphasized before approaching the proper theme. First of all, as believers, we have the interest of the people. Second, we have the opportunity of the disciples. Third, we have the ministry of Christ.

WHAT BELIEVERS ARE GIVEN

1. THE INTEREST OF THE PEOPLE

The people pressed upon [Jesus] to hear the word of God.
(Luke 5:1)

That is a very suggestive phrase, meaning that the multitude pressed heavily on Jesus to hear the Word of God. By this time, Jesus' fame was firmly established, and no matter where He went proclaiming the Word of God, the common people heard Him gladly. Wherever the Lord is lifted up and exalted, there is always an eager company of people gathered together to listen to the message. When the Word is fully and faithfully preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, there is never lacking an appreciative audience.

2. THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE DISCIPLES

Christ wanted to reach the crowd. How was He to do it? Why, He used what was at hand; and so you find Him entering the boat of Simon Peter and using it as a pulpit. I wonder if He is using your equipment to extend the influence of His cause among men? The Lord is still eager to proclaim His message, but the difficulty is this—He does not have enough boats to use. Is He occupying the throne of your heart and teaching men and women out of the ship of your life? Let Him have your boat, and He will reward you with a haul of fish.

3. THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

(Luke 5:3)

What a great open-air service that must have been, with an extempore sermon proclaimed from a most singular pulpit. We read that Jesus taught the Word of God to the people. He had no other message for them. As you can see by turning to the narrative, the Lord sanctified what He used. Dean Stanley said of the little lake of Gennesaret, where Jesus had been in this passage, "It is the most sacred sheet of water the earth contains"; and that is simply one way of saying that the Lord Jesus adorns everything He touches.

Perhaps you have been attracted by the phrase "*He sat down, and taught the people*" (Luke 5:3). That was the usual attitude of Jewish preachers. Ministers today stand to proclaim the Word, but the Jewish preachers would sit to declare the oracles of God; and in a real sense, the Lord Jesus has sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, in order to teach the multitudes out of the ship about His church.

Furthermore, as you can see, the Lord Jesus turned from the people to Peter, and thus the message chosen for our meditation

was spoken to Peter as an individual. Christ's greatest work was not with crowds, but with individuals; therefore, may each of us hear His word. He is bidding Peter to launch out into the deep, and there are several spiritual deeps within the narrative, all of which we must plunge into, just as Peter did. There is a parable wrapped up in this miracle. First of all, there is the deep of failure.

THE DEEP OF FAILURE

Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.
(Luke 5:5)

That sad confession is descriptive of the church in general today. For wherever we turn, we have an excess of denominational toil, but little or no fruit; we have plenty of toil, but no taking. Think of the energy that is poured out upon secular efforts that are unproductive of deep spiritual results—a continual grind and little to show for it.

The word *toil*, as used in this passage, is very profitable to study. In this passage, we see that the disciples did not toil laboriously; their labor was rather easy. The indication is that on this particular night, they were not caring whether they took any fish out of the lake or not. This may account for their failure, and it may be that this is the reason for our spiritual failure. There has not been enough sacrifice and surrender and tears. Our labor has been rather easy.

What days of discouragement these are because people keep finding themselves in the deep of failure! There is a spirit of defeatism abroad from which we ought to pray to be delivered. Many are on the verge of giving up and laying down their nets. I wonder if you are having that experience right now! You are conscious that you have been toiling and toiling and toiling, on the verge of

resigning, for all that I know. But will you bear this thought in mind, that the resignation of a tired, discouraged worker is never valid? The Lord would have us continue at our task, no matter if we are seeing results or not. *"We have toiled all night, and have taken nothing."* Let us be honest and recognize our failure, and confess it to the Lord.

THE DEEP OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

The second deep is found in Luke 5:4, and we might name it "The Deep of Spiritual Experience." The Master said, *"Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught"* (Luke 5:4).

We turn back to this verse because it reveals the reason for the disciples' failure that night upon the lake. Those fishermen had been plying their nets very near to the shore, but the fish were not there, so Jesus urged them to push out into deeper water.

Perhaps our lives are somewhat shallow. We have been living too near to the edge of the shore, and no fish can be found there. We must push out from the shore—out into deeper blessing, out into the depths of prayer and trust and love and abandonment to the God of the sea. We must learn to dwell deeply. Are we spiritual divers, bringing up from the deep the pearls of dying souls lying on the bottom of the human sea, and landing them upon the shores of salvation and eternity?

It may be that we have been toiling and taking nothing, simply because we are not out in the deep of consecrated service. We may be too cold and formal and mechanical. Our experience may be somewhat shallow and superficial. We must learn how to be more closely identified with the work that is dear to the heart of our blessed Lord. Let us launch out into the deep. Let us surrender our nets and our ships to the God of the ocean; that is, our gifts and our abilities and our opportunities for service. Let us push out

into the deep water—out into experiences of the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit up to this time unknown, for they that do business in deep waters are those who see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep.

THE DEEP OF OBEDIENCE

In the third place, you have the deep of obedience, as we see in Luke 5:5 and 6: “[Simon said] *nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.*”

It is essential to get to the bottom of these words if we are to understand all that is contained in that act of obedience. Peter was a fisherman, and Christ was a carpenter; so Peter might have reasoned with his Lord, “Well, Master, you know all about wood and nails, but I have been at this business of fishing from my earliest years, and I know that this is not the time to fish. We go out at night, for that is the time to take fish. The glare of the morning sun on the silvery water causes the fish to hide. Jesus, this is not the time to fish!”

But though Christ was a carpenter and Peter a fisherman, Peter responded to the command of his Lord and let down the net for a draught, for Jesus was likewise the Master of ocean and earth and sky.

Should Peter have gone out and fished? Experience and reason would have told us “No,” but Jesus said, “Yes, let down your nets for a draught” (see Luke 5:4), and Peter obeyed. And after he obeyed, Peter came to know that obedience is the key to God’s bountiful supplies.

So we may argue that today is not the time for a revival; and there are those who discourage all thought of a quickening of the

spiritual life of God's people in this day. They say to us, "Why, look at the chaotic condition of the world. See national and international unrest and disorder and the multiplication of worldly and iniquitous forces which militate against the truth. It is impossible amid the chaos of things to expect God to travel in the greatness of His strength."

But the darkness of the hour does not preclude a revival. We have every right to expect God to manifest His power in this day that is pregnant with opportunity. Faith never questions the word of God; it never argues. At Thy word—at *Thy* word—I will let down the net. It is our responsibility to obey, and it is Christ's responsibility to supply the fish. If there is absolute resignation to Him who made the spacious sea, then He will amaze us with spiritual success.

It is wonderful to realize that on that day and at that moment, the Lord knew where the shoal of fish could be found. Possibly, by His power, He brought the fish into the net of Peter, for His deity commanded all the circumstances. He was King among His own arrangements, as well as at home amid His own laws. On that day, as the Lord of nature, He revealed His dominion over the fish of the sea.

Are we willing to obey the Lord? No matter how unlikely the time and the place for soulwinning may be, if we are urged by the Spirit of God to let down our nets, then it is the Lord's responsibility to bring about the contact between the negative of human need and the positive of divine supply. No matter how the prompting of God may contradict previous experience, it is our responsibility to obey.

Once from His boat He taught the curious throng,
Then bade me let down my nets into the sea;
I murmured, but obeyed, nor was it long,

Before the catch amazed and humbled me.
His was the boat, and His the skill,
And His the catch, and His my will.¹

THE DEEP OF UNITY

And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. (Luke 5:7)

What a delightful touch this is! They beckoned unto their partners in the other boat. Those early fishermen were fast friends and partners in their occupation. We hear a great deal these days about sharing. Well, here you have sharers, for when success crowned the efforts of Peter, he immediately called for others to share in what the Lord had made possible. Here we have a forceful illustration of the ideal church.

A few weeks ago, I found myself in a Presbyterian church where it was difficult indeed to declare the Word and to gather the people together in a unified way, because the church was cursed with cliques—so many coteries, sections, and divisions. One department did not want anything to do with another department. That ought not to be! The ideal church is one in which there is a constant beckoning unto the partners, where all work together, and where all have a common desire to reach out to others. “*They beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship*” (Luke 5:7).

How does this generally work out in the church? It is often the case that the increase of one church means the depletion of another. I can take you to churches that have been built upon wreckage, and because of this, they can never stand. Sometimes when blessing breaks out in one church, and the spirit of revival is

1. George MacDonald, “The Boat.”

abroad, friends in that community are so anxious about conserving the results that they are jealous lest others should come in and participate.

May God give us large hearts, and if blessing breaks out in your church, my brother, be willing to beckon those who are around you. What a great thing it would be if blessing broke out, let us say, in a Presbyterian church, and there was a rising of the spiritual tide, and the friends in that community called in the Baptists, the Methodists, and the Congregationalists to share in the blessing!

Truly, the greatest need of the church of the living God in these last days is the unity of the Holy Spirit. Satan knows that his time is short, and so he is having one last throw, seeking to mar the unity of God's people. John 13:35 says, "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" As we manifest the love and unity of the Spirit of God, we are indeed partners in this great work.

You can take that word and apply it to your own makeup, as well, for all your faculties and talents and powers should be looked upon as partners. The powers of your head ought to call the powers of your heart into fuller service for your Lord.

THE DEEP OF DIVINE REVELATION

Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. (Luke 5:8)

When the Lord manifests His power in us, we have a revelation of our own nothingness. No matter where you turn, you will find that recorded large in Holy Writ. Job witnessed the revelation of the Lord and cried, "*Behold, I am vile*" (Job 40:4). Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and confessed, "*Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips*" (Isaiah 6:5). John saw the glorified Redeemer and fell at His feet as dead. (See Revelation 1:17.)

And here is Peter witnessing the display of the Lord's power, and, amazed, he exclaims, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." (See Luke 5:8.) The sea may be deep, but the deepest thing in all God's universe is the human heart. And so out of the depths of his heart, Peter cried unto the Lord.

In his cry, we see a trinity in unity: humiliation, unworthiness, and confession. And that threefold cord is not quickly broken. Humiliation is seen when Peter fell down at Jesus' knees. The goodness of the Master led him to repentance. Peter now realizes that the Lord is high over all. His unworthiness is seen in his cry, "Depart from me; get out of my boat, Lord, for I am not worthy that you should stay in it." Sin ever demands isolation. Last, he confesses, "Lord, I am a sinful man." (See Luke 5:8.) There you have the reflex of this vision. Peter comes to understand that there are buried depths within his own heart that only Jesus is able to discern and understand.

That "*depart*" is not the "depart" of a will refusing the Lord, but the cry of one discovering the vileness of his own heart. Peter was very honest and came by a new way to believe in the authority and power of the Master. Peter realized that if Christ was able to see the fish in the deep sea, He could discern every sin in the depths of his own heart.

THE DEEP OF SERVICE

Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. (Luke 5:10)

Such an occupation must be a permanent one, for this phrase can be translated, "Thou shalt be catching men." From that hour, Peter went forth to function as a winner of souls. How that word to Peter was blessedly realized on the day of Pentecost, for as he plied the gospel net in one haul, he landed three thousand souls on

the shores of salvation! "*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men*" (Luke 5:10), or, as we can state it, "Take them alive."

There is this difference, however, between taking fish from the sea and rescuing souls from sin. When a fisherman plies his net and takes a fish from the sea, he takes the fish out of its natural element, and it dies immediately. But when we fish for souls, we lay hold of men and women who are dead in trespasses and sins, and they are made alive through catching them. That is the import of the Master's Word, "*Henceforth thou shalt take men alive.*" They are eager to live after you have landed them on the shores of salvation.

My brethren, let this word ring in your ears: "*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*" You may have picked up this book discouraged; you may have labored long and hard; you may have had little results in your ministry; and you may feel crushed and defeated, on the verge of giving up and surrendering. Let this hour mark a spiritual crisis in your experience. "*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*" If you are willing to launch out into the deep and surrender yourself anew to the Lord, He will lay hold of you and send you back to the sphere where there has been little blessing, cause you to gather in many souls, and thereby give you the joy of magnifying His name.

Peter is now prepared to work in the depths of the human heart, for he has discovered something of the depth of his own needy heart. In Peter, vision led to vocation. Do not forget that you can never function for God in your vocation unless you have a similar vision to that of Peter. "*Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord*" (Luke 5:8). Those men at that lakeside never forgot the sacred imagery of the fisherman. They went forth to function in the way the Lord declared.

"Come after me and I will make you fishers of men. I will bait your golden hook of transfigured personality with food of angels, and men shall not be able to resist your noble winsomeness."

One of the earliest hymns extant of the church, written by Clement of Alexandria, was founded on the very imagery of the fisherman:

Fishers of men, the blest,
Out of the world's unrest,
Out of sin's trouble sea,
Taking us, Lord, to Thee;
Out of the waves of strife,
With bait of blissful life,
Drawing Thy nets to shore
With choicest fish, good store.

THE DEEP OF SURRENDER

They forsook all, and followed him. (Luke 5:11)

Last of all, we have the deep of surrender.

That is the ultimate deep of all who follow fully. Deep ever calls unto deep. (See Psalm 42:7.) Once we catch the vision and obey the command of the all-victorious Lord, we go on to deeper depths still.

Peter brought his ship to land and left it there. He surrendered his vocation as a fisherman and became a fisher of men. That day, Peter gave his boat; but the day came when Peter gave his body, for he was crucified for his Master. God may be calling some here to follow Him fully, to leave their vocation and to launch out into the deep of fuller service, to forsake all and follow Him.

But is there not a deeper truth in this word? We must forsake everything—all past sin and failure and disobedience, the glitter and appeal of the world, and all the vain things that would charm us most—to follow Him. David cried, “*Neither will I offer burnt*

offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing”
(2 Samuel 24:24).

A heathen woman was once asked why she gave her child to an idol to be destroyed by a very cruel death, and the reply of that benighted soul was, “I must give my best to my god.” Is our sacrifice to be less than that of a poor heathen woman? Let each of us say, “I must give my best to my God.”

If, beloved, we could enclose a great multitude of fish and have breaking nets, and witness a marvelous display of His power, wherever we labor for the Lord, then we must be willing to launch out into the deep of a full and unreserved surrender to the Lord, which will be honored by the Lord Himself.