

I Go a Fishing

by Alan Redpath

The sermon tells the story of Simon Peter's crash and how Jesus restores him to faith and service through a look of love and hope that breaks his heart.

Duration: 48:57

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 8:27-30, Mark 8:34-35, Mark 14:71, John 21:3-4, John 21:15-19

Topics: "Giving Up"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the story of Peter and his denial of Jesus. He emphasizes the importance of loyalty and devotion to God, especially in times of difficulty. The speaker recounts a personal experience of facing a hostile crowd and being accused of cowardice. He highlights the consequences of Peter's actions and the subsequent feelings of disillusionment, defeat, and despair. The sermon concludes with a challenge to prioritize prayer and maintain a strong connection with God, even in the midst of busy lives.

Transcript

This message by Dr. Alan Redpath was entitled, I Go A-Fishing. The Scripture, John 21, 3 and 4. I want to turn tonight, if I may, with you, the word the Lord has laid on my heart, is in the 21st chapter of John's Gospel, at least we look there to begin with, John chapter 21, and just let me read verses 3 and 4 to you. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go fishing.

They say unto him, we also go with thee. They went forth and entered into his ship immediately, and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was come, was now come, Jesus stood on the shore.

I try to put myself and put you into your thinking, into the picture as far as this man Simon Peter is concerned that day. One of the many people I'm looking forward to meet, to meeting when I get to heaven, is this man Simon Peter. I suppose there's been so much of a Simon about my life that I feel I know him very well.

It'll be wonderful to see him there. And I try to picture him this day when he met Jesus on the shore. When the morning was come, I don't think that Simon thought the morning would ever come.

He'd had an awful long night. As a matter of fact, it had lasted over six months. When he had been absolutely out of touch with God, had no dealings with God, wasn't in sympathy with all Jesus, and he

turned completely sour.

And I think that that night, I imagine that Peter thought it would never end. But what wonderful words those are. When the morning was come, Jesus stood on the shore.

I wonder if any of you here in this congregation this evening have had a similar sort of experience. Maybe you've been engaged in Christian work for some time, you've taught in the Sunday school class, preached in the open air, had opportunities of giving witness and testimony and business, but suddenly there came an awful crash. The bottom fell out of your world, and you just felt that it was absolutely hopeless.

The Christian life wasn't for you. And you're on the verge of what Peter was doing that that morning, I go a fishing. I'm fed up.

Let's start all over again, and go back to the old job, and forget about it. Because you see, during this past six months, there were three great words which had majored in Peter's experience. The first word was disillusionment.

And the second word was defeat. And the third word was despair. Can Jesus possibly have anything in the future for someone who has known disillusioned, defeat, despair? Well that's what John chapter 21 is all about.

It tells us of a new relationship with Christ which opened up to him on that day, when the morning was come. Jesus was on the shore. But in order that you may get into the picture yourselves quite clearly, let's just consider how it was that these three words had come into Peter's experience, after having been quite successful as a disciple.

The first word I used was disillusionment. Would you turn back with me to the first portion of Scripture which was read to us tonight? Mark chapter 8. It's good to hear the rustle of leaves in this church. That's a sign, if I may say so, of a well-fed congregation.

Mark chapter 8. Towards the end of the chapter, the portion that we read together, here is this man, Simon Peter, at Caesarea Philippi. And the moment has come for Jesus to test them all. So we asked them a question, whom do men say that I am? And they said John the Baptist, a liar, one of the prophets.

And then Jesus came to a question which when he spoke it, I believe he held his breath. So much depended upon the answer. But whom do you say that I am? And Peter, it's bound to be him.

He was always opening his mouth and often putting his foot in it. Peter said to him, thou art the Christ. As a matter of fact, the full statement of what he said is given in Matthew's Gospel.

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I asked myself, did he mean it? I'm absolutely sure he did. I'm certain that with all the fervor of his impetuous heart, he meant every syllable.

Jesus was real to him, and he loved him, and he said so. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And the reply, which Matthew gives us again, was, blessed art thou, Simon Barjon, flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

You see, nobody calls Jesus the Son of God by intellectual discernment, but only by revelation of the Spirit of God. And heaven had opened to this man that he'd seen the truth. And unquestionably, he knew it in his heart.

And he said, thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. That was the very answer which Jesus had hoped to get. It came with all the fervor and fervency of his life.

And immediately, for the first time in his ministry, the Lord began to open up the future to his disciples. And he said to them, the Son of Man must suffer, must be rejected, must be killed, and rise again. And immediately he said that, Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, and said no, no, no, that's not for you, not that way.

And Jesus said an extraordinary thing to him. He just turned, right about turn, and turned his back on him and said, get thee behind me, said. Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of man.

Oh, what a disillusionment that was for him. He never thought about the cross. He was never in favor of it.

It wasn't in his mind or in his program. He imagined himself being prime minister of a kingdom which Jesus was going to set up for Jerusalem. But he never thought about a cross.

And so Jesus unveiled the program of salvation, and showed to him that that's the way he was going to go. And Peter at once refused it, said no thank you, not that way. And so that was the end for the time being, our fellowship between Jesus and Simon Peter.

I believe that at some time in our lives, Jesus puts his finger upon all who profess to believe in his name, and unfolds the plan of the cross for your life. I don't mean by that that he unfolds all the future, but he does show you that the Christian life means a cross. And if I could speak personally and privately to people here, all of you, and share with you intimately the things of God as you've known them and experienced them, I'm quite sure it may be years ago, months ago, weeks ago, even only today, that Christ has spoken to you and said no, not that way, this way.

He's shown you the Christian life as a way of crucifixion. And your reply perhaps has been the reply of Peter, not that way at all. And the whole thing became a complete disillusionment to him.

He just couldn't take it, and the disillusionment was followed by defeat. For you notice in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, the second portion which we read together, we read in verse 71, he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom you speak. Now you know if this wasn't the Bible, and I didn't know my own heart, I would say it's absolutely impossible for the same man within the space of six months to say at one time, thou art the Christ, at the next time, I don't know him.

But it doesn't happen all at once. Nobody's defeat in public takes place without there being the defeat in private. Nobody crashes or collapses as a Christian in the public eye, without first of all, he's been falling to temptation privately in his life.

I shall never forget many years ago, conducting an open-air meeting in the city of Southampton in England, and I was speaking to a crowd of workers, shipbuilders, on the docks. And the meeting was held on the green of Southampton, a big grass place, and the men were sitting there having lunch. Crowds of them, about 3,000, and we had the opportunity of preaching the word to them.

I was using a public address system and speaking to them, and I was getting very badly heckled by one section of the crowd. I never mind that, an open-air meeting, when I have public address equipment, I just turned up the mic, and said, now look here, for the next 10 minutes this meeting is mine. Then you can

come and talk to me if you want to.

So when I finished, and the 10 minutes was up, that section of the crowd came rushing at me, headed by a fellow who was about 50 years of age, I should think, a bit more maybe. He wasn't drunk, but he'd been drinking. But my, if ever a look of hatred was in his face, it was in that man.

And I couldn't get to the public address equipment to turn it off, and my few helpers had somehow disappeared. And I found myself surrounded by this mob, by this enraged man, and the following conversation went full blast over the public address equipment. He built it up by a broadside, and he said to me, you're a dirty coward.

And I said, I beg your pardon. And he repeated it with an oath. I said, what do you mean? Oh, he said, you're no good, you don't know what to say to them.

You have the least idea, you're no good at all. I said, my friend, if you got behind this microphone, what did you say to them? I would tell them, he said, there are a lot of sinners going to hell, and they could only be saved by the blood of Jesus. And I looked at him in amazement and said, who told you that? Oh, he said, cut it out, governor.

I've been in your game. I've worn my collar round your way. I wore it back to front of that day, on that day.

And he said, there's nothing in it. It's all a washout. So I said to him, my dear sir, you say I'm a coward.

Let me ask you, you say you've been in my game, as you call it, but you've quit. I'm still in it. Who's the coward? You or me? And then, with a tremendous stream of bulls, he completely lost his temper, and lunged at me with both his fists, and spat at me.

I was very glad that I had been trained in the art of rugby football, because I got under his spit, and under his fist, and I tackled him. And I know how to bring a man down, and be sure that he gets the worst of it. And that's just what I did.

And he came crashing onto the ground, and fell in his nose. And I fell on top of him. And the crowd gasped.

I heard as we went down, the crowd saying, Oh! And when we got up, he was sober. And I said, now look here, you're the man who needs to be saved by the blood of Jesus. And he went back quietly to his work.

But you know, I was so intrigued with that man, because after all, that sort of thing doesn't happen every day of life. That I checked up on his history, through his employers. And you know what I found? He had been for more than 20 years, a missionary in India, with an evangelical missionary society.

And at one time in his missionary service, his wife had said, I must get back to Britain to have our children educated. And he said to her, don't go, because I can't take it without you. And she said, for their sake, I simply have to go.

And she went. In six months time, another woman, a ruined testimony, a closed mission station. And years later, drunk in Southampton.

And now my friend, I'm not passing judgment on that man. He that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall. I don't pass judgment on him.

God only knows what I'd have done, in similar circumstances. But all I'm saying to you is this. He didn't crash like that, all at once.

Nobody ever does. Many people say, we never can. Oh, but there had been, of this I'm certain, there had been marks and signs of a collapse in his life for years, which one day suddenly caught up with him.

And he went on. That's what happened to Simon Peter. He crashed in public, cursing and swearing and saying, I didn't know him, never heard of him.

Ah, yes. But that wasn't how it began. Just look a second at Mark's Gospel, chapter 14.

Here's the man who has said no to the cross. Here's the man who has rejected the principle of Calvary. Doesn't want it.

Mark 14, verse 29. Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this day, even in this night before the cock crowed twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake to him vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.

Likewise also said they all. Here's the first, the first step of the ladder downwards. Peter has said no to the cross.

So he's removed his confidence from the Lord, and he's put it in Simon Peter, and he's full of himself. Look at the number of times in that verse he says, I, I, I, I. He's become boastful. Sure of himself, self-confident, of course, because he's removed himself from confidence in Jesus.

He doesn't trust him, he doesn't want his program, he doesn't want his cross. So he goes to himself, and his trust is in his own heart, and his own abilities. I will never deny.

He becomes boastful. Strange how the first symptoms of falling in our lives are found along those lines. A Christian becomes proud, self-assertive, self-opinionated.

He always must be consulted in every situation. His opinion must be sought, or else he'll resign. I, the I, which the Lord Jesus intended should be wiped out, because of the cross, has begun to assert itself again.

Peter became boastful. But look on to verse 36. Here is our Lord praying in Gethsemane, Father all things are possible unto thee.

Take away this cup from me nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt. And he cometh and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto them, saith unto Simon Peter, Simon sleepest thou? Couldst thou not watch one hour? Of course not. For having said no to the principle of the cross, Simon has shut off all access to heaven.

Heaven's like brass, it's now closed. And so he's no access in prayer to God, and he's become slothful. Do you ever sleep in prayer? Do you find prayer hard, difficult? Why? You say you've no time? You say you can't read your Bible because life's too busy? You can't observe a regular quiet time? You don't have it now? You used to, but you don't now, because you're too, you've too big a job to do.

Too big many responsibilities. You've left it out. Why? Too busy? Oh no.

May I respectfully suggest, why? Because some time ago, Jesus when you were studying your Bible, began to speak to you about the cross. About the way of Calvary. About going his way.

You began to argue with him. And from that time on, your Bible ceased to live. And prayer became meaningless.

Because you see, prayer is essentially two-way traffic. It's you talking to God, and God speaking to you in his words. Oh, but your Bible became the world's book.

My dear friends, from experience, from bitter experience in my own life, not only from this passage of Scripture, I say that we've got a closed Bible today, in many Christian lives, simply because we've got a personal controversy with heaven. We were singing a little while ago, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

Lovely. But have you ever noticed, and ever known, and ever realized, my dear friends, that when you pray, my thy kingdom come, before you ever pray that, you must of necessity pray, my kingdom go. And maybe you've never done that.

Because his kingdom cannot come, till mine depart. And that's why it is that sometimes our prayer life has gone stale, and our Bible study has become meaningless. We've become slothful.

Look a bit further, Peter's going down the ladder. You're watching him, aren't you? Both slothful. Verse 47, And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smoked a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

Now Mark got most of his material for writing his Gospel from Simon Peter, and he's kind enough to preserve anonymity. You wouldn't know from Mark's Gospel who did this, but John tells us, it was Simon Peter who took a sword, and smoked a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. It was a terribly bad shot, because he meant to behead him.

He wasn't interested in cutting an ear off, it was his head he wanted. But he missed. And now Simon Peter has become impulsive, insolent, serving out of the will of God, hot-headed, impulsive.

You know? Verse 54, And Peter followed him afar off, even unto the palace of the high priest, followed him afar off. He's become wayward now. He was once very near to Jesus, especially on the Mount of Transfiguration.

He wanted to stay there all the time. But now he's following afar off. There's a tremendous gap between himself and Christ.

And worse than that, he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire. He's become worldly. He's going to the wrong fire to get warm.

He's with the wrong people, in the wrong company. He's finding his friends among unbelieving people. And then the final step in the ladder, he began to curse and to swear, and I say, I know not this man of whom I speak.

Do you see these steps that this man has taken in private? Boastful, slothful, impulsive, wayward, worldly, unbelieving. Crash! And all that the people saw was the crash. But God had seen him, and had his eyes on him.

Seen him becoming proud, and becoming prayerless, and becoming wayward and worldly. And finally, crash. So you see, disillusionment was followed by defeat, and defeat was followed by despair.

For just at that moment, the cock crew, and the Gospel of Luke has a remarkable commentary on this. You've probably seen it and read it. The Lord turned and looked upon Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, and he went out and wept bitterly.

Say, have you ever asked yourself, how did Jesus look at Peter that day? What sort of a look had he on his face? Anger? Resentment? Disappointment? Anger? Fury? Criticism? I don't think so. There's a magazine published in the States called Ideals every month, and some time ago I used to get a copy, and at Easter they produced several photographs of scenes around the crucifixion. I'll never forget a year or two ago, seeing the only picture I ever have seen of this incident, Peter going out and weeping bitterly.

And in the picture you see the cock crowing, and Peter with his back turned round and running away, looking absolutely in despair. And you see inside the palace, looking at Peter, you can just see the face of Christ. And I'm absolutely sure that artist had captured the real significance of the look of Jesus.

I only wish I had the picture now, and I could put it in front of you. Because the look on his face was a look which said, You remember when I first met you, Simon? I said to you, thou art Simon, thou shalt be called Peter. I beheld you on that day, I looked you through and through.

And in the verse in Luke's Gospel, when the Lord turned and looked upon Peter, it's the same word, he looked him through and through. Exactly the same look. And it seems to me that Jesus is saying to him, now I've heard your swearing, and heard your denying, heard your blasphemy, but Simon, Simon, I'll yet make a rock out of you.

And that look broke his heart. I'm sure that when Jesus went up onto mountain tops and prayed, he often prayed for Simon. He said so, and told him, I have prayed for you.

Satan will desire to have you, and sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not. I'm absolutely sure that the Lord prayed, Oh Father, either break that man's heart, or else his faith will collapse. And Simon went out into the night with a broken heart.

I don't wish to be dramatic, but I want to say to you, that puts an end to anybody who says there's no emotion in religion. Of course there's emotion in religion. You cannot serve Christ really effectively, till God has broken your heart.

Have you done that? Or have you simply got a good Baptist creed, or a broken heart? Just three years ago, I was planning to come out here. In fact I had my passport, and visas, and tickets, and everything. I was coming to Belgrave Heights at Christmas 1964, and going to visit different parts of this continent.

And one day when I was writing out my message for the following day, which was a Saturday, suddenly my hand ceased to work. And I knew that something had hit me. In ten minutes, I couldn't walk, I couldn't speak, I couldn't move.

I was helpless. Reduced to childhood, spiritually, physically, and mentally. My Bible just meant nothing, and I couldn't pray.

Months went by, went slowly, but surely I began to recover. But during those months, I was subjected to temptation, the like of which I have never known in my life. I've had my 60th birthday now, and temptations of childhood and youth, which I thought I'd finished with forever, hit me in overwhelming force.

And I had nothing with which to resist it. Temptations to impurity, temptations to bad temper. My wife and daughter suffered from a husband and a father who had a low boiling point, and they got the sharp edge of a tongue.

And I remember saying to the Lord, Oh God, I don't want to end my life as a cabbage. I want to get away, take me to heaven. Right now, today.

I don't want to end my life in weakness. I can't stand this attack of the devil anymore. I've had enough.

And it seemed that, very strangely, in my heart, strangely, in my heart, the Lord spoke, not by any revelation or vision or anything miraculous, but a word from heaven, which said to me, this isn't an attack of the devil, you've got it all wrong. This is not Satan at all. It's Jesus, your Savior.

And all that you have gone through, I have brought about. I've had to do it, in order that I may make you understand, that that's the kind of man you are, and you always will be, but for the grace of God. And out of a broken heart, I understood, not merely theoretically, but an experience, that the only good thing about me, was Jesus.

How far God has to bring us down, before he makes us see that truth. Defeat, disillusionment, despair. But in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore.

And may I, in the last five minutes, just in John 21, show you, a new Simon Peter, how wonderfully different he is. Verse 15, Jesus says to Simon, just he and Simon, have moved away from the little breakfast, moved past the ship, and the other disciples. Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than thee? More than thee? More than these other men? Do you love me more than them? And Simon, oh he didn't trust himself to say he did.

All he said was, well Lord, I've made such a mess of it, and such a hash of it, I don't say that I do. But I do say that I, I, well I'm fond of you. But I don't rise to any more than that.

That's the word that Peter used in reply. Jesus said, do you love me? He said, I don't say that I do. You see, a new humility.

Oh, a different man. He's humbled now. Look again.

Simon, lovest thou me more than these? Fishing gear, fishing tackle, you've been going back to the old job. Simon, do you love me more than all of that? I believe at that moment, fishing and the love of it, died out forever in Simon's life. A new loyalty.

He cared for nothing now but Christ. Yea Lord, thou knowest that I care for you. Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me.

A new intimacy. Do you love me? It's you I want. It's you I've been after, your heart.

Do you love me? I have a friend in Chicago, who a few years ago had the 25th birthday anniversary, wedding anniversary. And they told me this, they wouldn't mind me telling you, that they celebrated by

having a private dinner party. And before they went out, the husband determined that he was going to ask his wife a question.

He said to himself, I can't understand why it is we've been married for 25 years and she's so aloof. I've given her a new Cadillac car every year, a new mink coat, and new homes, and everything, she's had everything. But look how aloof she is.

Don't understand it. So at the 25th wedding anniversary after a good meal, he said, now my dear I want to ask you something. Why is it after 25 years and I've given you new cars, and new coats, and new homes, and you've had everything that a woman can desire, why is it you're so cold? Oh, she said, I'm so glad you've asked me that because I've been wanting a 25th wedding anniversary after a good meal.

He said, now my dear I want to ask you something. Why is it after 25 years and I've given you new cars, and new coats, and new homes, and you've had everything that a woman can desire, why is it you're so cold? Oh, she said, I'm so glad you've asked me that because I've been wanting to try and tell you a bit of dance. She said, you've given me new homes, and new coats, and new cars, and everything indeed.

But there's one thing you've never given me, and that's the love of your heart. I wonder what that man said. I know what he felt actually.

Simon you love me. See, a new relationship of intimacy with Jesus. All together different now.

A new responsibility. Feed my sheep. God never lets love lie idle.

Get that. He never lets love lie idle. Oh, this disciple, now he was going to be used mightily.

It wasn't long when the greatest sermon in history was to be preached, and Simon was the one who was chosen to preach it. Oh, hope of every contrite heart. Oh, joy of all the meek.

To those who fall, how kind thou art. How good to those who seek. A new responsibility, and a new intensity.

Look at this verse, and this verse we end. When thou wast young, Simon, verse 18, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whither thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thine hand, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee, whither thou wouldst not.

Simon, in other words, paraphrasing, when you were a young fellow, the trouble with you was, you chose your own way, went your own way, got into trouble. But when you'll be old, another shall gird you, and take you where you don't want to go. And there Jesus is giving him a long look into the future, showing him a cross on which he was to be crucified upside down.

But I don't think Simon ever forgot those words. They were with him to his dying day. And do you remember? One day when Simon was in prison, the story is told us in that familiar passage in Acts chapter 12.

He was kept in prison, prayer was made without ceasing of the church, and when Herod would have brought him forth the same night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And an angel, behold, the angel of the Lord came, and a light shined in the prison, and smote him, and said, get up quick. His chains fell off from his hands.

The man was to be beheaded the next day at dawn, and what was he doing the night before? Sleeping. If you were going to be beheaded tomorrow morning, would you sleep tonight? Don't think I would. Oh, this isn't Simon, this is someone else.

How is he doing it? Oh, I'll tell you. At least I think so. I think I know.

This is the first question I'm going to ask him when I meet him in heaven, because I'm going to tell you what I think how he slept. You see, he remembered that last conversation with Jesus. Do you love me, son? Yes, Lord, you know that I care for you.

Then feed my sheep, accept the new responsibilities, and remember there's to be a new intensity and devotion and loyalty. When you were young, you chose your own way, but when you were old, when you will be old, and just at that point, as he reflected upon it, he thought to himself, well, what did Jesus say to me? When I was young? When I shall be old? He said I was going to be old. Well, he only said it a few weeks ago.

Well, he told me that I would live to be an old man. Well, Herod can't cut off my head tomorrow morning, so I'm going to lie down and go sound asleep. Resting on the promises of God, we find a new Simon who's become rock-peated with a strong confidence in the Word of God.

You see what happens when you're down and despaired and defeated and hopeless and about to give up? God moves in, and there's a new relationship starts to see, based on the new humility, a new loyalty, a new intimacy, a new responsibility, and a new intensity. I pray that that relationship with Jesus may be ended. Shall we pray? O Father, how we thank Thee for the marvel of Thy grace, the wonder of Thy goodness and mercy that has followed us every day of our lives.

How we praise Thee for the patient Lord that Thou hast shown to all of us. We marvel that Thou hast not cast us off. We do ask Thee for anyone here tonight who may feel a sense of despair and depression and futility.

O Lord, we pray that out of a broken heart there may commence a new relationship with Thee. We thank Thee for the wonderful things Thou can do with a heart that Thou didst break, especially when Thou didst have all the pieces. We ask that each one of us may, out of a broken heart, with no confidence on ourselves, live in an intimate relationship with a living Christ which will make us radiant for His soul.

We ask it in Jesus' name.

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