

The Ideal Christian Life - Part 1

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, teachability, and cooperation in Christian service, and the glory of God in our service.

Duration: 34:51

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 14:17, Luke 5:1, Luke 5:4

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of preparation in delivering the Word of God. He shares the example of George Verwer, who said that he had been preparing his whole life to deliver a message. The speaker also highlights the significance of offering what we have to the Lord, whether it be money, possessions, or talents, and how He can multiply it for His purposes. The sermon then focuses on the story of Peter and Jesus using his boat as a pulpit, illustrating the lesson that we all have something to offer to the Lord. The speaker concludes by discussing the omniscience of Jesus and how He knew exactly where the fish were in the Sea of Galilee, demonstrating His divine knowledge and power.

Transcript

When I was here last, I must have been awfully young then. These last 12 years I've been out in California working with the Discipleship Intern Training Program. This is a program to train men for leadership in local assemblies.

A fellow from Raleigh has been through the program and is now teaching there. Some of you know him, Carl Knott. And he sends his greetings to the Saints back here.

He's kind of lonely out there. He'd like to see some more Tar Heels in that program. So if there are any men, young men, who would like to have concentrated leadership training, we'd be happy to talk to you.

There are some brochures on the table there at the back. I'd like to look with you this morning at the 5th chapter of Luke. Just a few verses in the 5th chapter of Luke's gospel.

I think I have to admit that Luke is my favorite gospel. Everyone has favorites. Everyone's entitled to have a favorite.

And I think I'd have to say that Luke is mine. Luke, chapter 5, and beginning with verse 1. Luke, chapter 5, verse 1. And it came to pass that as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by

the lake of Gennesaret and saw two ships, or rather boats, really, standing by the lake. But the fishermen were gone out of them and were washing their nets.

And he entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and prayed to him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people out of the boat. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draft.

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 nets were breaking.

They began to break. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other boat, that they should come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, 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 at all that were with him at the draft 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, for henceforth thou shalt catch men. When they had brought their boats to land, they left all and followed him. Now I would like you to use a little sanctified imagination this morning.

See if we can picture the scene. We're at the Sea of Galilee in the northern part of Israel, Palestine. The Sea of Galilee is really not a sea.

It's a lake. It's about 7 miles across and 14 miles from north to south, and it's shaped like a fiddle. And I think that the Lord was at the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee when this incident took place.

What is he doing? He's teaching. And what is happening? The crowd gathers. It's kind of thrilling.

It's kind of thrilling to see that every time the Lord Jesus engages in his ministry, the crowd gathers. Why did the crowd gather? I'll tell you why they gathered. First of all, they gathered because he was teaching the Word of God.

I want to tell you there's something tremendously attractive about the sacred scriptures. They speak to men's hearts. They speak to people's hearts just exactly where they are, how much we owe to the Word of God.

Not only did he teach the Word of God, but he taught it authoritatively. He taught it with conviction, and he taught it with enthusiasm. And that's tremendously important.

He taught it with authority. He wasn't like the scribes and the Pharisees. The scribes and the Pharisees, they kind of peddled a second-hand religion.

They gave the people pablums. They rehearsed the obvious. But the Lord Jesus spoke the Word of God, and he spoke it with authority.

This makes me think of an incident that happened in the life of Billy Graham years ago. He was out in California at the Forest Home Conference. He was a young man.

He had been listening to professors with their doubts and denials concerning the scriptures, and he began to wonder. He began to wonder about the Bible. Is it the Word of God? And he went out into the mountains behind the Forest Home Conference, and he was having a duel with God over the subject of the Bible, over the subject of the Word of God.

And there on the side of the hill, Billy Graham decided to accept the Bible by faith. He went forth from there to the Los Angeles Crusade, and that's when he began to say, the Bible says. And from that moment on, he noticed a new authority in his preaching.

And that's when the great ministry began. He accepted the Bible by faith. When I read that, I thought, that's exactly what I did.

Nobody ever proved the Bible to be the Word of God to me. I accepted the Bible by faith. And then God showed me that it was the Word of God.

How? By its power in my life. By what it did in my life. I think it was F.W. Grant who said, no one who has felt the force of it is likely to deny the source of it.

And I can honestly say that from the moment I accepted God's Word, the Bible, as the Word of God, by faith, I've never had serious doubts about it at all. And that comes across in the preaching of a person, doesn't it? It comes across in Billy Graham's preaching. It certainly came across in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I say he spoke there by the side of the lake with enthusiasm, too. Spurgeon said, get on fire for God and the world will turn out to see you burn. And Jesus was on fire for God.

And here they are pressing on him. They're pressing on him by the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were there.

What were they there? They were there washing their necks. Washing their necks. Why would anybody want to wash necks? The necks were in salt water, in fresh water all day long.

There was no reason why they should wash. Oh, yes, there was. Yes, those necks were bringing in fish with all the oil that is in fish.

And if they didn't wash their necks, they'd soon rot. Is there a spiritual teaching for us in the disciples washing the necks? I think there is. We have to wash our necks.

The Scripture says, be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. And the fact that I might have been sanctified yesterday and living a holy life yesterday won't do for today. The water that ran the mill yesterday won't run the mill today.

And day by day, moment by moment, I have to be before the Lord, confessing and forsaking all known sins in my life and looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. We need to wash our necks day by day, moment by moment. Well, the crowd is pushing Jesus into the lake.

Kind of a nice problem, if you don't mind my saying so. Nice to have people coming under the influence of the word of God to such an extent that they're pushing the teacher into the lake. He calls Peter and he uses Peter's boat for a pulpit.

I like that. It's been intriguing to me to study in the Gospels and the Book of Acts the unconventional pulpit that the Apostles and the Lord used. I don't think they ever had one like this, do you? They used the marketplace as a pulpit.

That was a good place. Prisons were tremendous places for pulpits, weren't they? Actually, wherever they were and whatever the crisis came up in life, they used it as an opportunity for teaching and preaching the word of truth. Unconventional pulpit, I call them.

And not alone that, but it seems to me that the sermons that you find in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, they were not what someone had said the performance of an hour. They were the preparation of a lifetime. What happened was that these people would be arrested and brought before the council.

Great opportunity to teach. Great opportunity. But you see, they had been preparing for that moment so that when the moment came, the word of God flowed forth from them.

Not the performance of an hour, but the preparation of a lifetime. After George Verwer of Operation Mobilization had delivered a rather brilliant message, somebody said to him, How long did it take you to prepare that message? He said, All my life. That was right.

All my life. It's what was in him as a result of his life experience with God that came out. And so it's wonderful, isn't it, to see the Lord Jesus here using Peter's boat as a pulpit.

There's a lesson in that for us. You have something you could give to the Lord that he could use. It's rather thrilling to think, and Peter little realized that day when the first streaks of dawn came, that the Son of God would use his boat that day for a pulpit, and we'd be talking about it in 1985.

I tell you, the Christian life is really thrilling, isn't it? Really thrilling. Anyway, I want to tell you something. You've got something you could give to the Lord and he could use, whether it be money, material possessions, whatever it might be.

I know a boy that had some loaves and fishes, and he gave them to the Lord. The Lord fed 5,000 men plus women and children with a few loaves and fishes. You've got more than that.

Give it to Jesus and see how he can multiply it in blessing to many. Then the Lord Jesus said to Peter, launch out into the deep. Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draft.

They weren't in the deep. They were in the shallows. Did you ever stop to think that we like to live in the shallows? I think the evangelical church today is living in the shallows.

We like to hug the shore. We're security conscious, aren't we? Everybody thinks in terms of security. We like to have all the cushions and pillows and props and crutches and all the rest.

All the support, the artificial support of life. And Lord has said to us, launch out into the deep. Launch out into the depths of faith.

Did you ever stop to think that God's will for us is that our lives should be a perpetual crisis of dependence upon him? That's true. We don't like it. The flesh doesn't like it.

But it's true. God's will for us is that our lives should be a perpetual crisis of dependence upon him. And that's why Jesus says to us, launch out into the deep.

I had a friend, I can't tell you the full story because the time is getting away, but I was talking to this young fellow once and said to him, you know, what do you see? What do you see in life as a Christian? What's key? He said, I see that it's very hard to live a life of faith in the United States. He said, you have to put yourself in a position where you have to trust God. Where if God fails you, you're sunk.

And he said, if you do that, there'll be a power in your life and when you touch other lives, something will happen for God. And he lived that life and when he touches other lives, something happens for God. There's a power in his life.

Jesus says, launch out into the deep. There are depths of trial. There are depths of sorrow.

There are depths of sadness. And you wouldn't choose them for anything in the world, but having gone through them, you wouldn't give them up because the depths, it's in the depths that the nets are filled with fruitfulness. It really is.

Some of you can bear testimony to that today. Joe, I wouldn't want to go through that again, but I wouldn't give up the experience for anything in the world. Faith has its deep waters and so do to suffering, sorrow, and loss.

But these are the things that fill the nets with fruitfulness. Somebody has said, life is filled with blessings that are cleverly disguised as trials. That's true.

Life is filled with blessings that are cleverly disguised as trials. The next thing I notice in this passage is the omniscience of Jesus. He said, launch out into the deep.

Let down your net for a draft. What does that mean? It means he knew exactly where the fish were in the Sea of Galilee. And he wasn't a fisherman, he was a carpenter.

But he was more than a carpenter. I like that. People tell me that when Jesus came to earth he laid aside the attributes of deity.

He didn't. He was just as much God when he was here on earth as before he came when he was in the ivory palaces. Jesus never laid aside any of the attributes of deity.

He was just as omniscient, just as omnipotent, just as much omnipresent here on earth as when he was with the Father in glory. He veiled his glory. Ah.

He veiled his glory in a body of flesh. The side he threw his most divine array and veiled his Godhead in a garb of clay. And in that garb, this wondrous love display restoring what he never took away.

He did that. So that he could walk through the marketplace at Nazareth and people would bump him and they didn't realize that he was the incarnate Son of God. He was veiled.

But every once in a while it came out. The glory shone out that day when he stood in the storm in the Sea of Galilee and said, Peace be still. And the winds and the waves obeyed him.

That's deity. People say to me, Jesus did everything Jesus did. He did in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And he didn't do anything in the power of the Holy Spirit that you and I couldn't do. Is that true? Of course it isn't true. Jesus said, Destroy this temple in three days.

I will raise it again. And he spoke of the temple of his body. My Savior was absolutely omniscient.

He had full and perfect knowledge when he was here on earth. He said, Launch out into the deep and let down your net for a draft. Then Peter made the most sorrowful confession that any fisherman could ever make.

He said, We toiled all night and caught nothing. I don't know whether any of you are fishermen, but it really is humiliating, isn't it? All your friends know that you're going off on this tremendous fishing trip. And then they're all waiting with bated breath when you come home to hear the fantastic yarns of what you've caught.

And you have to say, We didn't catch anything. That's really humiliating for a fisherman. But you know, we have to say that sometimes in Christian service, we have our dry spots in Christian service.

We've toiled all night and caught nothing. Why is that? I think one of the reasons is because we do things for God that might not be the work of God. We have great ideas of what we could do for the Lord, but they aren't things that the Lord has told us to do.

There's a difference between working for God and doing the work of God. And it's great to be guided by the Lord. That's what gives us efficiency in work.

Service carried on by our own wisdom and our own strength is futile. It really is futile. The secret is to be guided by Him.

A 75-year-old woman said, I am 75, and I have done nothing with my life. Dear friends, that's sad. We've toiled all night and caught nothing.

But Peter says, Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the nets. I like this because although he was an experienced fisherman, he was willing to take advice from a carpenter. That's good.

It teaches us the value of humility and teachability. I can't learn something more. I have never met a Christian of any fellowship that I couldn't learn something from.

We're all members of the body of Christ. And we can learn from one another. I think it's a good thing to pray that God will lead us to people that we will be able to learn valuable lessons from.

What was the result? A great haul. A great haul. The nets began to break.

They had never had a haul like this in their lives before. Why? Because they did what Jesus said. It fills the nets with fruitfulness.

Their nets, it says, were breaking. They enclosed a great multitude of fishes and their nets were breaking. And what did they do? Well, you'd think they would have said to the other fishermen, You know how it is out there when you're fishing.

All the other fellows are looking and their eyes are turning green with envy. They see this happening and they want to be international. And it would have been easy for Peter and his cohorts to say, Just keep your distance now.

This is our turf. Well, I guess turf isn't a good word for water, is it? But anyway, this is our territory here. Now you stay away.

This is our haul. They didn't say that. They beckoned to them and said, Come on and help.

It shows the value of cooperation in the things of the Lord. They weren't greedy to get the glory. Somebody had said, It's wonderful what you can do for the Lord if you don't care who gets the credit.

Well, of course, we want that. We want it to be that he gets the credit, that he gets the glory. But on the human level, it's wonderful what you can do for the Lord if you don't care who gets the credit.

So they beckoned to their partners which were in the other boat that they should come and help them. I like them. I like that.

And you know, I think the time has come when Christians have to unite in their service to the Lord against the forces of Antichrist which are already working in the world. Shows the value of cooperation. Well, what a day, huh? What a day.

But I want to tell you something. Peter, James, and John really couldn't take credit for that haul of fish, could they? All they did was pull it in. It wasn't their wisdom that led them to the fish.

It wasn't their wisdom until the time or the place to let down the net. And you know, I feel that so true in soul winning. If you let a soul to Christ, you are only one link to the chain of salvation.

We can't take credit for it. All the glory is God's, isn't it, in our service for the Lord. It's wonderful when God uses us.

I know that. It's really wonderful when He uses us. But the glory is all His.

Only He can save after all. The nets began to break and the boats began to sink. Problems.

Well, that's terrible. No, it's not terrible. That's the most wonderful thing that could happen to a group of fishermen.

They have so many fish in their nets that the nets are breaking and the boats are sinking. They couldn't wish for anything better. There are problems in the Christian life.

There are problems in Christian service. Jesus never said it would get easier. He said it would get better.

It does get better. It doesn't necessarily get easier. And when you're dealing with souls, don't create the impression that once they trust Jesus as Savior that the world will be their oyster and they'll have no more problems.

They will have problems. One great American industrialist said, Problems are the price of progress. Don't bring me anything but problems.

Good news weakens me. Not sure I've come to that stage yet, but it's still true just the same. Problems are the price of progress.

Don't bring me anything but problems. Good news weakens me. These are the kind of problems that any fisherman loves to have.

Breaking nets and sinking boats. But then a very strange thing happened when Simon Peter thought he fell down on his face before the Lord and he said, Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord. Whatever brought that on.

That was a strange thing. Instead of saying, Wow, I never saw I catch a fish like that before. Instead of that, he prostrates himself before the Lord and says, Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

What's that all about? Well, I'll tell you what it was about. He had a vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus that he had never had before. And I want to tell you this.

When you see the Lord in his glory, you realize your own worthlessness. Job had that experience, didn't he? He heard of the Lord by the hearing of his ear, but then when he saw him, he hated himself and repented in dust and ashes. Isaiah had that experience.

When he saw the Lord high and lifted up in his train filled the temple, he said, Woe is me for I am undone, a man of unclean lips. And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Why do you say that, Isaiah? My eyes have seen the glory of the Lord.

There's nothing that shrivels us like a vision of the glory of the Lord. It takes a straight line to reveal a crooked one, doesn't it? And Jesus came into the world the straight line, and we stand up beside him and we realize how crooked we are. That's what happened to Peter that day.

He had a vision of the glory of the Lord and he was overcome. An overpowering sense of his own unworthiness. That's one of the paradoxes of the Christian life, that the closer we are to Jesus, the more we feel our utter unworthiness.

That's what makes me wonder about all of these books that are on the market in Christian bookstores today, on me-ism, on self-ism, all about self and nothing about Jesus. That is not the way of victory. I think it's interesting to see here that it was when Peter was engaged in his ordinary employment that the call of God came to him.

And I think that's a basic principle in Christian life and service. I think a lot of people think that if they just sit around all day and hope that one day they'll feel the divine tap on the shoulder, I promise you it won't come that way. It won't come that way.

What you want to do is get busy for the Lord and in the course of your daily occupation, the time will come and God will say, follow me. I often think of those shepherds out on the hillsides of Bethlehem, you know, tending those dumb sheep. And one of them could have said, I'm tired of being out here on the hillsides with these stupid sheep.

I think I'll go into Bethlehem for a pizza. But he could have gone into Bethlehem. But I tell you, he would have missed the angelic visitation.

He would have. It's while he was busy with his everyday work, while they were busy with their everyday work, that the call came to them. While you're waiting for guidance, do whatever your hands find to do.

You can only guide a ship in motion. You can only steer a bicycle when it's moving. Are you waiting for the guidance of God? Keep busy for the Lord and he will not fail you.

The Lord called Peter from fishing for fish to fishing for men. Think about that for a minute. Where are all the fish of Galilee that were there then? Dust and ashes.

Those fellows had the vision, I think, of taking those silver fish and converting them into silver coins and getting rich. They could have done that. They could have done that.

But what good would it have done them? Think of the value of a fish compared to the value of a soul. That's the vision that you have here in this passage. Christ called Peter from catching fish to taking men alive.

And I'll tell you, it's a wonderful vision to be used of God in doing a work in a human life and that human life becomes a worshipper of the Lamb of God for all eternity. There's nothing better than that, is there? Nothing better than that. I notice here that Peter responded.

Jesus said to him, follow me. Peter responded. Ah, but so did James and John.

And I think this is significant. If you respond to Christ, maybe somebody else will respond too. Do you ever think of that? You respond to the call of the Lord.

And I remember George Seward in his book, Quest for Souls. He was preaching in Dallas and at the end he gave an invitation and a dignified looking gentleman stood up and walked down the aisle toward the pulpit. Right after he got up and walked down, two young fellows from there walked down after him.

They were his sons. They were his sons. Do you know what they were saying? If Christ is good enough for Dad, He's good enough for us too.

They were waiting for their father to take the step. When he took the step, then they took the step as well. Do you know, I think the most significant lesson that I get out of this passage of Scripture is that these three fellows, and they were young fellows, they were in their twenties, they followed Christ on the best business day of their lives.

Think about that for a minute. A lot of people wait for the recession and then decide to follow Christ. They wait for the depression and then decide to follow Christ.

These fellows followed Christ on the best business day of their lives. I think it's wonderful to see men and women, young men and young women talented with the finest cunning and laying the very best they have adoringly at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to tell you, He's worthy of it.

Is God speaking to your heart these days? Are you going through turmoil of soul? Are you sensible that the Spirit of God is speaking to you? Come and lay it all at the feet of the Lord Jesus. That's what Thomas Gill said in effect in that hymn, Lord, in the fullness of my might I would for thee be strong, while runners o'er each dear delight to thee should soar my song. I would not give the world my heart and then profess thy love.

I would not feel my strength depart and then thy service prove. I would not with swift-winged zeal on the world's errands go, then labor up the heavenly hill with weary feet and flow. Oh, not for thee my weak desires, my poorer, baser part.

Oh, not for thee my fading fires, the ashes of my heart. Oh, choose me in my golden time and my dear joys have part. For thee the fullness of my prime, the glory of my heart.

Those fellows never realized the day they decided to forsake all and follow Jesus, the wonderful results that would flow from that. I say it again, that's the thrill of the Christian life. Christ calls you.

You respond, and I tell you that day you never know the wonderful things He has in store for you. I testify here this morning, I've had a wonderful, wonderful life. Wonderful life.

If I could have been given my choice, I could never have dreamed the life that He's chosen for me. They little knew that day the result of their decision to follow Christ. Amy Carmichael wrote, I heard His call, come follow.

That was all. My earthly goal grew dim. My soul went after Him.

I rose and followed. That was all. Who would not follow if they heard His call? I think there's a sense in which the Lord Jesus calls every man, every woman, every boy, every girl.

The amazing thing is you don't have to answer. You don't have to answer. If you don't answer His call, you'll get some other Peter, James, or John.

But I'd like to tell you this, you'll never get a better Christ to follow. If you don't follow Him, you'll never get a better Christ to follow. Maybe He's speaking to you today for salvation, calling you to salvation.

Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Maybe He's calling to you for service today. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Have you noticed the Spirit of God speaking to you in a special way today? Don't turn Him away. He has wonderful things for you, things you could never dream or imagine. Shall we pray? Father, we thank You for taking us back in memory to Blue Galilee so many years ago.

How up-to-date the whole scene is for us today. We think of the lovely Lord Jesus teaching there by the water, dealing with these men, preaching the Word of God, showing them how to catch the fish, then calling them from catching fish to taking men alive. We thank You that Peter, James, and John forsook all and followed Jesus on the best business day of their lives.

No sacrifice to follow such a wonderful Savior. Perhaps some here today, Lord, are hearing Your call. Give the grace, we pray, to answer yes.

Give the grace to say, I've heard His call. Thou hast bled and died for me. Henceforth, I will live for Thee.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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