

“Biblical Characters of the Bell Curve: Early Adopters (Peter)”

Luke 5:1-11 ¹

Good morning! My name is Simon. Your pastor asked me to come today to tell you a little bit about my story, since your topic today has to do with persons who demonstrate eagerness in their walk with God. I think he called them “early adopters,” although that’s not a term I’m familiar with. “Eager,” though, is something about which I know a good bit.

I’m from the city of Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, where my brother Andy, and I, had a small family fishing business. We’re originally from Bethsaida, a few miles around the lake, and we pretty much grew up on the water. I really expected to be a fisherman all my life, but those plans changed, and I’ve come this morning to tell you the story of how my life took a different direction.

When I was a young man in my early twenties, news began to circulate around the lake that some unusual things were happening down south, near Jerusalem. A strangely-dressed fellow by the name of John was gathering huge crowds down by the river Jordan and he was preaching to them about God’s promised Messiah.

This “river preacher” was announcing that, after all our centuries of waiting, God’s promised Messiah had come, and that in response, people should repent and be baptized as an expression of their faith in God. Because of his emphasis on baptism, this preacher was known as “John the Baptist.” You may have heard of him.

Well, one day when John was preaching in our part of the country, my brother Andy had gone over to hear him. While John was preaching, a fellow named Jesus, from the neighboring town of Nazareth, walked up. John pointed to Jesus and said, “Look! The Lamb of God!”

That introduction intrigued Andy, and he went over to talk with Jesus, spending the whole rest of the day with Him. Later, Andy came to get me, saying, “Simon, come and see! We’ve found the Messiah!”

Jesus traveled around the country a good bit, and we’d get news of Him from time to time. About a year later, Jesus showed up in Capernaum again, preaching down by the lake. Such a crowd gathered that He came over to me and asked me to cast off a bit from shore so that He could preach from our boat. That particular location is known as “the Bay of Parables” today.

When He finished speaking, Jesus asked me to put out into the deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Now we’d already been out all night and we hadn’t caught a thing. This fellow was a carpenter, while I’d spent my whole life on this lake. Although I really thought Jesus’ request was kind of wacko, I kept my thoughts to myself, and answered, “Master, we worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

Well, when we let the nets down and began to draw them up, we’d caught such a pile of fish that our nets began to break! I yelled to James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were our partners in the business, to bring their boat . . . and quickly! As we unloaded those fish into both boats, we had taken on so much weight that both of our boats began to take on water. Andy and James and John and I were completely astonished.

Whoever this Jesus was, I figured He had to have some pretty strong connections with God, so I got on my knees in front of Him and said, “You need to get away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man!” Jesus looked kindly at me, pulled me to my feet, and said, “Don’t be afraid, Peter. From now on you’ll be fishing for people.”

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship of Columbia, Maryland on September 14, 2014.

Now as hard as it may be to believe this “fish story” I’ve just told you, what comes next is even more amazing. James and John and Andy and I pulled those overflowing-with-fish boats up to the shore, and we just walked away from them to follow Jesus.

And it wasn’t long before things began to happen that made that amazing catch of fish seem like nothing! Not too long after we left our boats, we were with Jesus at a wedding feast in the village of Cana. Jesus’ mother, Mary, was one of the hostesses for the event, and when the wine began to run short, Jesus turned over a hundred gallons of ordinary water into exquisite wine . . . in an instant!

When my wife’s mother became sick with a fever, Jesus healed her just by taking her hand, and she was immediately well and strong again! When the daughter of one of the rulers of the synagogue died, Jesus took James and John and me with Him to her house and He brought her back to life again! Can you believe that? It was incredible!

You’ll not be surprised to hear that as a result of these miracles, Jesus quickly became quite a hot item, and large crowds began to follow Him everywhere He went. Some of those people were hoping to be healed. Some just wanted to watch that healing. And some followed Jesus because they wanted to find some fault in Him.

After a while, Jesus selected twelve men out of the many who followed Him to be a special group of disciples who would learn from Him and work with Him. James, John, Andy and I were four of that twelve, and James, John and I later formed kind of an “inner circle” among the Twelve. I’m not sure just why Jesus chose the three of us, but He allowed us to experience a number of things the other nine didn’t see. They heard about those things, of course, but they weren’t there when they actually happened, as we three were.

On one memorable day, when we were on the far side of the lake, across from Capernaum, Jesus took five small loaves of bread and two tiny fish and turned them into enough food to feed 5,000 men and their families! After teaching the people for the rest of the afternoon, Jesus remained behind while the twelve of us crossed back over in the boat.

A strong squall blew up in the night, and we were having a hard time of it. While we were struggling with the boat, the wind, and the waves, Jesus came out to where we were, walking on the water! When we saw someone walking on the lake, we were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” we yelled. Then Jesus called out, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

I don’t have a good explanation for what happened next, but it may have something to do with why your pastor calls me that “early adopter” thing. For no particular reason, just as soon as I could see that the person walking on the water was the Lord, I called out to Him, “Lord, if it’s really you, let come to you on the water.”

“Come ahead,” He said.

Well, I climbed over the side of the boat, as I’d done thousands of times before when the boat was at the shore, but this time, of course, we were out in the middle of the lake. I know it’s hard to believe, but just as soon as my foot touched the water, I could sense that it was going to bear my weight, and I wasn’t going to sink.

I let go of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus, and that was one of the most amazing experiences I’ve ever had. But the storm was still blowing hard, and when I remembered that I was out in the water in the middle of a storm, I became afraid. Just as soon as

I turned my attention from Jesus to the storm, I began to sink into the water as one normally does, and I cried out to Jesus, “Lord, save me!!”

Jesus reached out and grabbed me, and with Him beside me, I was able to walk on the water back to the boat. On the way back, Jesus scolded me gently: “Why did you doubt me?”

Just as soon as Jesus and I climbed into the boat, the wind died down. And once again, the twelve of us were awe-struck by Jesus. “Who is this man,” we asked among ourselves, “that even the wind and the waves obey Him?”

Not long after Jesus and I had walked on the water together, our little band was walking near Caesarea Philippi. As we walked along, Jesus asked us who the people seemed to think He was. What were we hearing “on the street”?

Herod had beheaded John the Baptist by this time, and we answered, “Well, some say you are John the Baptist come back to life. Others say you are the prophet Elijah, who is supposed to come before Messiah comes. Others say you are Jeremiah or another of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” Jesus asked. **“Who do you say I am?”**

As you might imagine, we’d been asking ourselves that question quite a lot. I often remembered Andy’s initial statement that Jesus was God’s promised Messiah, and I’d been studying what the prophets had told us the Messiah would be like. And so, in that moment, all that reflection came together in my heart and I blurted out, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”

Jesus answered, *“Blessed are you, Simon, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. **And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.**”*

Although Jesus was obviously pleased with my response, He went right on to tell us that we shouldn’t reveal His identity to anyone. He told us that His real identity was a top-secret affair. And then Jesus started “talking crazy.” He told us that we were going to Jerusalem, and that when we got there, He would suffer many things, and that He would, in fact, be killed; but on the third day He would be raised to life again.

After Jesus said these crazy things, I pulled Him away from the others and began to rebuke Him. “Lord,” I said, “these things will never happen to you!”

I’ll never forget what happened after that. Whereas Jesus had been pleased with me a little while before, now He looked at me with fire in His eyes. “Get out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

As I look back now, I see how very little we really understood about Who Jesus is and what He was up to. Jesus actually talked about His death and resurrection quite often, and as I look back, it seems that all this talk about dying and coming to life again should have gotten our attention, but we seemed to not want to hear it.

The months seemed to fly by, and soon it was nearly time for Passover once again – the third Passover since we’d begun to follow Jesus. The twelve of us met with Jesus in an upstairs room, and when we had completed the Passover meal, Jesus looked around our circle of twelve and sadly said, “This very night every one of you will fall away on account of me.”

I blurted out (are you noticing a pattern here?), “Even if everyone else falls away on account of you,” I said, “I never will!”

Jesus turned, looked me in the eye, and said, with sadness, “I tell you the truth, my friend, you will disown me three times this very night, before the rooster crows.”

I responded with what proved to be false courage, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you!” And all the others said the same.

You know the story of that night well enough for me to be spared the agony of retelling the account of my shameful, cowardly denials of my beloved Lord. That was the worst twenty-four hours of my life. And you probably think, as I did, that you would never, ever deny Jesus.

Well, if the challenge came in broad daylight and in battle dress you might at least resist. But the temptation to deny Jesus seldom comes to us as clearly and boldly as that. Our enemy works in subtler ways.

Ask yourself a few questions like these: How do you respond when others misuse our Lord’s Name? Do you follow Jesus day by day eagerly, grudgingly, or do you follow Him at all? Where are you tolerating sin and spiritual rebellion in your life? Are you pulling your weight as a member of His Church? Are you looking for all the benefits and none of the responsibility? There’s guilt enough for us all, isn’t there? We’ll come back to that.

Well, as horrible as that twenty-four hours was, you can’t begin to imagine our joy – my joy! – when we learned that Jesus had indeed been raised to life just as He had told us He would be. When the ladies brought the report, John and I ran to the tomb as fast as we could go to see if it was so. But as joyful as I was to see Jesus, I couldn’t look Him in the eye. I was too ashamed.

We saw Jesus again a week later, and then we didn’t see Him for several weeks. Then, one morning, after several of us had been out fishing all night, Jesus appeared to us for the third time after He was raised from the dead. Jesus ate breakfast with us beside the lake, and when we’d finished eating, He asked me a question, using my old name of Simon, not Peter, the name that He had given me.

“Simon, son of John,” Jesus asked, “do you truly love me more than these?” As He spoke, Jesus swept His hand around the boat and its nets and its equipment and gestured toward the other disciples. What He was really asking me was this: “Simon, do you *really* love me more than your fellow disciples do? Do you love *me* more than your fishing? Are you prepared to give all of this up, to abandon your steady job, in order to give yourself forever to my people into my work?”

I knew that this was what Jesus was asking, and I responded, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Then Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Then Jesus asked me the question again . . . and then He asked me a third time. I was hurt that Jesus asked me this three times, with all the others listening! But then the joyful realization of what Jesus was doing swept all over me. Jesus’ threefold question and threefold commission in front of the others was unmistakably His canceling out my three denials, His public statement that I was forgiven, and His public commission to lead our little band forward into God’s future.

Jesus raised me to my feet, and as I looked into his eyes, love was shining out from Him like sunlight from the sky! Jesus took all the broken pieces, all the shame, all the heartache of my life, and gave me peace, joy, and purpose instead. He'll do that for you, too.

Though 2,000 years have come and gone, it's still the same world, still the same Jesus, still the same Spirit of Power. Now if the world is still the same, Jesus is still the same, and God's Spirit of Power is still the same, what is preventing Jesus from doing today the kinds of things He did in my time? Do you know? I can tell you.

And as I tell you, please remember that I speak as one who has done more than my share of denying Jesus. I'm not pointing my finger when I tell you that the reason why the Spirit of Jesus is not able to flow powerfully through you into the world on this Lord's Day morning is that *you don't want Him to*. You love the world too much. You're covered up with "world dust." And it's impossible for God to act in power through a person whose mind and heart are in the wrong condition.

God's love and power are a lot like sunlight. Sunlight can't be focused and concentrated through a lens that is dusty and dirty. And sunlight doesn't pass it all through a lens or a prism that is painted black.

My friend, if you're a Christian, and Jesus is not working powerfully in your life today, maybe you need to look at the condition of your heart. It may be that "world dust" has overtaken you, and a deep cleaning is in order.

And if you're not a Christian, if you've never placed your faith in Jesus and invited Him to come into your life, to forgive your sin, and to make you effective in transforming the world, then your heart and mind are rather like a lens that sin has painted black. God's light has not entered your heart. God's love is rejected there. God's power is refused. But all that can be SO different! Why not invite Jesus in?

My friends, Jesus is all the world to me. What is He to you? Will you let Him in? Will you make Him Lord, right now?