

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

upon the Jewish nation because they were unfaithful to their trust, and of their captivity to that heathen empire to whose people they had refused to make known the true and the living God. Over us, too, as Churches, over England as a nation to which God has given unprecedented resources for evangelizing the world, similar judgments may be impending unless, with new energy and zeal, we endeavour at last to discharge our duties to mankind. It may be that the hour is at hand when repentance will be too late; but as yet the supreme opportunity has not passed by; by grasping it, we may both save ourselves and save mankind from destruction.

*Birmingham.*

R. W. DALE.

### *THE FIRST MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISH.*

LUKE v. 2-11.

THIS miracle, like that of the healing of the nobleman's son, suggests the question whether there is confusion between the narrative and another, namely, that which is found in Matthew iv. 18 and Mark i. 16.

In this case the affirmative answer is given by great commentators and doctors of the Church. But the weight of opinion in its favour is seriously exaggerated when a recent valuable work declares that "the only commentator of note who insists that this is not the case is Alford." St. Augustine, Greswell, Stier with his usual vehemence, apparently Olshausen, and with hesitation Plumptre, must be added to the list.

But the question is not one of authority. We have to ask, What do the narratives assert? and what reason is there for supposing that they give us inadequate or confused reports? Evidently the answer to this latter question turns upon another, namely, how far does it appear that

the utterance recorded in St. Matthew—it is little more than an utterance after all—is incompatible with the subsequent occurrence of the miracle and the words in St. Luke?

We have already seen how natural it is that similar events should follow one another, if the first leads up to the second, as the healing of the nobleman's child led directly to the petition of the centurion, by inspiring his faith in a distant cure.

It is the same mental connection which explains, what careful readers must have observed to be habitual, the use by our Lord of the same illustrations over again, set in new lights and carried to further developments.

The parable of the talents tells us that zealous labour will have its full reward even if opportunity is brief; but when it is retold as that of the pounds we learn that when opportunity is equal, the reward will be proportionate to the depth and efficiency of zeal.

The feast which is forfeited by neglect becomes a royal and official entertainment, the neglect of which is treason and entails destruction.

It is a strong evidence for the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel, and one which has been too little considered, that we can trace this characteristic process of the mind of Jesus, the setting of familiar illustrations in a new light, acting and reacting between it and the synoptics. In the very first parable, His work resembles the sowing of grain. And when Greek self-culture is attracted to the Lord of all self-sacrifice, His thought is of the corn of wheat which must die or else remain barren. The discourse about the Bread of Life leads naturally to the symbolism of the Eucharist. The shepherd who carries home the lost sheep in St. Luke, is the good shepherd who giveth his life for the sheep in St. John.

Plainly we are studying the words and actions of a

Teacher the most original who ever lived, but whose originality was too simple and spontaneous to shrink from using the same thought a second time.

We observe in the next place that the capture of fish was among these familiar symbols, since it is employed as such in the parable of the draw-net, and in removing the fears of Peter after this miracle. With its spiritual import thus avowed, He repeated the sign after His resurrection, as a final object-lesson to those who must henceforth cast their nets into the waters of our mortal life, while He is undiscerned upon the shore. It is therefore undeniably a phrase in that symbolic language which He loved so well, and which made His teaching so marvellously concrete and vivid. And we may therefore expect it to recur.

Once more, we must consider that His choice of the apostles was not an abrupt summons, miraculously effective, though addressed to persons unknown before. The Twelve were summoned to a closer fellowship and more active service from among the great multitudes whom He had attracted. And in particular, His intimacy with Peter and Andrew began when, the Baptist having pointed out the Lamb of God, Andrew announced to his brother that they had found the Christ. Now, on any supposition, one event was interposed between the first interview and the final call. Jesus had certainly said, "I will make you to become (hereafter) fishers of men." Is it wonderful that He should also tell them when this work was to begin?—that having in remembrance the promise that they should one day become fishers, He should presently add, That time has now arrived; from henceforth ye shall catch men?

"Can any one suppose," asks Godet, "that Jesus twice addressed the same persons in the same terms, 'I will

make you fishers of men ' ; and that they should have twice left all in order to follow Him ? ” This indeed cannot be supposed, but then it is not the supposition: what is asserted is much the contrary. The promise ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων is a very natural precursor for the announcement ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν ἀνθρώπους ἔσθη ζωγρῶν, the advance to which is as distinct as that from betrothal to wedlock. The statement that on a given occasion they left the nets and their father, approaches somewhat nearer to collision with the statement that they subsequently left all. But where are we to suppose them to have been, in the intervals of their absence from Jesus, while as yet they had no independent activity ?

It is certain besides that Peter, after leaving the nets and his father, retained his house, for in it Jesus healed the mother of his wife.<sup>1</sup> How then can we fancy it impossible for him, at any later period, to leave all and follow Jesus? Even after the resurrection, when unoccupied in spiritual duties, he thought it no shame to go a fishing. And there is no more genuine contradiction between these accounts of progress in severance from his old calling, than between the assertions that the nobleman believed when Jesus said, Thy son liveth, and that he believed when his servants told him their good news on the next day.

In fact, the difficulty of dividing the narratives is greatest at a hasty glance. But the difficulties in the way of their identification increase in proportion to the closeness of our scrutiny. In Matthew, Jesus finds the brothers, not when He is preaching, but when walking on the shore. They are already casting a net, instead of expressing surprise when bidden to do so. And their partners, instead of coming up

<sup>1</sup> So even Edersheim arranges the events, quite oblivious that he had already written, “the call . . . necessitated the abandonment . . . of all earthly ties,” before bidding us “follow the Saviour . . . to Peter’s wedded home.”—*Life*, i. pp. 474, 485.

to fill their boats also to the sinking point with fish, are espied by Jesus as He goes on from thence sitting in their ship and mending their nets. This latter statement reduces to desperation the most ingenious efforts to amalgamate the accounts, and it is simply ignored in such an account as this: "The Lord said unto him, 'Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men,' and to the others *who were beside him* (the Greek of this is *πρὸς τὰς ἐκεῖθεν εἶδεν*), 'Follow Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.'"

Nor does the chronology favour such a consolidation. The call in the first two Gospels is very early, and distinctly before the healing of the Peter's wife's mother, which however is prior to the call in Luke, where the whole connection is different, and where the quiet walk is replaced by the pressure of a crowd, from which He takes refuge on board Peter's vessel.

It is illegitimate indeed to lay stress on the different word by which St. Luke designates their nets (*τὰ δίκτυα* instead of *ἀμφίβληστρον*), for St. Matthew presently calls the nets, when they left them, *δίκτυα*; and in any case they are sufficiently identified as being the implements of the same fishers. But it is different with the remarkable phrase which Jesus employed (if we suppose that it is either His word or adequately renders it), "from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (*ἀνθρώπους ἐση σωγῶν*), an expression which only occurs once more, in palpable reference to this promise, when St. Paul speaks of men whom Satan had entrapped, now taken alive by the servant of God (*ἐξωγημένοι*, 2 Tim. ii. 26). In St. Matthew, the word is simply "fishers of men."

Thus the narratives are different; the occasions different; the reproduction of an expression already employed is quite in the manner of Jesus; and there is just such an advance when it reappears, such added stringency of meaning, as to prevent the reiteration from being tame. And if we reflect

that on the second occasion there is not only the phrase but also the embodiment of it in a symbolic action, we have just such a transition as from the discourse about living Bread to the institution of the Eucharistic feast.

On these grounds therefore, without the slightest desire to force the narratives, but protesting against an uncalled for identification because it forces them, we regard the incident recorded in the earlier Gospels as a preparation for the later and miraculous event recorded by St. Luke.

First, from St. John, we learn how the brothers were attracted to Jesus as disciples. Secondly, from St. Matthew and St. Mark, we learn that the hope of winning others, of being called, sooner or later, to this as a life-work, was inspired in them. Such is the manner of the Divine working, patient and gradual as the development of seed, and making of each lesson, well learned, the starting-point for a further advance. Thirdly, we have now to learn by what events, in what temper and frame of mind, they were led to the decisive hour.

It was after a night of failure. Their discouragement is evident in the words "we have toiled the whole night, and have taken nothing." Human nature is the same everywhere, and in the disquiet and disappointment of the baffling of earthly hopes, we are prepared for higher things. Nor is this to our discredit. It is not merely that men take refuge in religion because they must take refuge somewhere: rather it is because the heart, disillusioned, saddened by the meanness and poverty of secular things, recognises that life is not only partially a defeat but always, in itself, a dissatisfaction. The melancholy of a lost effort makes us conscious of the latent melancholy which clung even to our successes, and prepares us to believe that the secret of life must be outside and above it. Some meaning

we feel that it has, since all the universe has its design ; and yet events mock our folly in supposing that life is justified by itself. We are then ready to admit the claim of the supernatural to interpret all.

Is it too fanciful to connect such feelings with the fishermen of Galilee ? They were men chosen to turn the course of history and elevate the soul of humanity. They were full of large Messianic hope and aspiration ; and Jesus drew them to follow Him by the hope of a larger destiny, the fishing for men.

The promise of their vocation came just when they had rendered a small service. Men are ambitious of great things, and would gladly follow any chieftain who could secure to them a high position. But Christ chooses His captains among the lowly. He that would be greatest in the kingdom must be the least and the servant of all. And Jesus asks that a fishing boat may be thrust out from shore to serve Him for a platform, before bestowing His commission. His courtesy is noteworthy. He neither claims nor commands the service, but simply prays it, of men who little dream what consequences for themselves are waiting upon their answer. Who does not know that great things are constantly involved in what seems pettiest ? A random word to an acquaintance, a small service rendered, or a trifling inconsistency committed when one is disappointed like these fishermen, but, unlike them, rendered irritable by disappointment—these things make destinies and mar them.

But where Jesus is received He will not long abstain from ruling. He who “prayed them” to accommodate Him with a platform whence to teach, presently gives them directions, absolute and unconditioned, with regard to their own trade. It is thus that whenever men come unto Him, attracted by the gentle words, “I will give you rest,” He



says to them, "Take My yoke upon you." And the question, What will we do for Jesus? always, in loving hearts, leads up to the necessity of self-surrender.

They are taught, moreover, to think of Him as the Governor of the world and its affairs. Where lately He prayed to be received, He soon assumes the command even of what is secular and earthly. In this also He is concerned. He may teach His disciples to leave all for His sake, yet He does not despise their poorest interests; He is the first philosopher who ever said, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." His command is that they should launch out into the deep and let down again, in broad daylight, the nets which had enclosed nothing in the dark. And Peter's answer expresses at once how poor is the prospect of success, and how ready his own obedience. Whereupon they enclosed such a draught that the nets were breaking, and would have broken had they been strained, just as the boats would have sunk if loaded further. And they silently beckoned to their partners, overawed, unable to raise the glad shout with which successful fishers invoke aid.

As for Peter, it is the spiritual side of the marvel which impresses him: he no more asked than we can tell whether the marvel was one of power to discern or to direct the silent creatures of the deep; but he well knew it to be supernatural. Moreover, he felt in it the supernatural pressing him close home. What had happened might not be more marvellous than the miracle of Cana or the healing of the nobleman's son, but it reached the very centre of his daily life, it "beset him behind and before." And this realized nearness of the Divine has been dreadful to flesh and blood ever since Adam and his wife hid themselves among the trees. The coming of God into our familiar life wakens us up to realize how unworthy, how

stained that life is. Therefore one says, We shall surely die because we have seen the Lord; and another, Now mine eye seeth Thee, therefore I abhor myself; and yet another, Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King.

And therefore he, who afterwards so nobly refused to depart from Christ, saying, Lord to whom should we go? cried out to Christ to depart from him. His unworthiness was too great. He could not brook that awful presence. His very language betrays his reverence. Christ, who was Master when he let down the nets, is now Lord [*Ἐπιστάτα*, v. 5; *Κύριε*, v. 8], and if one suspects the dawn of a supreme consciousness in this latter somewhat ambiguous word, the suspicion is not lightened when we observe that he states his own unworthiness not only as a sinner but as a man (*ἄνθρωπος ἁμαρτωλός εἰμι, Κύριε*). It is only a suspicion, however, and the same phrase, but with somewhat less emphasis, occurs afterwards, where no such significance can belong to it, when they murmured because He went in to eat with a man that is a sinner (*ἁμαρτωλῶ ἄνθρωπῷ*, xix. 7).

But this self-condemnation is a grace, and the best of all preparation for dealing with other hearts, when it throws a man at the feet of Jesus, to confess his anguish there. Never, even at the express bidding of words which utter the alarm of a soul, but conceal its longing, never will Jesus forsake any who has not first forsaken Him. To Peter He does not even speak of pardon, but of high vocation, and his humiliation marks the attainment of his vocation. It is from henceforth that he shall capture men.

G. A. CHADWICK.