

LeaderLesson 20: The Parable of the Fishless Fishermen

Bob Lowman, Jr.

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At the recent Evangelism Response Center regional training event here in Charlotte, Dr. Tim Beougher of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary shared this story. We could not identify an original source, so the author remains anonymous.

With our theme for the year being Focused Obedience, we need to examine our living and serving to see if we are doing what we know God has told us to do. Jesus told His disciples, "Come, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17).

So as you read this parable, ask yourself as I ask myself: "Am I fishing, or not?"

Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Year after year these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing.

Continually they searched for new and better definitions of fishing. They sponsored nationwide and worldwide congresses to promote fishing and hear about methods of fishing.

These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called "Fishing Headquarters." The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish.

There was one thing they didn't do, however - they didn't fish.

They organized boards to send out fishermen to fish in far-away streams and lakes where many fish of various colors lived. In addition, expensive training centers were built to teach fishermen how to fish. Those who taught had doctorates in fishology, but the teachers did not fish. They only taught fishing.

Many who felt the call to be fishermen responded, and after training, were sent to fish. But like so many others with the title, they never fished. Some felt their job just was to relate to the fish in a good way so the fish would know the difference between good and bad fishermen.

After one stirring meeting on "The Necessity for Fishing," a young man left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported he had caught two fish. He was honored for his catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it.

So he quit his fishing in order to have time to tell about the experience to the other fishermen. He was also placed on the Fishermen's General Board as a person having considerable experience.

Now it's true that many of the fishermen sacrificed and put up with hardship. Some lived near the water and bore the smell of dead fish every day. They were ridiculed by some who made fun of their fishermen's clubs and the fact that they claimed to be fishermen yet never fished. They wondered about those who felt it was of little use to attend the weekly meetings to talk about fishing. After all, were they not following the Master who said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men?"

Imagine how hurt some were when one day a person suggested that those who didn't fish were really not fishermen, no matter how much they claimed to be. Yet it did sound correct.

Is a person really a fisherman if year after year he never fishes?

Application:

If you are a pastor or leader, like I am, we have to first ask ourselves if we are fishing or not? Are we obeying the Great Commission personally? If not, why not? And if not, how can we expect those we serve to pay attention to us at all when we remind them of our God-given responsibility to be fishers of men?

Once we have answered these questions personally, then we must ask those we serve about the amount of fishing they are doing, the ways we all are practicing our fishing skills, building the relationships we need with neighbors around us who need to know Jesus...who desperately need to be caught, whether they know it or not.

Pray with me that we will hear the truth in this parable and respond to its challenge by trusting and obeying the Lord, being the witnesses He has empowered us to be (Acts 1:8).

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Metrolina Baptist Association
328 West Carson Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28203
www.metrolina.org / 704.375.1197
Dr. Bob Lowman, Jr., Executive Director

