

## VISION IS BUILT ON WHAT'S DONE TODAY

Fifth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Lessons for Life* from Luke 5:1-11  
“Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.’” Luke 5:10

In the United States the standard railroad gauge, the distance between the rails, is four feet, eight-and-a-half inches. That’s a rather odd number, but there’s a reason for it. Four feet, eight-and-a-half inches is how they built train tracks in England, and English expatriates built the U. S. railroads. Why did the English build them like that? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that’s the gauge they used. Why did they use that gauge? Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing. Why did wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that’s the spacing of the wheel ruts.

So, who built those old rutted roads? The first long distance roads in Europe and therefore, England, were built by Imperial Rome for their legions. The roads have been used ever since. And the ruts? Roman war chariots first made the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels and wagons. Since the chariots were made for, or by Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing. Therefore, we have the answer to the original question. The United States standard railroad gauge of four feet, eight-and-a-half inches is derived from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman war chariot. Specifications and bureaucracies live forever. So, the next time you are handed a specification and wonder which horse’s rear came up with it, you may be exactly right. Because the Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate two war-horses.

But, there’s more to the story. When you see a space shuttle on the launch pad at Cape Canaveral, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRBs. Thiokol makes the SRBs at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs might have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory runs through a tunnel in the mountains. The SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track is about as wide as two horses’ behinds. So, the major design feature of what might be considered the world’s most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago when the Roman army hitched up two horses to one of its chariots.

The point of all this is that much of what we have today comes from the past, and a lot of what we will have in the future will derive from what we have today. We’ve been looking at the example and teaching of Jesus to learn several *Lessons for Life*. Today is the fifth of these lessons: *Vision is Built on what’s Done Today*. Turn to Luke 5:1-11. Here we have the story of how Jesus called four of his disciples—Peter and Andrew, and James and John. As we move through this passage I want you to see three things. **1. God calls us to be faithful in what we do today, 2. God blesses what we do**

**and makes it greater, and 3, God transforms what's done today into vision for tomorrow.**

**1. God calls us to be faithful in what we do today.** The last verse of Luke 4 tells us that Jesus left Capernaum and began preaching throughout Judea. But before he set out, he called four men to follow him as his disciples. That's our story in chapter 5—how he called them. The first verse tells us that Jesus was standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which Luke refers to by its ancient name, the Lake of Gennesaret. A sizable crowd had gathered to hear what Jesus had to say. The people were inching closer, the pressure coming from the rear of the throng as people struggled to hear. They were pushing Jesus closer and closer to the water's edge. According to verse 2 he noticed two fishing boats that had been pulled up onto the beach.

In 1986 during a period when the water level in the Sea of Galilee was low, a couple of brothers noticed an ancient boat sticking up out of the mud.. It turned out to be a 2000 year-old fishing boat, the exact kind of craft that Peter and Andrew and James and John used. It might even have been one of their boats, but probably wasn't. The boat is of shallow draft, 27 feet long and 7 and-a-half feet wide. It is made out of seven different kinds of wood. The boat required a crew of four rowers and a helmsman. Such boats were the mainstay of the Galilean fishing industry. Today it is displayed in a museum not far from where Capernaum once lay.

The fishermen to whom the boats belonged were not in the boats, but squatted on the grass, verse 2 says, *“and were washing their nets.”* This gives us a clue as to the time of day it was—late morning. Fishermen ventured onto the lake at night, for that was the best time to catch the fish. They would bring the night's haul into the harbor at dawn, sort the pile of fish, and sell what they had caught to the merchants and housewives. Then they'd clean and repair the nets for the next night's work. Finally, they could go home to bed. Verse 3 says Jesus walked over and *“got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And he sat down and began teaching the multitudes from the boat.”*

Jesus knew Simon from before. If you were here last week you'll remember how Jesus had taught in the Capernaum synagogue on the Sabbath day and then had gone to Simon's house for lunch. We sense a friendly familiarity here. By pushing out a few yards from shore, Jesus had a natural amplifying system that would enable him to speak easily to a group of five to seven thousand people. You know how this works. Sound travels clearly across water, or even on the still air across a valley. When we lived in Pittsburgh our house backed up on a deep, wooded rift, perhaps a quarter mile wide. One of the houses on the other side had a dog that the owners left out at all hours, and the dog barked constantly. The sound was magnified so that it sounded like the animal was right under our window. Calls to the police didn't help. They'd drive over to the other street but couldn't hear any barking from the front of the house. A couple of the men and I who lived on our side entertained the idea of mounting a commando raid some dark night and dispatching the dog. Barb and I decided to move instead! Anyway, Jesus spoke to the people who sat on the shore and they could clearly hear every word.

This is where our whole story starts—with a routine. The same pattern six days a week. Fishing was not glamorous work. It certainly was not a job that would make you rich. In no conceivable fashion could this occupation of tough manual labor be conceived as the stuff dreams are made of. You weren't going to change the world from a fishing boat. You weren't going to create a name for yourself that would be known all over the earth because you had clean nets. You were not going to have the largest church on the planet named after you in the capital of the empire. Simon Peter was a fisherman like his dad had been, like his sons—if he had any—would be. That's all he could look forward to.

But it is here, in the ordinariness of daily life, that God comes and meets us. He expects us to be faithful in what we do so that if he comes we will not miss him. He calls us to be available, to have our boat ready for the Master's use should he desire it. It is a small thing. Row your boat a few feet out from the shore. But you've got to be there, on time, cleaning and mending your nets, the same as every other day. In our nation's capital a young man works for the federal government. It is not a particularly challenging job. In fact there are long periods of stifling monotony. But he is there faithfully, at his post, day after day. One afternoon a fellow worker approached him. "I've been watching you," he said. "Are you a Christian?" "Yes," said the young man. "I thought so," said the other. "So am I." Serving Christ in small things. Just doing your job. God calls us to be faithful in what we do today.

**2. God blesses what we do and makes it greater.** Verse 4: Jesus is done. Then he issues a command. "*Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.*" Peter must have thought to himself, though he didn't say it, "Jesus, you're not a fisherman. You're a carpenter, for goodness' sake. What do you know about fishing?" But there was authority in Jesus' command: "*Let down your nets.*" It was the wrong time of day. It was the wrong captain of the boat. However, we are not to question God. We are to obey. Peter said in verse 5, "*Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but at your bidding I will let down the nets.*" Perhaps Peter thought Jesus from his vantage point on the helm could see a school of fish out in the water. Jesus could, but it was not with human eyes.

Something like that happened to me on my first weekend at seminary. I had nothing to do Sunday morning, no responsibilities. It would have been so easy simply to sleep in, get a jump on some of my classes. But another student and I—and he wasn't even a Bible believing Christian—decided we would go out to hear some of the preachers in the city. We decided to begin—where else?—at the *First* Presbyterian Church. We drove downtown. By the time we found the proper parking garage we were pushing things rather close. We pulled into a parking place, and who should pull into the next space but the one person in the whole city that I knew. And he introduced me to the pastor of the church that day. And before the week was finished, I had been asked to serve as a student intern on the staff of that church—one of the great churches in the country, and the church where my future wife would soon be joining with her family. You get up and you do what God calls you to do, and God blesses it and makes it greater.

“OK,” Peter said, “we’ll put down our nets, just because you say so. Look at verses 6-7. *“And when they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish; and their nets began to break; and they signaled to their partners in the other boat, for them to come and help them. And they came, and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.”* Peter’s reaction to all of this is interesting. Verse 8 says, *“Peter...fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’”* Many of you will remember the movie, *A Perfect Storm*. I had heard good things about the movie, about man’s struggle against the forces of nature, so Barb and I got it to watch. It’s a horrible movie! It’s supposedly based on a true story, but ninety percent of it is entirely fiction. All the fishermen are drowned in the Atlantic in a hurricane. And every character in the film is rough, violent, drinks too much, has a broken marriage. In the end you don’t care that they all went down with the boat. You watch that movie however, and perhaps you get a little picture of what Peter and his partners were like. Rough, tough, sinful men who are overcome by the presence of the holiness of Jesus Christ.

But here is what Peter learned from this encounter. He wrote it years later in I Peter 5:6. *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.”* God can get our attention by his display of power, even the most sinful of us. He can prosper us if he wishes. He can take what we do in our everyday lives and work through us if he so desires. Stephanie and Fred Hubach were a young couple in my church years ago. I married them and they set out to follow Christ. They had a baby boy, and then another. But the second little boy was born with Downs Syndrome, and suddenly their lives were changed forever. They would be caring for Timmy as long as they lived. But that was when Jesus walked over to Stephanie and issued a command. “Put down your nets.” Stephanie has written a book called, *Same Lake, Different Boats*, and it tells their story. Stephanie developed a special needs ministry in their church, and then her work spilled over and has become national through the Presbyterian Church in America. Not her plan. God’s. Not her desire. His. Through all of the sorrow and the daily frustrations and the hopelessness, families are being impacted and injected with hope and healing. God blesses what we do and makes it greater.

**3. God transforms what’s done today into vision for tomorrow.** Verse 10 tells us that these four men--grungy, hard working fishermen with no future dreams--were amazed by what had happened. Then Jesus spoke to them. *“Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.”* The other account of this event found in Matthew 4:19 has the more familiar saying, *“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* Jesus had taken their ordinary, daily labors, which they faithfully carried out week after week, and he blessed it with a huge catch so that he caught their attention. And then he used that to spread out a vision that would consume their lives. There is a similarity between fishing for fish and fishing for people. You have to find the fish. You must find people. You need bait. You must carefully haul them into the boat. It takes skill and persistence, and lots of hard work. If Jesus had simply walked up to these fellows and said, “I want you to join me in the work of saving men’s souls and building my church across the world, they’d have backed off and declined his invitation, for that was something far outside

their ability to imagine. But by placing his call into the context of life and work as they knew it, they began to see. A carpenter who could produce a gigantic catch of fish, better than fishermen could, was more than capable of producing a huge harvest of souls caught in the net of the gospel. Verse 11 says, *“When they brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”*

This statement does not mean that Peter and Andrew and James and John were irresponsible, that they just walked away from their business, and if they were married like Peter was, that they left their wives and children to fend for themselves. Not at all! Luke does not tell us how much time elapsed between Jesus’ call and their departure. They had fish to sell. They had nets to mend again. They had arrangements to make for the running of their business. You don’t remove the four principals from a firm and expect it will keep on being profitable, unless you assign tasks to others and set up lines of responsibility. Peter had to talk things over with his wife. And it wasn’t like they were never coming back. What Jesus was asking for at this point was for them to accompany him on a series of short trips to the surrounding area, and then to return home again. Later he would call them to full time service as apostles. And then ask yourself this: Why do you think Jesus blessed that last fishing effort with so many fish? It wasn’t just to make a show. All of those fish when sold would cover the loss of income while they were away. God makes very practical provision for his servants when he calls them to follow him.

But suppose these men had not been faithful at work. Suppose they came late that day. Or decided to go home early before the task was done. Suppose they were indifferent fishermen, or lazy. Suppose they were good-time-guys who hung out at the local bar and whiled away the hours drinking with their buddies. Or suppose they neglected their wives and children so that their home lives were in shambles. Then they would not have been there on the day when Jesus came to speak to the crowds. Their boats would not have been available for Jesus to use as a pulpit. Or suppose they’d answered the Master by saying, “Jesus, we’re tired. We’ve worked all night.” Or, “Jesus, there aren’t any fish out there. We’ve tried.” Then they’d never have seen Christ’s great work. And they’d never have caught his vision for the world that he was calling them to participate in. Someone else would have gotten the call. And instead of St. Peter’s Cathedral we’d have St. Harry’s Cathedral--or something. They’d have missed out.

But they were there when Jesus came. And Jesus changed the hearts of these sinful men. And he took what they knew, what they were, and what they did, and he transformed them all into men he could teach and train and who could carry out the assignment of building his church. He took the amazement of verse 9 and used it to give them a vision. He does that for us. God takes what you and I do today and he transforms it into a vision for tomorrow. Now, what will he do with you? How about some fishing?

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