

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 5- Luke 5:1-11** 60- The Divinity of Jesus- Part 5

---

December 20, 2009

## **Luke 5:1-11**

Around Christmas of AD 410- the city of Rome had just been overtaken by a band of barbarians called the Visigoths. These pagans went through the Roman Empire killing hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed the Empire that had stood for over a thousand years and which was viewed by many to be eternal. We do not view the fall of the Roman Empire like they did because we have the advantage of 20/20 hindsight- but many people of that day, many politicians, many preachers, and many believers, all thought that civilization itself could not possibly endure once the Empire fell, and that surely the Lord would come very quickly now.

After all- it had been four centuries since Jesus had been born in a manger, and it had been 340 years since the Roman Army had destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and Jesus Himself had said that He was coming back soon. Surely the coming of the Lord was near because no one thought that the Christian Church would be able to endure if the Roman Empire fell.

Augustine- the Bishop of Northern Africa- stood and watched the collapse of the Roman Empire. And like many- he, too, thought that the economic hardship of that time along with the political madness would bring about that the return of Jesus to this earth.

Now Augustine is arguably the greatest theologian that the Christian Church has ever produced. What is not arguable is that he was its greatest spokesmen during the first 1,000 years after the death of the Apostle John. Yea- the very foundational teaching of the Protestant Reformation that unworthy sinners who are guilty of the Original Sin of Adam are Sovereignly and Mercifully Justified by Grace

alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone was preached and taught and passionately proclaimed by Augustine like no man since Paul had 400 years earlier and like no other man would until Luther and Calvin took up that mantle again a thousand years later.

But in order to encourage believers to put all their hope in God during the very hard years of the fall of the Roman Empire- Augustine wrote his masterpiece- *The City of God*- which gave the clear distinctions between the City of Man- which is only temporary, and the City of God- which is eternal. Augustine cried to his brothers and sisters that no matter what happened to their country, or their nation, or even to the entire civilization that human beings had developed- that he called "The City of Man"- Jesus Christ had promised that He would build His Church and the very gates of hell would not prevail against the Church that Christ had built.

And it is hard for us to even image this morning as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ- the Son of God- that 1600 years ago- before America was discovered, before there was capitalism, before free enterprise was invented, before representative Democracy was created, before air conditioning and fast food restaurants and television and computers and before automobiles filled our streets and before airplanes filled the air that people thought that Jesus was coming back because they could not even image how life could go on with all the economic turmoil and political unrest that was happening all around them.

But here we are 16 centuries later- still loving and serving the same Lord Jesus that Augustine loved and served, still preaching from the same Book that he preached from, still proclaiming the same story that he proclaimed, still crying with the same passion and vigor that Augustine did against any false teaching that would undermine the central Truth of the Gospel that the Absolute Sovereign God of the Universe is infinitely holy, and that we who are the fallen seed of Adam are infinitely sinful and that we cannot earn Salvation by anything that we do, and that partaking of Church Sacraments does not redeem the human soul, and that we are made fit for Heaven through the imputation of Christ's Righteousness by the agency of Faith alone- apart from Confession and apart from Communion and apart from Baptism and apart from partaking of the Mass, and that the human will is not free but it is in bondage to the sinful nature of Adam that we

were born with and that human effort and human ingenuity and human will power and human choice all pale in comparison to the Mercy and the Grace that issues from the mighty Hand of the one true living Omnipotent God. And 16 centuries later we, too, pray:

God grant what thou commandest  
And Command what thou wilt

Because we know that without God's Grace and Mercy we are nothing, and we know that nothing happens in the Universe without God's express Permission and without God's express Ordination, and today- even though things look very bleak for many of us- even though we live in a time of great upheaval and great change and great economic hardship and great political unrest- as we, too, look out over the horizon and we see the dismantling of Western Civilization right before our eyes, and we, too, are tempted to fear and we are tempted to trust in the City of Man and we are tempted to look to some Man, some politician, some sinful human to help us and to relieve us.

But then we see the Babe lying in a manger and we are reminded again of the time of the greatest miracle that has ever or that will ever be manifested- the miracle of when the Owner and Creator of the Universe inserted Himself into His Own Creation, and God Almighty took on human flesh and became Man and was born as this little tender frail baby who would grow up to die on the Cross for all our sins so that we could be forgiven, and so that we could be saved, and so that we could be born again, and so that we could have the very Righteousness of Christ imputed to us and be made fit for Heaven!

So once again on this day as we gather to celebrate not only the Birth, but we gather on this Lord's day to celebrate the Resurrection of this same Lord Jesus Christ- Who lived and died and Who rose again, and we, too, trust in the Christ of Calvary Who has promised to never leave us and never forsake us, and we trust in the God Who created all things and Who does all things after the Counsel of His Own Will, and this morning- no matter what we face- we look to the Hills from whence cometh our help, because even now- with all that is going on- Jesus Christ is building His Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church that Christ builds!

Now, as we have been examining this eleven verses over these last four weeks- we see five distinct Characteristics of God's Almighty's Own Personal Nature that Luke tells us are also found in Jesus. Those five Characteristics are:

1. Jesus is the Source of Divine Truth
2. Jesus is Omniscience
3. Jesus is Omnipotent
4. Jesus is Holy
5. Jesus is Merciful

And we have already gone over the first three last week- we ended that message in the fourth Characteristic of God that is found in Jesus, and that is that both God the Father and God the Son are Holy, and I want to pick up on that again today.

Because as Peter witnessed this miracle of this huge catch of fish- his response was so different- so radically different from what so many others would have been that it is remarkable and something that we dare not pass up. God help us not to just skim over this- this morning but help us O God- to get the power and the importance of this passage.

Now through this miracle- Peter was set for life. This was the largest catch of fish that he or any of the other fishermen had ever seen. This catch was so large- that it was sinking both of the boats that were built to hold masses amounts of fish- so this was not just a *large* catch- this catch was enormous and overwhelming, and so obviously supernatural- so obviously miraculous - that Peter knew immediately that this catch was not about the fish, it was not about providing for Peter financially, it was not about building his business or of allowing him to live comfortably after this moment on the money that he would have made through the sale of all these fish. This huge supernatural catch of fish was all about Peter being saved, and of him following Jesus without any reservation, without any reluctance, and without any conditions.

Until this moment- Peter was following Jesus- but only from a distance. He was giving Jesus lip service, he was following Jesus to some extent and to some degree, but not with abandon, not with his whole heart, and not to the point of giving up everything.

Up until this moment- Peter really thought that he was actually doing Jesus a favor by serving Him at all, but with this one single miracle- Peter was changed forever and realized that he was a sinful and wicked man who had nothing to offer Jesus, and it was Jesus who was doing Peter the favor by choosing him and by rescuing him from his sin.

And somehow Peter knew this. God had graced Peter here with the ability to instantly realize just Who was standing before him, and Peter somehow knew exactly what he was dealing with here. He was dealing with One Who was the Source of all Truth, One Who knew everything that could be known, and One Who had all Power in Heaven and Earth.

Peter knew that he was dealing with Truth, Omniscience, and Omnipotence. And that meant that he was also standing before Divine Holiness because Peter knew that the God of Truth, and the God of Omniscience, and the God of Power is also the God of Holiness. And Peter knew from the years that he had been taught the Old Testament that God is not just Holy- but that God is "Holy, Holy, Holy". And God gave Peter the incredible blessing of realizing that along with God being holy- that he himself was sinful.

And this brings up a very important Truth that we need to try to grasp about the ability of the human vessel to be convicted of sin, and both the desire and the ability that we have to repent and to love and serve God.

It is commonly thought by many in the modern Church that we humans just naturally have the capacity within us to repent and to be convicted, and that all of this is simply a matter of human free will or our own choice originating out of nothing other than our own volition.

That somehow we are all born with the ability to love God and to repent and serve God if we just choose to do so. But that idea completely disregards two very fundamental Biblical Truths:

- A. The Absolute Sovereignty of God
- B. The Radical and Negative effects that the Fall of Adam had on the human race

And I want to say to you this morning as clear as I can that human free will is a concept that is way overblown and elevated far too

high, and way too much dependence and way too much importance is placed upon it, and I also want to say to you very precisely that human free will as a living and breathing concept is not found anywhere in the entire Bible; it was not taught by Moses or David or Isaiah or Jesus or Paul or John, and the ability that we have to make choices is not "free".

We can and do choose, and we are held accountable by God for what we choose so it is always important that all of us choose to do the right thing, that we choose to say the right thing, and that we choose to believe and to do the right thing.

But we must also understand that we do not choose what we choose arbitrarily or haphazardly or in a vacuum. We choose what we love, what we desire, and we choose what we want. And what we love and what we desire and what we want is based upon the condition of our nature.

You see every living being on earth is not born innocent as is most commonly believed, and neither are we born with the ability to love and serve God- no- the Bible does not teach that at all. The lost fallen pagan world teaches that- but the Bible does not teach that.

The Bible declares very clearly that all of us are in a terrible mess with God by virtue of the fact that we are all born in sin and we are all shapen in our mother's womb with the very same iniquity of Adam, and we are, in fact, born with the original sin of Adam already imputed to us.

And, therefore- because that is true- nobody is pure, nobody is innocent, and nobody is free from sin- we are all sinful; we all rebel against God and His Ways, and we are all constantly trying to do what is right in our own eyes, and, therefore- we are all corrupt, and because of that- we all stand before God guilty of being a transgressor of the Law of God.

We are by virtue of our fallen and sinful nature- rebellious towards God and rebellious towards the things of God. We rebel against God's Law, God's Commandments; God's Word, God's Truth, and God's Person. And we are by nature trying our hardest to run away from God and to hide from God- hoping that God doesn't see and hoping that God doesn't know.

We love darkness rather than light, we love sin rather than righteousness, we desire self rather than God, we crave and are very creative in inventing new ways to steal Glory away from God for

ourselves, we lust to be first and important, and we seek to rob God of our worship and our obedience and our devotion and our love while we live our lives for no other reason other than to benefit ourselves.

We covet after more of this world's goods and we buy into the silly and shallow lie that more stuff that is passing away will make us happy and satisfied rather than placing all of our satisfaction and all of our joy in God- Who Alone is Immortal and Absolute.

It is our nature to be like this- this is who we are- and this is what we do naturally without even thinking about it- it comes naturally to us- because we are all fallen.

It is unnatural for human beings to run towards God; it is unnatural for human beings to love God; it is unnatural for human beings to follow after God and to be convicted of sin and to repent and to love and serve God on His terms. These things are not natural to us, they do not come to us naturally, and because that is true- Serving God, loving God, being convicted of sin, and repenting is way more than simply the exercise of our own free will- these things require supernatural intervention on God's part to graciously and mercifully give us both the desire and the power to love and serve Him. Please turn with me to **Philippians 2:13:**

**For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.**

Now this passage begins by saying,

**For it is God...**

And the way that the Greek reads here shows us that this is what is called an "exclusionary phrase" here- meaning that it is God *alone*, it is God *all by Himself*, it is God *Sovereignly* doing something in us *without* us helping Him or *without* us cooperating with Him- it is God all by Himself working in us *without* any assistance or cooperation from us at all.

Well what does the Apostle Paul write here in these inspired Words that God is doing in us Sovereignly all by Himself?

**... who is at work in you**

God is Sovereignly working in us, working inside of us, internally down deep in us to give us or to provide for us two things that we need, and two things that we do not already have. Well just what are those two things?

**... both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure**

Two things:

1. The Will or the Desire to do of God's Good Pleasure
2. The Ability or the Power to do of God's good Pleasure

So we see here that God is Sovereignly working in us to give to us both the will and the power to do of God's good pleasure. That is exactly what the Holy Bible says, right? Do you see that? But now here is the \$64,000 question. We can no longer argue about the fact that God Sovereignly, all by Himself, works in us to give us both the will and the power to do of God's good pleasure- that is clearly what the Bible says- but the question that we should all ask at this point is,

*"Why does God have to work in us Sovereignly to give us both the will and the power to do of His good pleasure if being convicted of sin and repenting of sin and being saved and serving God and loving God and obeying God are simply a matter of human free will?"*

In other words- if our ability to repent and our ability to love God and our ability to be convicted of sin was simply a matter of us choosing to do so- why would God have to Sovereignly work in us to give us both the will and the power to do so?

The obvious reason why God has to Sovereignly work in us to give us both the will and the power is because we do not already possess either of those two qualities. It should be manifestly clear to us that if we already had those two qualities- God would certainly be wasting His time working in us to give them to us wouldn't He?

But God graciously and mercifully works in us all by Himself to give us both the will and the power to love and serve God precisely because we do not already possess either of those two qualities.



Well, why don't we already possess those two qualities? Because we lost them both in the Fall. And this is why, dear friends, that a correct and full understanding about the devastating effects that the Fall had on us is mandatory. And it is my contention and I say this often and nobody has ever been able to contradict this statement:

That without a clear and full Biblical understanding of both the Absolute Sovereignty of God and the radical and the negative effects that the Fall had on Man being firmly rooted and actively working in our minds- the rest of the Bible will make little or no sense to us.

And that goes into every area of the Scriptures and every area of Christianity, and even every area of Church life itself. In other words- if you are not clear about God's Sovereignty, if you do not have a Biblical understanding of both the Absolute Sovereignty of God and the radical ruination of Man through the Fall - then you will be off base about things like Evangelism, and Manhood and Womanhood, and Marriage, and the role of Suffering in this life, and Prosperity and Physical Healing, and you will even be off base about Salvation- that is just how important this is.

But if you are taught rightly and Biblically and fully about these two important issues- then the rest of the Bible will fall into place and you will not struggle so hard with what God has revealed in Scripture about these important subjects.

The point that I am making is that if Salvation and being convicted of sin and loving and serving God is simply a matter of human free will- then it really isn't that big of a deal and it isn't eternal and it isn't of Grace and it isn't through Mercy. And if human free will is the deciding factor in whether or not we repent and believe and love and serve God- if all of that is simply a matter of choice- then by rights- we should receive all the credit and all the Glory for making that correct choice, and God would be wrong to receive any Glory for that at all.

But if God is as Sovereign as the Bible says that He is, and if Man is as fallen and the Bible says that he is- then for any of us to be convicted of any sin is a miracle, and for any of us to ever love God and for any of us to have even the desire to repent and follow after God is a powerful and glorious and merciful, and, yes, Sovereign Work of Grace in our lives, and, therefore, God gets all the Glory.

And I beg you to hear me on this, dear friends, because this is not a small issue- this will change everything. Unworthy and fallen sinners are *given* the ability to repent, we are *granted* the power to believe, we are mercifully *issued* the desire to love God, and we are graciously *provided* with the will to serve God. And that makes Grace to be magnificent, and that makes Mercy to be the only game in town, and that makes God's Goodness towards us to be fabulous, and that makes us to be very small, and very insignificant, and very, very unworthy.

So Holy Scripture says that we are convicted only because God *allows* us to be convicted, and we are saved only because God *allows* us to be saved, and we love God only because God *allows* us to love Him. The Apostle John put it this way in **1John 4:19**:

**We love, because He first loved us.**

In other words- the *basis* of our love for God is not our own free will choice- no, we didn't simply *decide* to start loving God one day- that is not what the Bible teaches at all. No, the foundation of why we love God is the awesome reality that God first loved us. God determined in Himself to love us - to set His Love upon us- *first*- before we did anything to deserve that Love.

And the way that this Greek construction reads shows us that this, too, is an exclusionary statement. In other words- the *only* reason why we love God is because God first loved us.

And so God *mercifully* and *graciously* set His Divine Love upon us- not because we deserved it, and not because we earned it, and certainly not because God was in any way obligated to do so. But God loved us before we ever knew Him, and He loved us way before we did anything good or bad, way before we were even born - yea- the Bible declares without hesitation that God set His love upon us to show us favor and to save us and to grant us eternal life before God ever established the foundations of the world.

Now don't fall asleep yet- hear this- because this is important. And the result of God loving us first- John said- is that now we love God. And this is *always* the result of God first loving us- that we *always* love Him, that we *cannot* and we *do not* and we *will not* react any other way except to love God in return- not in perfect sinlessness because of the limitations of our flesh- but we will always *honestly* and

*truthfully* love God in response to Him loving us first. And so we love God- yes, we do- but only because God first loved us. In other words- our love *for* God is a gift *from* God.

But we can't stop there- because it is abundantly clear that all people on earth do not love God. So what do we say to that? Again- remember we have established the fact that the only reason that we do love God has nothing to do with human free will or human choice- but we love God because God has wondrously and Sovereignly set His Love upon us first. And so we must continue on into this fully by asking this series of questions:

*"Do we who are saved love God?"*

*"Yes".*

*"But why do we love God?"*

*"Not because of any good thing in us. The Bible says that we love God only because He first loved us."*

*"But does the lost world love God?"*

*"No."*

*"Why not?"*

*"Obviously, because God has not set His Love upon them- at least not to the same extent that He wondrously and graciously done for us."*

*"How do we know this to be true?"*

*"Because their response would be the same- they would love God, too."*

And the fact that they do not love God shows us that God has not set His Love upon them, or else they would react to God's Love the same way that we have- by loving and serving and following after God- because that is the only reason why we do those things.

Now, because our love for God is a gift from God, and because we have the desire and the power to love and serve God only because God worked in us Sovereignly to give us that desire and power- because all of this is true- all of this has the net effect of making us grateful and to make us humble, and through all of this- we have a profound and deep and unpayable debt of love- that we now owe God; we now are in debt to God and so we do all that we do now that we are saved- not to earn God's Favor or to earn God's Merit or to deserve God's special treatment- because we can't.

But we do all that we do in obeying and serving and following after God in loving and grateful response to all that God has done for us in and by and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must keep in mind that if God is as Sovereign as the Bible says that He is- and if Man is as radically ruined and fallen as the Bible says that he is- then God would have been just as Holy, just as Righteous, and just as Glorious if He never would have even looked our way, and God would have been just as Loving and just as Kind if He were to send the entire human race to hell right now- for two very important reasons:

- ✓ We are all guilty as sinful transgressors of the Law
- ✓ God is not obligated to give Mercy to anybody

So I said all of that to say this. If Man is not that fallen or if God is not that Sovereign- then conviction of sin and repentance and Salvation and serving God is simply a process of human will power and the result of human choice, and, therefore, Man should be given all glory for those things, and God is not entitled to receive any Glory from those things at all.

God is only entitled to receive Glory for these things if He is as Sovereign as the Bible declares Him to be and only if Man is as fallen and unable and unwilling as the Bible says that he is.

And here is where I tie all this back together- because Peter knew all this. In a split second, as soon as Peter saw this miracle of this huge catch of fish- God graced Peter with the ability to see just how sinful he was and how Sovereign Jesus is. Please read **Luke 5:8** again with me:

**8 But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"**

**9 For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken;**

Look- fishing was Peter's thing. He knew all about fishing. But this was not fishing. What he had just seen was not fishing. Knowing where the fish are and controlling them- that's not fishing. This was supernatural. This had no human explanation. This was a powerful and glorious demonstration of the Divinity of Jesus Christ.

You see, Peter had heard Jesus teaching about the Kingdom. And he had heard Jesus teaching about repentance and salvation and forgiveness. And Peter had heard that because Jesus was sitting in Peter's boat teaching all this.

And Peter had heard Jesus teaching this in the synagogue just prior in the record of Chapter 4. And no doubt Peter had discussed it with Jesus when Jesus spent the day at his house and healed his wife's mother of that terrible fever.

But no teaching by itself had brought Peter to where the Lord wanted him to come apparently. And so the Lord had a very special manifestation for Peter that shocked him and that was this occasion with all these fish which was the way that God chose to grace Peter with the desire and ability to recognize his own inherent sinfulness.

And this is the first time we have that indication because Peter had received his initial call back in **John 1**, and there had been a *confirmation* of that initial call to follow Jesus recorded in **Matthew 4** and **Mark 1**- which are two parallel passages.

But in neither of those passages is there any discussion on Peter's part about his own sinfulness- there was no genuine repentance- no turn from sin, and no indication anywhere that Peter had yet responded to God's Love by loving Christ.

But now Peter knows something. Whoever he thought Jesus was when they first met, whoever he thought Jesus was at that second confirmation, whoever he thought Jesus was in the synagogue, and whoever he thought he was at home when He healed his mother-in-law, and whoever he thought he was when Jesus was teaching that day on the shore at the lake has all changed now, and now there are no more doubts, absolutely no shred of confusion or bewilderment- now Peter is

assured that this man who looks just like any other man is actually God Almighty wrapped in human flesh, and the only proper response to that correct and full knowledge of Who Jesus is - is for Peter to fall down on his face and confess his sins.

And so Luke tells us in verse 8 that Peter cried out and said-

**... Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!**

This is the penitence that Jesus is always after- the kind of penitence that brings forth true Salvation and the only kind of penitence that Jesus accepts from us. This is that poor prisoner, the blind and the oppressed man that Jesus said He had come to preach the Gospel to in reciting the words of **Isaiah 61**. This is exactly the kind of attitude that Jesus was looking for- not an attitude of confidence, not an attitude of self-satisfaction, not an attitude of religious achievement, not an attitude of self-righteousness- but an attitude of brokenness and desperation.

And it's interesting to me that Luke always refers to Peter as Simon, up until **Luke 6:14**, when you have the listing of the Apostles, and after that Luke always refers to him as Peter. He is Simon up to 6:14, and he's always Peter after that. But Luke never refers to him as *Simon* Peter, except right here.

Now why is he Simon Peter here? And I think the answer is because this is where Simon *becomes* Peter. This is where the real transformation takes place, and so He gives him the full name. This is now not just Simon and not just Peter- but he is Simon Peter. This is the moment of his penitence. This is the first time in the **Gospel of Luke** that someone is brought to the recognition of their own inherent sinfulness.

And Peter is crushed because he knows he's in the presence of a holy God, that's why he reacts this way. He is stunned by the Presence of God and is only aware then of his sin because he knows if he can see God- then God can see him, and Peter sees holiness and God sees sin.

And it's very traumatizing and it's very intimidating and it's very terrifying, and he says, "Go away...go away." He's afraid for his life, calls Him, "O Lord," and I think he means by that at this point, "God." In the Septuagint, God is translated *kurios*, the word for Lord- so this is worship of the Holy One.

And when Peter falls on his knees- that's worship. He knew not to worship anybody but God. And then when he calls Him Lord, I think he means it in the highest possible sense of that word.

You see, the Old Testament is very clear that God is holy. And Peter knew the OT very well. And now he knows that he's in the Presence of God, and he says, "Go away...go away." The trauma, the self-consciousness, the guilt, the shame, the sense of unworthiness, the terror, the fright, and he can't restrain himself from telling the Lord to get out of his presence. It's just too intimidating.

Now occasionally we have discussions about people who leave this Church. And somebody will say, *"Well, they went here...or they went there...they go over here for this reason, or that reason, the other reason."* But I always have a sort of a standard thought about this. I believe people leave this Church primarily for one reason- unless they're relocated somewhere or unless there's some constraints that really demand it- I believe that people leave this Church primarily because it intimidates them because being brought even on the human level the best way we can do it face-to-face with the Creator, face-to-face with holy God is something they seek to avoid.

And that's just in a human environment. That's just here in the Church. But to come and enter in to a place where God is exalted, God is glorified, His Word is lifted up, His name is preached- for the person who doesn't really want to deal with their sin is a very intimidating environment. And you can go to a thousand Churches and spend your whole life there and never have to deal with any of that- but you are confronted with that here, and most people are not that serious about the things of God- but we are.

But you know- that's nothing compared to literally being in a small boat with the Creator like Peter was here. And that's why in **Mark 4:41** when Jesus was in the boat and they said, "We're all going to drown!" And He stopped the storm, it says they were afraid, and then it says they were very much afraid because it was far more frightening to have God in your boat than have a storm outside the boat, and they were more terrified about having God in the boat with them than they were about the raging sea because they all knew that they were all sinners and deserving of God's damnation. But instead of getting what they deserved- they got Mercy instead.

That's why Abraham said in **Genesis 18:27**:

**I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am *but* dust and ashes.**

Dust and ashes are a symbol of true heartfelt penitence. And that is the very same thing that Job said in **Job 42:5-6**:

**5 I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You;  
6 Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.**

Then there's Isaiah who sees the Lord in **Isaiah 6:5**:

**Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.**

Then there's Manoah. I love the story of Manoah in **Judges 13**. Manoah has an encounter with the angel of the Lord- a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ- the second Person of the Trinity comes and appears to Manoah, and he goes home and he says to his wife in verse 22:

**... “We will surely die, for we have seen God.**

And then there's Ezekiel- who has a vision of God in **Ezekiel 1** and falls over in a coma. And then there's John in **The Revelation 1**- who has a vision of the glorified Christ, and it says he fell over like a dead person he was so traumatized.

One of the most interesting statements of all in regard to this is found in the **Exodus 20**. There- God is giving the Law, and in verse 19 when the people said to Moses,

**... Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.**

Moses, please, we don't mind talking to you- just don't bring God down here or else we're dead. You see, that's the sense of sin that brings forth true repentance and Salvation, and that kind of conviction and repentance is only brought forth because God graciously and mercifully allows us to have it.



You can't work this up, you can't originate this kind of repentance- this kind of conviction is a gift from God to those He has chosen to save.

That's the publican in **Luke 18** beating his chest. He won't even look up. He won't lift his eyes. He's afraid somehow that God might see who he is, and he's crying, *"God, be merciful to me a sinner."*

It's the disciples in **Matthew 17** on the Mount of Transfiguration who sees the Glory of Christ and falls over in a coma. Literally frightened into unconsciousness. This is what God seeks in **Isaiah 66:1** and **5**, a person with a broken and contrite heart. This is someone who is given the ability and the desire to see their own sin, and you can't really see your own sin until you are allowed to see God. Until that point- you will always blame somebody else for your problems and it will never be your own fault.

And that's why the emphasis of true Biblical ministry always has to be to exalt God- to magnify God in the eyes of the people and never to exalt Man. The Church is not a place full of mirrors to show you how great you are or to teach you how much power you've got or what kind of authority you have or what your rights in Christ are all about or to show you how much you are going to do for God. That is not Christianity, dear friends.

The Christian Church is a place to learn about how great God is, how majestic God is, how powerful and Omnipotent and Omniscient and Omnipresent God is. To dwell and to linger and to taste God's Magnificence, to preach about God's Glory, to stand in awe of His Justice and His Wrath, and to be silent at His Love and Goodness.

In the Church we should be amazed at God's Brilliance, we must teach about how valuable and how worthy and how precious God is, to learn about how great God is and how insignificant and unworthy we are.

True preaching is when we are reduced to where Peter was- falling at Jesus' knees- crying out- *"Depart from me- I am a sinful man"*. Genuine Spirit empowered preaching is when sinners are gripped with conviction and are terrified of slipping into eternity unwashed and unredeemed- when backsliders tremble at their lukewarmness and ongoing sin and where faithful followers are encouraged to press on regardless of the cost. Only through that can God's Mercy become truly wonderful.

On Sunday, July 8, 1741, in Enfield, Connecticut, 38 year old Jonathan Edwards preached a three hour sermon entitled "*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*". Edwards elaborated for three hours in a high pitched monotone voice about the horrors of hell and the absolute certainty that every single human being who is not born from above will spend eternity there in unimaginable torment.

Not a word came from the 200 people of his congregation until right before he finished by saying that every single human being- no matter how rich and no matter how much they may think about yourself who is not saved is dangling over the flames of hell fire by a tiny thread, and the God Who they insult every day with their sins is the only One holding them away from those flames.

On and on he went- spending time in great detail about the frightening thought that unless we, too, repent- we shall all likewise perish. Every eye was glued to this frail man and he labored on in that sermon. But it was said afterward that many that day gripped the tops of the pew with such force that they ripped the top cap off and toward the end of that sermon- grown men- who were recognized pillars in the community ran down the aisle screaming for God to have mercy on their souls because they said they knew they were so close to hell- they could smell the sulfur and feel the heat.

We are told today by the elite Church growth gurus that preaching about the horrors and the reality of hell has gone out of style- that people do not want to hear about how sinful they are today- they want to hear about how good they are and how much God wants to use them and what great things they are going to do for God.

These charlatans will tell you that if you really want to grow your church- you need to spend more time singing songs and less time preaching. Cancel the Prayer Meetings they say and raise up pottery classes and take all those dull, dry, boring Bible Studies and turn them into motorcycle riding clubs and weight loss classes- and you will fill your Church so large that you will have to take them in shifts.

But, whatever you do, don't preach in a high pitched monotone voice with no emotion about hell for three hours- that will just never work. That will never produce any lasting results. Preaching today is all about emotion, all about feelings, all about building up the self-worth and the self-esteem of the people, and preaching today is all about entertaining the people into making a decision, and preaching

today is all about the pitch of the preacher's voice and the mood that the music gets people into and how well the preacher can manipulate the people into doing what they want them to do. I think they call that the Spirit moving.

You will find these self-centered people this coming February cancelling their Sunday night Services so that the lukewarm and the idol worshipping men of the Church can stay home and watch the Super Bowl instead and being faithful to the cause of Jesus Christ. You will find it in the women of the Church this spring as they begin to plant their gardens and have no time to pray. You will find it in the young people who always have time for the latest video game but never time to study God's Word.

But what actually *did* happen after Edwards preached about hell and damnation and the Wrath of God being poured out without measure against all ungodliness? What did happen when this frail man ignored the pragmatism of his day and went ahead and preached about God's Holy Justice against Sin?

History reveals that the message of God's Wrath against sin and the repentance that this knowledge brings forth and the Mercy of God that follows that kind of true repentance ran out the door of that small little Church and ran down the streets of that city and covered Connecticut and then spread to the neighboring States and that within a year- the population of the Christian Church in New England doubled.

Within five years- that same message had ignited one of the greatest revivals that this country has ever known where men both small and great fell on their face just like Peter and confessed their sins. They call this season of genuine Repentance followed by God's Mercy in Salvation- the First Great Awakening, and today when you read about this time- you will see that historians say that a million souls were saved during this time.

The Church Growth gurus were wrong then and they are wrong today. Preaching God's Word fully and rightly with passion and conviction from the trembling lips of a man who himself has fallen on his face in true repentance will always bring forth the kind of penitence that allows God's Mercy to flow like a river. But without the knowledge of sin- without the clear presentation of God's just anger against all sin and against all sinners- Mercy is just a side show.

Luke tells us that Peter was overwhelmed with his sin. The knowledge of his sin completely consumed him to the point that he couldn't wait and he fell down and confessed it to God.

And we can also assume that James and John were convicted like this, too, as were many others. They were broken and contrite- just what the Lord was seeking. You remember, it was Isaiah who in **Isaiah 6** thought he was so sinful that he was going to be destroyed, and it turned out that this was the very moment when the Lord called him into ministry.

It was at the very moment that Job- who thought that he was the very worst of sinners and needed to repent in dust and ashes-, was blessed by God beyond all imagination. It was John- who because of his sinful life in the presence of the vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1- fell over out of sheer terror in a dead faint. And the Lord awakened him at that precise moment in his life and told him to get up and take his pen and serve Him by writing the five Books in the New Testament.

I tell you this morning that at the very point where you think you're on the brink of damnation because of your sin- that is reality you're at the brink of reconciliation because of God's great Mercy. Because Mercy always *follows* Repentance.

And I love this in **Luke 5:10**. Read with me:

**10 ... And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.”**

**11 When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.**

*"Do not fear,"* or literally *"Stop being terrified,"* This is the Greek word *phobeo*, from which we get our English word phobia. Jesus as telling them- *"Stop being terrified, Peter- you don't need to be terrified"*. And that's the kind of fear Peter was feeling- it was the terror of being in the Presence of holy God and being on the brink of Divine Judgment. And yet instead of giving Peter what he deserved- Jesus showed Him Divine Mercy, and then told him- Stop being terrified.

Now let me just say as a footnote. There is a healthy fear of God. There is a positive reverential fear of God that we need a whole lot more

of in the modern Church. We could go a lot of places in the Bible to demonstrate it, but let me simplify it, if I can.

There is a statement in the **Deuteronomy 13:4** that defines this proper fear. Just listen to this. **Deuteronomy 13:4** says,

**You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him.**

So there is the kind of fear that seeks to run away from God, but there is also that kind of supernatural godly reverential fear that seeks to cling to God. If a child has managed to put himself in a very precarious position by some foolish things, there are some fathers who may come and castigate the child and brutalize the child and criticize the child, be unmerciful to the child, and the child would rather work his way out of his dilemma without the father because he fears the father's hostilities.

On the other hand, there are children who are by their own foolishness found in situations of difficulty and perhaps danger crying out with all their might for a father to cling to because they understand the love and the tenderness of that father who will forgive their folly and rescue them.

There is the terror of the sinner who fears the judgment of God. And then there is the healthy reverence and wonder and awe and love and adoration of the child who wants to cling to a father who is the Father of mercies, as Paul calls God in **1Corinthians**.

And so we want the kind of fear that clings- the fear that says I can't make it on my own. The fear that says You are my Redeemer, my Savior, my Lord, my Master. You are the object of my love, my affection, my worship, my praise, my adoration, my devotion. I want to keep Your commandments. I want to listen to Your voice. I want to serve You. I want to follow You. That's the fear that clings.

And for the sinner there is that fear that terrifies and wants to run. That's why I say there are people who come even here and when God is displayed and God is manifest and the glory of God is shown in the face of Jesus Christ, it's a very intimidating thing. And those who love their sin want to run away. Those who are, in a sense, unmasked by it but want to continue the game of hiding, flee.

But for us who desire Mercy- we cling, don't we? The same God can create terror in the unrepentant sinner and comforting calm in the sinner who does repent.

**What does the LORD your God require from you?** says **Deuteronomy 10:12&13, but to fear the LORD your God.** What does that mean? To walk in all His ways. To love Him. To serve the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes. That's the positive kind of fear. That's holy reverential respect.

But Peter was in terror, and so Jesus said to Simon, *"Do not fear, stop being terrified."* And then He says this, and here's where the last Divine Attribute- Mercy- kicks in- *"From now on you will be catching men."*

Now let me tell you, you can't do that if you don't belong to the Kingdom and to the King. You can't do that if you don't enjoy the Presence of the Lord, the Power of the Lord, the Power of His Spirit.

This in my mind is an affirmation of the fact that the Lord had drawn Peter into His Kingdom and into His Kingdom enterprise, as well as James and John.

And this is wonderful. Isaiah feared that he would be destroyed- instead he was called to preach. John feared that he would be destroyed- instead he was called to write. And here- Peter feared that he would be destroyed- instead he was called to preach- along with his friends.

So please listen to this- You never have to be afraid to admit your sin, that's the point at which you must come to receive God's Mercy. Here is the formalizing of the call of Peter and James and John into that intimate inner circle that they enjoyed through the whole ministry of Jesus. The most penitent is the one who receives the most Mercy and becomes the most qualified to accompany the Lord in the great Salvation Ministry. This is kind of where the great commission starts.

By the way, the phrase *"you will be catching men,"* is an interesting Greek word *zogreo*, from two words, *greo*, to catch and *zoen*, life. So "You're going to catch alive", is what it literally means. They spent their whole life catching fish dead but now they're going to catch men alive. You catch fish for the purpose of killing them- but you catch men for the purpose of giving them life. It's an astonishing Mercy- that not only does God forgive the sinner who is overwhelmed by his sin in the presence of the holiness of God, not only does God forgive the

sinner, but God clings, God pulls that sinner in- in an embrace in which He chooses to use that sinner in His Salvation enterprise. And we then become ambassadors for Christ, don't we? We become the missionary force that fulfills the Great Commission.

Well the sovereign power of God had done its mighty work in the hearts of these men, and verse 11 says,

\*

**When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.**

Now let me tell you- that this is the catch of all catches that they had dreamed of their whole fishing career, and it might have been a temptation to say, *"Well, I think the better plan than us following You to catch men is You come with us and we'll really catch fish."* I mean, the dawning of a new day. Who knows how much money all these fish were worth and this could have catapulted their fishing business to a whole new level.

Just think about how many more boats they could have bought. How much better equipment could they have bought; how many more men they could have hired to increase the business. But here they are at the very pinnacle of financial and business success- here they are having made the catch of all catches in the history of fishing, and it says they brought their boats to land, got out of the boats and they left everything and they followed Jesus to suffer want, and to eventually die a martyr's death.

All the activities of their life to that point passed. Initially they had followed Jesus only part-time- at a distance- but this was full-time. This was the life they would live all the way to their death. From this moment on they were permanently engaged in catching people in God's Salvation net. These men were now fully engaged in the highest calling in life-fulfilling the Great Commission.

So that's the message for you today- Jesus has appeared, He is God. He has come into the world. He is God. We know He's God because He's the Source of all Divine Truth, All Knowledge, All Power, All Holiness, and All Mercy. And only God gives Mercy to unworthy sinners. Only God calls sinners to reconciliation to Himself and commissions them to the great task of evangelization and catching men alive. This is God. And they know it. And when they are called this

time- they will not resist. They see their sin. They see their Savior. Their Savior embraces them in Mercy and they embrace Him in obedience. And together they will preach the Gospel that saves souls.

So how about you this morning? Have you come to that point in recognition of your own sin? Have you come to the point where you wanted to run from God only to be embraced by Him through faith in Jesus Christ? Feeling yourself utterly unworthy, do you now understand that you're called to be His disciple? Thinking you're not even worthy to be a disciple- Christ has made you worthy to become a proclaimer of the Gospel.

Let's come and pray.

© 2008- 2015 by The Covenant of Peace Church. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America

The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729 [www.covenantofpeace.net](http://www.covenantofpeace.net)

Scripture quotations, except those noted otherwise, are from *The New American Standard Bible* © 1996 by The Lockmann Foundation. Used by permission.

This is a single transcript in a larger series of teachings taken from a verse by verse study of **The Gospel According to Luke**. You are free to reproduce it and distribute it as the Lord leads you- without cost or reimbursement to us with the stipulation that you may not add anything or take anything away from this transcript without the express written permission of The Covenant of Peace Church and that this complete copyright statement be at the end of all copies.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.