

**~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:**

Just for your information, the Lake of Gennesaret (5:1), the Sea of Chinnereth and the Sea of Galilee are all the same body of water. It is rather small, about eight miles wide and thirteen miles long.

This story of Peter's catching so many fish illustrates that it always pays to trust the words of Jesus in spite of the circumstances. Peter and his companions had worked all night and hadn't caught a single fish. The reason they worked all night is because they knew from experience that night was the time to catch the fish they were after. Now it was morning. They were tired and ready to go home after an unprofitable night's work. Plus, they had already washed their nets. However, their obedience to Jesus paid off.

It is sometimes pointed out by prosperity preachers how Jesus blessed Peter's business with abundance after borrowing his boat. These same preachers, however, rarely point out that Peter left all those fish on the beach (along with everything else) to start following Jesus, which of course was Jesus' original intention. Jesus isn't blessing people so they can have lots of stuff for themselves.

May I also ask: As Peter and his companions frantically worked to get every fish they could into their boats to the point of sinking them, all under the calm and holy gaze of Jesus, what was going through their minds? Could Peter suddenly have realized that his actions revealed his heart? Could he have realized that his frantic attempt to fill the boats to the point of sinking was a revelation of his greed? That he was only thinking of profits while he was standing in the midst of a miracle, and that his excitement was wrongly directed at the fish instead of the Miracle Worker? Could that have been why he then fell at Jesus' feet saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"? (How do you suppose Jesus would have reacted if Peter had announced that he was seeking speaking engagements for his new sermon series, "Secrets for Divine Prosperity"?)

When Jesus called Levi (Matthew) the tax-gatherer, he "left everything behind" and began following Him (5:28), just as Peter, James and John left everything to follow Him (5:11). When Jesus calls us to follow Him, anything that hinders us should also be left behind.

Israel, as you know, was under Roman authority during the time of Jesus. Roman officials sold the right to collect taxes in certain areas to the highest bidder, and that person would then become the chief tax collector. He, in turn, would hire others to help him collect the required sum. Tax collectors, however, would assess taxes at a rate that greatly exceeded what Rome required, pocketing the difference. They were looked upon as cheats and traitors by the average Jew. So that puts Matthew's reception for Jesus in perspective. Only wicked people, Matthew's friends, would have attended. So we can sympathize with the Pharisees when they complained to Jesus' disciples about attending a reception hosted by Matthew.

It was, however, an evangelistic opportunity from Jesus and Matthew's standpoint. Jesus came to save sinners. The only way to do that is to talk with them. The only way to talk with them is to be with them. The only way to be with them is to go where they are. I always cringe when I see Christians protesting against some sinful group of people, and verbally battling with them as they clash on the streets. Jesus had a better method. But He didn't compromise the truth. You can be sure that there were some convicted tax collectors at Matthew's house, as Matthew held the reception in Jesus' honor. I think we can assume that Matthew told all his cronies about Christ that evening.

Jesus summed up His ministry with the words, "I have come...to call sinners to repentance" (5:32). Why has that simple truth been lost to so many in Christendom? True Christians are former sinners who repented, and who now live to please God.