

Who can Jesus use?

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, you are a powerful God. You are a God who speaks.

In Psalm 29, you say that your voice thunders over the waters. Your voice can strip even the trees. So I pray, Lord, that your voice will be heard in a powerful way this morning.

Help us to see Jesus. Help us to know Jesus. Help us to love Jesus in every way possible. So we pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, I'm a chess fan, and I love the story once told by Vishwanathan Anand, who was the world chess champion in the 2000s. There was a time where he was sitting in a train, and there was an old man next to him.

So they got into a conversation. What do you do? The old man asked him. I play chess, he replied. I mean, what do you do for a living?

[1 : 00] The man asked again. Oh, I'm a professional chess player, Anand replied. The old man then said to him, Let me give you some advice.

That is a tough field. You cannot make a living playing chess unless you are Vishwanathan Anand. Anand just smiled and said, Thank you.

Thank you. You see, how you talk and interact and respond to someone is shaped by whether you have grasped who the person is.

After all, contrast the way this old man responded to Anand to the way this young fan responded to LeBron James in this video clip I'm about to show you.

One that went viral last week. Now, for those of you who don't know, I'm also a basketball fan, and LeBron James is considered one of the top five basketball players of all time, at the very least.

[2 : 00] So, check out the reaction of this young lady when she discovers who is sitting next to her. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. who actually existed in history. That's how someone in my extended family responded when my son told him that Jesus wasn't just a fairy tale, as this person had assumed over Chinese New Year.

For others, perhaps they respond with apathy. Jesus is for the religious Christians, they assume, and since I'm not one, who cares? For a few, they might even respond with fear.

[3 : 37] After all, if Jesus is just a religious figure, he must be all about imposing all kinds of guilt-inducing rules that interfere with how I want to live my life.

So I want to run away from that as far as possible. But this morning, let me tell you what the Bible says. The Bible tells us that when you discover who Jesus really is, it's actually a profoundly transformative encounter.

For Jesus is both bigger and better than our presumptions. No one is left unchanged when they come to know the true Jesus for themselves.

You could be a non-Christian here today, asking, what use is Jesus? You could be a Christian here today, wondering, can Jesus even use me?

Or you could be sort of in between, thinking, well, I grew up with Jesus, but is it time to go independent? Well, this morning, our passage will invite us to personally meet Jesus again, and to open our hearts to a transformative encounter.

[4 : 55] And the way it's going to do that is by highlighting one person, the one whom we know as Simon Peter. You see, although this passage has quite a number of people in it, it really zooms in on the interactions between Simon Peter and Jesus in particular.

And by the way, I'm going to refer to Simon Peter as Peter for the rest of the sermon. And as we journey with him from verses 1 to 11, what we will discover is Peter's view of Jesus slowly evolves and changes from beginning to end, such that when Jesus is finished with him, he can never be the same again.

So let's travel with Peter and examine how his view of Jesus progresses. And I suggest there are three stages of progression.

So let's begin with stage 1 and let's discover how Peter views Jesus initially as a magnetic but distant preacher.

In verse 1, we find Jesus by the lake of Gennesaret, sometimes known as the Sea of Galilee. And what is he doing by this freshwater lake? He is preaching.

[6 : 16] After all, do you remember what Jesus sees as his mission? Given that it's been a few months since we were last in Luke, let me remind you. Back in Luke chapter 4, you might remember, Jesus began his public ministry.

He stepped inside his hometown synagogue, unwrote a scroll containing Isaiah 61, read it aloud, and then told his hearers, today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

I am here to proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the captives, proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. I am here to give notice about God's impending plan to fix everything that is broken and turn an upside down world the right side up again.

I am here to preach the kingdom of God. So this is a message that is too good and too amazing to restrict to the religious establishment.

I've got to go to all the masses. I've got to go to where people are, to their homes, to their places of work. And this is exactly what Jesus did.

[7 : 35] And even when he cast out a demon and healed people of their sickness back in chapter 4, he was clear on his mission. Look back at 4 verse 43, just a few verses before today's passage.

I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also because that is why I was sent.

So Jesus is preaching and people are responding. Verse 1 again. They were pressing upon each other, crowding around him to hear what he has to say.

Jesus was certainly magnetic. We're not told what he thought exactly, but clearly he said things that spoke to the longings of the people.

He said things that were weighty and substantial. He said things that, verse 1 again, the listeners recognized as the very word of God.

[8 : 42] They carried an unmistakable authority. Well, that's how it always is, isn't it, whenever the authentic word of God is preached. It opens you, it cuts you, it wakes you, it takes hold of you, it reveals depths unseen.

It's what millions of people have discovered over the centuries. It's living, it's active, it's revitalizing. So Jesus naturally wants to make sure that the word of God is heard as widely as possible.

So, verse 2, upon spotting the boats of the fishermen, he then gets into one of them, verse 3, the one belonging to Simon Peter, and asks him to put out a little from the shore.

That's probably because he's at a location where the land slowly slopes gently down to a natural bay, creating a natural amphitheater, which means a human voice can be easily heard by those on the shore.

And this is where we get our first glimpse in this passage of Peter's relationship with Jesus. Clearly, they must already be acquainted.

[10 : 07] After all, if I was a grab driver, my car is my livelihood and I wouldn't let any random stranger into my car. So, similarly, Peter is a fisherman, his boat is his livelihood, and he must have some level of trust in Jesus already to loan it to him.

Indeed, from chapter 4, we know that Jesus has already healed Peter's mother-in-law from a dangerously high fever.

So, we can safely assume that Peter likes Jesus. He thinks Jesus is a good guy. So, if he wants to preach, okay, sure, he can have use of my boat.

But, that's probably all there is to it at this point. After all, Peter doesn't seek Jesus out specifically. He is not part of the crowd pressing in to listen to Jesus. In verse 2, he is washing his net. He is more preoccupied with finishing up and going home to rest after a hard and frankly disappointing night of work, as we'll soon see.

[11 : 32] Jesus, physically speaking, is in his boat, but relationally speaking, as my old pastor, Vaughn Roberts, once observed, he's at a distance from him.

He's not interested to pursue a deeper relationship with Jesus. I wonder if that describes some of us today.

We don't hate or dislike Jesus. Of course we don't. We are happy to say he's a good guy, even to others. But we ourselves are not that interested to pursue a relationship with him.

We are far more preoccupied with our work or our interests than with Jesus. We are happy to come to church, happy to be prayed for, especially when something is going wrong in our lives, happy to even help out a little as a musician or with the refreshments or with a charitable donation.

The way Peter was happy to help out by loaning Jesus his boat. But we don't want to let Jesus get a bit too close.

[12 : 53] You know how sometimes you sign up for a course because you are interested in the subject of that course, but you also hope at the same time the teacher doesn't get too close to you and pick on you to give the answer or to present up front or something like that.

Well, spiritually speaking, perhaps that is where some of us are. We kind of like to hear about Jesus at a distance, to learn about him, but we don't want Jesus to get too close.

That is where Peter is. But that is not where Jesus is going to let Peter stay. You see, even when you are apathetic, Jesus wants to pursue you.

He wants you to grasp who he really is. Why? Not because Jesus is vain and egotistic, but because he is big-hearted and sympathetic.

For now, we come to stage two, where Peter discovers Jesus as the holy yet generous Lord. The holy yet generous Lord.

[14 : 17] In verse four, after Jesus has finished speaking, he makes a request to Peter, put out in deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

Now, I wonder if you can just hear Peter internally wincing at this point. I mean, come on la, Jesus. We know you are a preacher and a good one at that, but can you leave the fishing to the real fisherman?

If you talk to me about woodwork, then okay, I take it you are from carpentry background. But fishing, leave it to us professionals. After all, you do realise it is daytime, right?

There is a reason we fish at night. The water is cooler, so the fish is more likely to surface, and they cannot see the nets as well. Those were probably some of the thoughts bouncing about in Peter's head.

And of course, we have the words that come from his mouth too. Verse 5, Master, we work hard all night and haven't caught anything.

[15 : 30] The last thing we want to do after a night of disappointment is to go back out and receive more disappointment. But Peter looks at Jesus, takes a deep breath and decides, you know what?

This man deserves my respect. If it was anyone else, I might push back harder, but because you, Jesus, say so, I will let down the nets.

So off they go, and what happens next? The six. In goes the net, out comes a huge haul of fish. In goes the net again, out comes another huge haul of fish.

And before you know it, the wake of the catch is straining their nets. So, verse 7, the crew shouts to the other boat to come and give them a hand.

They start scooping fish out of the nets and into their boats. And before long, their boats are so full of fish, they almost sink. what a day it must have been for the fishermen.

[16 : 46] Never in their long careers have they witnessed anything like this. you know, whenever we invite a guest preacher here, we usually give them a love gift.

But in this case, it is the guest preacher who is giving his host a love gift many times over.

This is generosity beyond belief. So, if you are Peter, what do you think will be going through your head?

Perhaps you might have one of these two reactions. On the one hand, you could think, Jesus, if this is who you are, come and benefit me.

I mean, hey, Jesus, we know each other, right? So, maybe we can enter into a partnership together. You can use my boat for preaching all you want, but you join me on a fishing expedition once in a while too, and use your considerable talent to help us catch all the empurau and make a huge profit.

[18 : 04] You take your card, I take my card, and I can happily set up my retirement fund. And certainly, elsewhere in the Bible, that is how some people treated Jesus.

In John 6, after Jesus performed his miracle of feeding the 5,000, we are told that a few people came after him hoping to get more free food.

And even today, we can see that's how some people treat Jesus as a potential business partner who can benefit me. Jesus, I do some worshipping, make sure the church building look nice, then you bless me, okay?

Deal? Deal? On the other hand, Peter could have thought, Jesus, if this is who you are, get away from me.

You've obviously got the potential to upset my life. And I like my life just the way it is, thank you very much. You're too dangerous, you're too unpredictable, so I am definitely keeping my distance from you.

[19 : 23] Again, elsewhere in the Bible, that's how some people reacted. In Mark chapter 5, after Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, the people of that town became so afraid that they pleaded with Jesus to leave.

Just go, they said. We don't want you disturbing our peace around here. Get away from me. And again, even today, that's how people can treat Jesus too.

I think of a friend of mine from years ago who was pretty interested in Jesus. until one day, he realized that if he let Jesus in too close, he was going to have to change his lifestyle.

And that is when he found Jesus too dangerous. So he backed away, and to this day, he's still keeping his distance. But what does Peter do?

Verse 8, he falls on his knees, and he cries out, Lord, I am a sinful man. For Peter has realized one thing.

[20 : 42] He is not looking at a mere miracle worker. He is not with a dangerous fear monger. Instead, he is in the very presence of the divine king.

If earlier in verse 5, he calls Jesus master. Now he calls Jesus in verse 8, Lord. Some commentators suggest that's merely an alternative term of respect, like how you might call someone sir.

But so far, in the first four chapters of Luke, the title Lord has already been used 30 times, and every single time it refers to God himself.

And so when Luke has us eavesdropped on Peter here, and listen to him call Jesus Lord, that surely must be deliberate.

Peter understands he's in the presence of someone so glorious, someone so magnificent, someone so staggering, that the only title that applies is the Lord.

[21 : 55] Lord. And he does what just about everyone in the Old Testament does when they encounter God himself.

Think of Moses hiding his face before the burning bush. Think of Ezekiel, who upon seeing not the glory of God, but simply the likeness of the glory of God, already fell down.

and think especially of Isaiah, like we heard in the call to worship this morning, seeing the Lord on his throne and crying out, woe is me.

He says, have mercy, I am sinful. Do you see what happens when we see Jesus as he truly is? We will be overwhelmed. We will be terrified. For in the presence of holiness, we become much more aware of our unholiness.

[23 : 04] In the presence of the Holy King, we will be shaken to the call. We will know goodness itself and recognize that measured against the very definition of goodness, we are not good.

You see, so far, Peter has probably presumed himself to be superior to Jesus, at least in fishing matters. He doesn't need Jesus.

But now his presuppositions have been turned upside down. After all, this Jesus doesn't just preach God's word, but at his word, the fish obey his commands.

Is that not a privilege that belongs to the holy creator of the universe alone? And if that is the identity Jesus is putting on display, then we better humble ourselves.

You see, so often, our view of Jesus is a sentimental one. We think of Jesus as a happy-go-lucky uncle. surrounded by angelic-looking children whom he simply pats on the head.

[24 : 23] And if Jesus is the uncle who never does anything offensive, we think of ourselves as his teddy bears whom he loves to cuddle. And the problem with a sentimental view of Jesus is that it

never challenges our own view of who we are.

We are made in the image of God. we are his handiwork. But sadly, there is now a corrupting force that arises from within our hearts, one that causes us all too often to fail to listen, to walk past the needy, to justify what we know to be wrong.

And a Jesus who is sentimental will never expose that part of ourselves. But the real Jesus is different.

Isn't it fascinating and confronting that Jesus meets Peter both at his strongest and at his weakest point? He meets Peter at his strongest point, that is, his area of expertise as a fisherman.

man, and shows him, this might be where you are most comfortable, but that doesn't mean you have no need of me. That doesn't mean you know better than me.

[25 : 49] And so often, that's where Jesus wants to meet you too. He wants to meet you where you are most comfortable, where you feel most confident, where you feel you have the least need of him.

and you know what he wants to do then? He deliberately wants to create weakness in your life. He wants to show you you are not as self-sufficient as you think.

He wants to show you that sin often has a firmer grasp on your life than you think it does. He wants to show you you need him.

and he wants to do all that because he wants you to encounter him as he really is.

For who is Jesus? He is powerful, yes, and he is holy, yes, but that doesn't exhaust the description of who he is.

[26 : 55] You see, notice that Jesus also meets Peter at his weakest point. Peter, after all, has just returned from an entire night of fishing where he's caught nothing.

He's just experienced failure. He's exhausted. And then guess what Jesus says to him? Go back to the deep waters. Go back to where you've experienced failure.

Go back to the spot where you've exhausted yourself with nothing to show for it. Go back to where you don't really want to go. And Peter, in all his weakness and tiredness, does.

And what does Jesus do? He goes with him and he blesses him. Because Jesus isn't just powerful and holy, he is also generous.

Do you see that? What we have here is a glimpse of the gospel. The gospel says that Jesus did not come for strong people. Jesus did not come for people who have it all together.

[28 : 12] Rather, the gospel says Jesus came for the weak and needy. He came to the spot of our failure and our exhaustion. The spot where there seems to be no hope.

And he says, I want to bless you here. Not because you are deserving, but because I'm good. I'm generous.

And I want you to know me as the holy yet generous Lord. that's what the living Jesus still does today.

He wants to make clear that you and I cannot be self sufficient. But he also wants to make clear that he can be our sufficiency. He wants to make clear that you and I are sinners.

Notice he doesn't deny what Peter says. He doesn't say, oh, it's okay, Peter, no, no, no, please don't call yourself that. But he wants to make clear to you and I that is the starting point, not the end point.

[29 : 21] For look at what he says next. Verse 10. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. You see, here is the wonderful news of Christianity.

When we begin to truly fear God, when we acknowledge he is the holy creator and we are sinful creatures, we will discover the healing touch of the gospel.

We will discover a God who says to us, don't be afraid. For in Christ, we discover the Lord who had no sin will become a sin offering for us so that we might become a person who can declare, I am no more under condemnation.

I am joined to the righteousness of God. So today, you have a choice. You can stay where Peter initially was, exhausted, well-oing in failure, self-pitying a little maybe, or you can go where Peter eventually goes, to Jesus in obedience and faith.

But Jesus wants to reveal still one more side of who he is. And so we come finally to stage three, where Peter discovers Jesus to be a team player.

[30 : 59] Notice Jesus has more to say in verse 10. Don't be afraid, he says, from now on you will fish for people. Jesus, you see, is not looking just to embrace you, but to enlist you.

He wants you to be part of his team. And the only qualification he is looking for is dependence. His only criteria is that you know you need him, even as you obey him.

And what is the mission of this team? Well, it's a mission of recapturing people from the enemy. I realise only this week that in the Greek, the phrase fish for people here is different to the one used in Mark's Gospel.

Literally, it means something like to capture a life. And do you remember what Jesus' manifesto is? Remember, he's here to proclaim good news to the captives.

He's here to help people be freed from slavery, to sin and to Satan as they turn to Jesus and put their trust in him.

[32 : 13] But Jesus is a team player. He doesn't want to do it alone. He doesn't want to do it through angels. He wants to do it through you and me. That's what he's calling Peter to do in Luke 5.

That's what he keeps doing throughout Luke, such that in Luke 6, he will gather his 12 disciples and Luke chapter 10, he will send out 72 more. And by the time we get to Acts chapter 2, that's what we find Peter doing as he preaches Jesus to a crowd of thousands.

He's fishing for people. And it is in light of this commission that we now understand Jesus' miracle in a new light.

You see, what was the real point of that big catch of fish? It is this. Jesus is illustrating the future.

There is going to be a big catch of people for the kingdom.

One evidence? What about this? If you are a Christian today, you are part of that big catch, one that has captured billions of people across the centuries.

[33 : 33] And so Jesus says, be encouraged. As you go fishing, there will be fishers that will be caught. And remember he says, he will go with us as we go fishing.

Just as he went with Peter, he'll be there with us. This is Jesus. Not just a distant though magnetic preacher.

Rather, he is the holy yet generous Lord. This is who he really is. And he doesn't work alone. He's a team player.

And when you and I realize that, we will be on the receiving end of a transformative encounter. Isn't that what happened to Peter and his companions?

Look at verse 11. So they pulled up their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him. You might have heard that over this past week, God seems to be on the move at a major Methodist university in the USA.

[34 : 47] Of course, we can only truly see the fruits in a couple of years' time, but we can be hopeful that revival is happening on that campus. And I was listening to one of the testimonies of the young man at the revival this week.

This is what he said. I just gave my life a year and a half ago to Christ, and it has been the greatest thing I have ever done.

I left everything, and I am here to talk to every person in this room. forget the job, forget the girl, forget the guy, forget everything. He is worthy.

And this morning, is that what we need to hear? Today, perhaps the Lord is calling you to leave everything.

Who knows, he might mean that in the most literal way possible. people. I honestly do not know, but is there someone here today to whom God is saying, you know very well to follow me, you need to quit that job.

[36 : 00] You know very well to follow me, you need to leave that relationship. You know very well that you've been resisting what I have planned for you, and now is the time to stop resisting.

you know that you don't call yourself a Christian yet, but actually it's time for you to say yes to him, because he is worthy.

He is worthy for you to give up certain things, so that you can go and pursue that one thing he has for us, to call people to follow Jesus.

To fishermen, he says go catch fish. To electricians, he would say go bring light to the nations. To chefs, he would say go help people taste and see that the Lord is good.

To teachers, he would say go instruct people and help them to be wise in the ways of the Lord. Do you see this is Jesus' commission to us?

[37 : 06] And this helps us avoid one common misapplication of today's passage. passage. Sometimes, you might hear preachers preach Luke 5 like this. Brothers and sisters, come to Jesus and he will give you all that your heart desires, certain possessions, certain promotions, certain romances, certain health conditions, like he gave Peter all that fish.

But did you notice what happens at the end of this passage? Peter and the rest left the fish to follow Jesus.

They left everything to be obedient to Jesus because Jesus is worthy to be followed even if it costs you your possessions, your promotions, your romances.

You see, here's the difference ultimately between a person who follows Jesus and a person who doesn't. It is verse 5.

Peter says, we've worked hard, we haven't caught anything, and here's the key phrase, but because you say so, I will do what you say.

[38 : 29] because you, Jesus, say so. And I trust you, even when I don't understand it all.

That is the difference between a person who follows Jesus and a person who doesn't. I do it because you say so.

Even when it is painful, even when it doesn't fit my own plans, because you also say, don't be afraid.

And I know that because you are the holy yet generous Lord who went to the cross for my sake, I will not regret it in the end. That is who Jesus is most pleased to use.

So today I plead with you, please hear, please listen to God's word. Maybe Jesus is inviting you out to the deep waters. Maybe he's saying, you need to fall at his feet and admit your sinfulness.

[39 : 38] Maybe he's asking you to say to him, use me however you will. Will you follow him or will you stay on the shore?

God's love you to God's love you will. I'm just going to give us a moment here. I'm not going to pray aloud, but I will allow some space, some silence for you to come and pray to God on your own.

I'll invite also our musicians back up on the stage at this point. But I just want you now, want all of us now, let's just come to God, come before the Holy King, the Divine King, we are in his presence. Come talk to him, tell him that you need him.