

Fishing for People

Matthew 8:14-17, Mark 1:22-38, Luke 4:31-44, Luke 5:1-11

by Gary Cutter

General Observations:

- Peter was married since he had a mother-in-law. (Matt 8:14)
- Peter and Andrew evidently lived in the same house (even with at least Peter being married).

Geographical Information

- The region around Galilee can be defined as the region in northern Palestine, bounded on the north by Syria, on the west by Sidon, Tyre, Ptolemais and their territories and the promontory of Carmel, on the south by Samaria and on the east by the Jordan.
- The Sea of Galilee is the world's lowest fresh-water lake with a surface approximately 680 feet below sea level and a maximum depth of 150 ft. It is roughly 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. It has also been known as Chinnereth, Sea of Tiberias or Lake Genneseret.
- Capernaum was a flourishing city of Galilee situated on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee about 2 ½ miles southwest of the point where the Jordan flows into the lake. Capernaum means "the town of Nahum". It was thought to have been a Roman military post along the highway which went through Galilee enroute from Damascus to Jerusalem.
- Jesus made Capernaum his headquarters for his Galilean ministry, likely Peter's house.
- Excavated ruins of Capernaum include a white limestone synagogue dating from the third century A.D. This structure may have been built on the site of the synagogue in which Jesus ministered. It is located in a picturesque setting surrounded by palm trees. (From Bakers Bible Atlas pp 194-196).
- The time of this story is likely A.D. 27. (Halley's Bible Handbook p. 432)

Cultural Information

- There were many people who were considered demon-possessed. Generally the demons entered and held possession of these people and they appeared to be afflicted with severe physical or mental diseases. The only cure was the expulsion of the demons.
- Fishing was an important occupation in Galilee. At least seven of the disciples were fishermen. Bethsaida was one of the cities on the coast of the Sea of Galilee, and it's name means a "place of nets" or "fishery". (Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible p 502).

- Fishermen were “washing their nets.” These were likely casting nets, which are circular with small weights set at regular intervals around the perimeter. They are thrown with a spinning motion to fall spread and flat on the water. The weights sink quickly to the bottom and as the cord attached to the center is pulled, the perimeter is drawn in, entangling in the mesh any fish that have been covered.
- The fish in the Sea of Galilee in biblical times were basically the same as today, with the exception of a couple of kinds introduced since then. The most common fish caught in biblical times were Tilapia, also known as “St. Peter’s fish.”

Deeper understandings from Greek words:

Matthew 8:14-17

- Peter’s mother-in-law could have basically given up because she was severely ill with the fever. The word “lying down” means “to let go without caring where it falls.” Luke said she was suffering from the high fever, or held or seized by it.
- Jesus’ “touching the hand” could also mean to “cling to or adhere to” her hand, not just a mere touch. Mark says he took hold of her hand.
- When she got up, the Greek indicates she may have been asleep or not conscious since she could have been awakened.
- She began to serve them, or wait on them. Note that it did not take some time for her to become well, but likely immediately since she may have been serving food.
- Notice that the demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus by someone else; they did not come to him on their own. Obviously the devil did not want to approach Jesus, knowing who he was and the power he had. In Mark, they brought or carried them in.
- The Greek word “exebalen” indicates that Jesus had either “driven out” or “sent out” the demon; definitions indicate “to cause one to depart in haste” and “to lead forth with a force which he cannot resist”. Jesus did this by his power over demons, not in a weak way of negotiating with the demon to come out.
- Jesus did it with a word, which means saying, a decree, mandate or order.
- Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy, meaning to accomplish, bring to pass, complete in every particular.

Mark 1:22-38

- The people were amazed by his teaching; struck with shock and astonishment at the doctrine being presented because of his authority, which could mean his physical and mental power to act.
- His authority was not like the scribes or experts in the law. These were men learned in Mosaic Law and in the sacred writings, an interpreter or teacher. They examined the more difficult questions of the law and many times added to the law decisions of various kinds thought to elucidate its meaning and scope.
- The unclean spirit, or demon, cried out, meaning to raise a cry from the depth of the throat.

- The demon knew that Jesus was the Holy One of God, or the most Holy thing of the almighty God. Demons were fallen angels created by God and thus do know who God and Jesus Christ is.
- Jesus rebuked him, meaning to admonish or charge sharply, saying “Silence” (stop the mouth or muzzle it) and “Come out” (to flow forth from the body or to come forth from physically). Envision the spiritual demon “flowing” out of the body! This is what happened after the man was thrown into convulsions by the demon and the demon spoke with a loud voice.
- The people around were amazed or astonished, terrified or even frightened at this as they examined or discussed together the fresh doctrine according to authority. The unclean spirits did not dispute his authority, but submitted to him.
- Again, in verse 34, Jesus did not permit or allow the demons to speak because they knew who he was.
- In verse 35, Jesus got up early in the morning, meaning between 3:00 and 6:00 AM while it was still very dark, not close to sunrise, thus probably closer to 3 and 4 o’clock.
- Jesus went to pray in a solitary place, alone.
- Simon and his companions searched for (really means to pursue closely or follow after him); “when they found him” can mean to catch up with. “They were looking for him” did not mean they had lost Jesus. Evidently, they knew where he was going and therefore followed him closely and finally caught up with him.
- In verse 38 Jesus said he came out to preach. The Greek word can mean to “come forth from privacy into the world before the public”. Jesus came as God from heaven to preach on the earth.

Luke 4:31-44

- In verse 32 Luke used the same Greek words as Mark, where the people were amazed. It means to be struck with astonishment by his teaching or doctrine because he spoke with such authority. This highly affected the people listening.
- Synagogues have their origin in the Babylonian exile. There was one in every Jewish town, and was where Jewish assemblies were held. They were also in Gentile towns that had a large Jewish community
- Luke in verse 34 indicates that the unclean demon or spirit was fearful when he said “Ha”. This was an expression of wonder mixed with fear.
- Evidently there were more than one demon, since he used the word “us”.
- In verse 39, Jesus commanded the fever — he “admonished or charged sharply” the fever and it left her. Jesus spoke the fever away; he was in charge of the disease.

Luke 5:1-11

- In verse 1, the crowd of people were pressing around him or urgently crowding around him or resting upon him.
- Simon and the fishermen worked hard through the night fishing. They were weary and tired of bodily labor.
- In verse 7, they motioned to their partners in the other boat either along with or instead of calling. Greek word means to indicate to another by a sign or a nod what one wishes him to do.
- The word help means to take hold together with one, to assist, help to succour.
- In verse 8, Simon Peter fell down, meaning to fall forwards, fall down, prostrate one's self before in homage or supplication at one's feet.
- Those that were with him gathered around the catch of fish and were "amazed" or "rendered immovable" at the amount of the catch and so were James and John (Zebedee's sons) who were Simon's business partners as fishermen.

Discussion Question:

- In Mark 1:34, Why did not Jesus want the demons to tell everyone who he really was at this time?