The Big Catch

Intro:
How many of you like to fish? How big was the last fish you caught? How big will the fish be tomorrow? All kidding aside, I would not call myself a fisherman in the ordinary sense. But I can still tell a good ‘fish’ story if you know what I mean. The type of story where the fish keeps getting bigger every time you tell it. This is known as hyperbole and occurs to draw emphasis to something or someone. The increasing size of the fish may not point to the importance of the fish itself, but to the increasing importance that a fish was caught or of the act and ability to catch fish.

Luke 5:1-11 ESV

“On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”

Chronological issue & Parallel Passages:
The chronology of this passage is under some debate. The parallel passages for this could be seen in Matthew 4:18-20 and Mark 1:16-20 which occur before Jesus heals the man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue. This event is recorded in Luke 4:31-37. Some scholars posit that because of the inconsistency, there may have been 2 different encounters with Jesus and the fishermen on the shores of Lake Gennesaret. One an informal call to be a disciple and the other an official call to discipleship. Still other scholars find all 3 of the previous events to parallel John 1:35-42 where Jesus initially calls Peter and Andrew.

For the purposes of our time together, I will treat the current passage in its intended order within the gospel of Luke. But I wanted to make you all aware of things that you may want to study more in depth. Be students of the Word and do not be afraid to search the Scriptures.

Prophetic Rhetorical Template:
Kenneth Bailey thinks that Luke merely recorded this passage and did not compose it, reinforced by Luke’s explanatory note in verse 9. The prophetic rhetorical template is composed of seven inverted stanzas with the climax in the middle. This writing style is found throughout the book of Isaiah and the other prophets as well as in the letters from Paul and Luke/Acts. It looks like this:

A.
We will approach this passage with the previous template in mind and it will look something like this:

Set up – Context
A. Call to Act in Faith
B. Respectful Obedience
C. Physical Miracle
D. Encounter Holiness
C’. Spiritual Miracle
B’. Repentance and Surrender
A’. Call to Act in Faith

Passage:

Luke 5:1-3 “On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.”

1. Crowd pressing in on Him & Taught from a boat.
   a. Jesus used the natural geography of the land- NT Wright in Luke For Everyone points out that “Along the lakeshore close to Capernaum there is a sequence of steep inlets, a zigzagging shoreline with each inlet forming a natural amphitheater. To this day, if you get in a boat and push out a little from shore, you can talk in quite a natural voice, and anyone on the slopes of the inlet can hear you clearly- more clearly, in fact, than if you were right there on the shore with them.” (pg. 53)
   b. The crowd expected to hear the word of God and the message was heard by many. We do not know what Jesus taught in this particular message.
   c. Peter owes one to Jesus for healing of his mother-in-law and cannot refuse Him. Jesus asks Peter for help by putting out a bit from shore. Boats don’t just stay in one place,
especially in a large lake. Peter had to control the boat to keep Jesus near the shore and in a place for Him to teach the people. Jesus now has a captive audience of one.

d. Different teaching modes of Jesus:
   i. Mountain side (Matt 5-7), Synagogue (Luke 4), Boat off the shore of Lake Gennesaret – Jesus spoke to many.
   ii. Well (John 4), Upper Room (John 14-17), Nicodemus (John 3) – Jesus spoke to few.
   iii. Cross (Matt 27, John 19, Luke 23) – Spoke to everyone in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth. (Psalm 22). He does not just teach us with His Word, but with His life!

Luke 5:4-5 “And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” 5 And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.”

1. Call to Act in Faith.
   a. At the end of the teaching, Jesus should have asked Peter to take Him back to shore. But this is where the real teaching begins.
   b. God may call us to do things that do not make sense. This is what happens to Peter.
   c. We may encounter resistance from our own understanding.
      i. Fishing on Sea of Galilee was done at night when the fish could not see the nets and in the shallows water where the nutrient rich waters were.
      ii. A carpenter/rabbi telling a commercial fisherman how to fish?
   d. Let’s examine the situation: Peter and his friends were exhausted from fishing all night. They had just finished cleaning their nets. Now, Peter was being told how to fish from a carpenter/rabbi, and they were being told to let the nets out during the day in the deep waters.

2. Respectful Obedience
   a. Use of Greek ‘epistates’ in verse 5 can mean boss, chief, teacher or master and is used to reference someone of authority.
   b. Peter was willing to submit to Jesus’ authority, not because he thought he was going to catch anything, but because it was the respectful thing to do. It was ‘because you said so.’

Luke 5:6-7 “And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.”

1. Physical Miracle/ Big Catch of fish
   a. This was an extraordinary, even supernatural, catch as shown by the hyperbole. Peter may have had many questions come to him in the midst of the frantic struggle to get all the fish into both boats.
Was this a lucky guess?

How could Jesus know there were fish out here?

He can heal people, cast out demons and now this. What next?

If He knew where the fish were, why not cash in on that instead of being a wandering teacher?

The grace of God filled the nets, not by any skill of the fishermen.

In Jesus ministry, a physical miracle was many times accompanied by a spiritual miracle. As the incarnation of God in the flesh, conceived by the Spirit and born of a woman, Jesus was in a unique position to bring the two, Spirit and matter, together for all to witness.

Luke 5:8-10a “But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.”

1. Turning Point, “when Simon saw it” – Encountered God/Holiness
   a. What exactly did Peter witness?
      i. In Isaiah 6:1 we read that he “saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on the throne;” and when witnessing all this Isaiah said, in Isaiah 6:5-8, “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”
      
      6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

      8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

      And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

      b. The Lord alone has done this.
      c. Peter came face to face with a Person, Jesus the Messiah, who challenged him at the core of who he is.

2. Spiritual Miracle/ Big Catch of men
   a. The grace of God filled Peter, not by any power of his own.
   b. Peter sensed that he was in the presence of Holiness.
   c. The Big Catch was Peter, James, and John (the so-called inner circle – the ones taken by Jesus up on the mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17) and in light of their witness, the catch also applies to all those whom they will reach with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. Repentance and Surrender
a. The grace of God shined a light into Peter’s life and he could do nothing but repent and confess of his sin and submit fully to Jesus.

b. He now called Jesus ‘kyrios’. This Greek word is used to translate the name of God in Hebrew as ‘adonai’, which means Lord. God’s rule and authority, His Lordship, rests ultimately upon His creation and ownership of all things and people. (Psalm 24:1-2)

c. The dramatic shift of the two names used by Peter highlights the internal shift that happened within his person. Now it was “because I believe and trust.”

d. Interestingly, this is the first use of the word sinner in Luke’s gospel account.

Luke 5:10b-11 “And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” “And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”

1. Call to Act in Faith.
   a. Knowing the fragile condition of Peter’s heart in his surrender, Jesus tells him “Do not be afraid”.
   b. Jesus told them that they will still be fishing, just for people, and for life, not death.
   c. They let go of their own understanding and left everything to follow our Lord, Jesus Christ.
   d. This hyperbole marks the significant impact that this event had on the lives of Peter, James, and John. Did Peter leave everything? What about his wife or more ridiculously, what about his clothes?
      i. What does it look like to leave everything to follow Jesus? Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian, and an anti-Nazi dissident and author. He was vocal in his opposition to Hitler’s euthanasia programs and the genocidal persecution of the Jews. He even formed underground seminaries and worked through the German Intelligence organization to help in the resistance. Then, in April of 1943 he was arrested by the Nazi regime and put in a concentration camp. After being accused of a conspiracy against Hitler, called Valkyrie, he was executed on April 9th in 1945, two weeks before the U.S. soldiers from the 90th and 97th Infantry Divisions liberated the camp. With his life as an example, we read this quote of his: “When Christ calls a person, he tells them to come and die.”
      ii. We first die to ourselves and our old way of life- in the flesh and for the flesh. Then we are resurrected with Christ and live with Him and for Him. A life in Christ can never be taken away, not even through physical death. In this, I hear the psalmist cry out:

      “O death, where is your victory?
      O death, where is your sting?”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, like Peter, James, and John, followed Jesus’ example and carried his cross. As Bonhoeffer was concluding his final Sunday Service at the Flossenburg concentration camp, he told a fellow prisoner: “This is the end- for me the beginning of life.”
e. The message was given to many but was only embraced by a few. The crowd was pressing around Jesus to hear the Word of God, but who actually heard the message that day?

Applications:

1. Encounter Holiness:
   a. Allow Jesus to go from teacher to Lord.
   b. This requires a reaction to the Spirit’s conviction of sin, confession and repentance.
   c. Have you heard enough to know something is going on?
      i. You may have seen other people changed.
      ii. Are you ready to push out into deep water and drop your nets?

2. Be in a Posture of Need or Weakness:
   a. Jesus intentionally placed Himself in a position of authentic need (humility)- To the woman at the well Jesus made an authentic request “Give me a drink.”
   b. Someone’s worth is found where they are, not where you think they should be. Jesus approached Peter where he was, in the boat.
   c. Take time to help people individually.
   d. Be a resourceful fisher.
      i. Jesus is the ultimate fisherman; we are the bait- a living sacrifice

3. Greatest Miracle:
   a. Many consider physical birth to be the greatest miracle, but there is another birth, created by God.
   b. Each person has a unique chance at a ‘turning point’ or an “in the beginning” in their life, as created by God, like Peter had. Interestingly, understanding of ancient Hebrew grammar reveals that either the most important part of a sentence is written first or the verb. Yet in Genesis 1:1 it reads “In the beginning God created…”. The first word in the first sentence of the Bible is ‘Berisheet’, “in the beginning”, not God, who you would think is the most important, or created, which is the verb. There is something especially important about beginnings, when created by God.
   c. Salvation is the turning point or beginning in a believer’s life. It is the greatest miracle! And, it will have a profound impact on how you live this life.
   d. Jesus, the incarnation of God in the flesh, is the only One who can unite the two, Spirit and matter, in your person. My brothers and sisters, let us never tire of meditating on the glory of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of His sacrifice on the cross!
      i. The creatures in heaven cry out day and night and never cease to say, “Holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”
   e. The choice to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ can bring you Spiritually from Death to Life – from a fisherman to a fisher of men.
      i. Will you be part of the Big Catch?