

**RENEWING THE VISION**  
**Developing a Deep Faith in the Cause for Jesus**

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## RENEWING THE VISION

What can a man do who has lost his purpose? What can a Christian do who has lost his first love? What can a pastor do who has lost his vision? I have asked myself these questions often in my counseling and, yes, even in moments of personal discouragement. I have lost my purpose, my first love, and my vision more times than I care to admit. So, what does a man do in such a case?

The Bible records such a man and such a case. It is the story of a disconsolate fisherman who had dejectedly pulled his boat onto the shore and was washing his nets in resignation. This man was Peter, and his fascinating story is found in Luke 5 - the tale of a man who lost one vision and found another. How did it happen?

In his own words, he reveals the depths of his discouragement, "...*we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.*" (Luke 5:5). His lack of resolve was evident; the reasons for it require some thought and reflection. Was fear behind his reluctance to try again? After all, it must be humiliating for a professional to swallow the bitter pill of public defeat, especially in the sphere of his training, preparation, and expertise. Was it because of embarrassment so acute that it seemingly compelled him to share the blame by saying, "*we have toiled... and taken nothing?*" Was it because he was so tired? Anyone who has experienced an extended season of fruitless labor knows the bone-sapping fatigue which is only intensified by the knowledge of failure. Whether one or all of these things created his vacuum of enthusiasm, it is certain that Peter was in a slump. He had given up! Oh, he was still in the fishing business, but he was going through the motions more than anything else.

Do you know anyone like that? Are you one of them? I have been in hundreds of churches across the country, and it is not uncommon to find pastors who are "holding on," doing their duty, serving God out of obligation rather than devotion, walking humbly through familiar paces like a mechanical robot. The pews of such churches are filled with like-minded disciples. They serve God dutifully, without joy, wondering all the time if there is more, if something is missing from their Christian life, frustrated by singing "Victory in Jesus," when defeat is the norm. Do you need a renewed vision? There is good news! There is new life waiting for you just as there was for Peter! How was Peter's vision renewed?

It began when the Lord Jesus Christ entered the picture. (Isn't that always the case?) He was as conscious of one lone man stooping listlessly over a net as He was aware of the teeming crowd who hung on His every word. Because He "... *needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*" (John 2:25). He knew Peter's need without a word being spoken. From a heart of compassion, He introduced him to the solution; He introduced him to A CAUSE, not a political cause, not some bleeding-heart appeal to save some dumb animal, not moral reformation or even needed legislation to make the streets safer. These are high-profile, politically-correct causes of our age, but are more "...*clouds... without water,*" (Jude 1:12) and "*broken cisterns,*" (Jeremiah 2:13) than causes of any real substance. As an unsaved teenager, I thought being a social

worker with street gangs was the highest cause; but after my salvation, I came to realize that the true test of any cause is its longevity — how long will it last? The litmus test of true worth is its eternity; “... *we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but at the things which are not seen are eternal!*.” (2 Corinthians 4:18). I concluded that there is only one commodity which will stand the test of time, even eternity, and that is the human soul. Therefore, the highest cause one can embrace is that which ministers to the souls of men. This was Christ’s cause. He was preaching to people whose souls hung in the balance. He wanted to make it Peter’s cause as well. He enlisted Peter; and in doing so, He addressed a three-fold cause.

First, He addressed the need of the world. What was that? “...*the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God.*” (Luke 5:1). They knew their need as Jesus did. They wanted to hear the Word of God. This is not a celebrity hunt, nor a casual interest of a mindless mob; this is life and death searching for truth. Jesus knew that this purpose would best be served with some help from Peter. In seeking his help, He gave Peter a cause greater than his business and money. I once asked a man what he did with his time. “I go to work mostly,” he said. I asked, “Why?” “To pay the bills,” he said. “Why?” He seemed perplexed at this line of questioning, as if everyone should know the importance of paying bills. He answered, “To keep a roof over my head.” Again, I asked, “Why?” He seemed somewhat exasperated by now when he said, “To keep healthy.” You guessed it; I asked “Why?” again. His answer was, “To go to work.” There you have it, the vicious cycle which traps so many; they go to work to make money to pay the bills to keep a roof over their heads so they stay healthy to go to work. They are locked into a routine which offers no fulfillment, no joy, no eternal dividends, but they continue robotically on their way. Sadly, many Christians and even pastors fall in line with them. They lose sight of the real cause for which they live and breathe and have their existence: the cause of never-dying, human souls. You can pour your energies and invest your money in many projects, but only one cause will last for eternity . . . a human soul. Buildings rot, machinery rusts, empires crumble, but any and all effort invested in helping dying souls “hear the Word of God” is an eternal investment. This was the cause to which Christ called Peter. How did He do it?

He entered into Peter’s ship and “... *prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land.*” (Luke 5:3). Notice that the Bible doesn’t say He made him, but prayed him. Christ is always a gentleman in His dealings with us. No coercion here. No high pressure. No embarrassing methods of manipulation and embarrassment. He “*prayed him.*”

By doing so, He went into partnership with Peter. He sat in Peter’s boat and had him position it in a strange location. Now he had a vantage point unavailable on a crowded shoreline. He was far enough out in the water for all to see and hear clearly. He now had a platform for preaching. But wait! Couldn’t Christ have done this without Peter’s help? Couldn’t He have walked on the water instead? That certainly would have gotten everyone’s attention! Better yet, He could have ascended a few feet over the water. This would have been better positioning and certainly would have been a riveting performance. It is noteworthy that Christ rejected these supernatural means and chose rather to enter into a partnership with Peter. He does the same with

us, doesn't He? For some idea of the value He places on this arrangement, consider the fact that He promises to "...never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (*Hebrews 13:5*). As powerful as this promise is, in another place He adds a new dimension to it: "... lo, I am with you alway." (*Matthew 28:20*) Why does our Lord make this emphasis "LO" when He has already established that He will never leave us? I believe the answer is found in the context. The passage reads, "Go ye ... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway ..." (*Matthew 28:19-20*). In other words, when we enter into partnership with Christ, when we take on the same causes that are dearest to Him, when we devote ourselves to reaching human souls in saving them and teaching them, His cause has become our cause; therefore, He is with us as at no other time!!!

Peter needed a cause, not just any cause, but the same cause as Christ's. When a man loses sight of that cause, when he begins to focus on a lesser cause, his vision for God will naturally fade. After all, why should God sustain a vision contrary to His own?

When David came upon his brothers quaking at the sound of Goliath's belligerent bellowing, his first question was, "... is there not a cause?" (*1 Samuel 17:29*). His challenge fell on deaf ears because Goliath had coerced them into focusing on his cause. He said, "... I defy the armies of Israel!" (*1 Samuel 17:10*), but David saw it differently. He said, "... who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy THE ARMIES OF THE LIVING GOD?" (*1 Samuel 17:26*). [Emphasis added]. Even David amended this view to the higher plane. When he stood face to face with the giant, he declared, "... I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, THE GOD OF THE ARMIES OF ISRAEL, whom thou hast defied!" (*1 Samuel 17:45*). [Emphasis added]. Our enemy tries his best to set the terms of battle, to focus our attention on his estimate of the cause; as a result, our cause becomes defending our fort rather than storming the enemy's. If "we don't drink, and we don't chew, and we don't run with them that do," we think we're good Christians. We confuse "not being overcome of evil" with "overcoming evil with good."

In the church, the cause is weakened by making it a means to an end instead of an end in itself. Preaching, soul winning, teaching, and discipling to some becomes a means to the end of "church building" or building a crowd rather than building a soul. We begin to use our people to build our churches instead of using our churches to build our people.

Recently a study was done with a sample group of centenarians who had reached the ripe age of 100 years or more. The purpose of the study was to determine the reasons for their long and fruitful lives. Four common characteristics emerged in all the people studied: 1) They had a strong sense of optimism. They viewed life through the lens of "power consciousness" instead of "problem consciousness." 2) They had the ability to accept loss well. The death of loved ones all around them was faced with a trust in God and His control. 3) They stayed physically active. One woman of 105 years was leading an aerobics class for senior citizens. 4) They were all engaged in something worthwhile: a cause. They had a purpose, a reason for living that compelled them forward, unlike their bed-ridden counterparts who had retired out of deference to a world-

view of “you deserve a break today.” It was Thomas Chalmers who said, “The grand essentials of happiness are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for.”

Peter’s first step to a new vision began when he was introduced to a high and holy cause. What is your cause? What motivates you and compels you? What really rings your bell and gets your motor running with excitement? Have you lost the vision of your early Christian life when you lived for seeing a soul saved, when you wept over sinners at the altar, when you cried out for Holy Spirit power? Perhaps you, like Peter, need a new vision. Maybe you need a cause.

The next step in Peter’s new vision was a CHALLENGE. Now that he had entered into Christ’s cause, our Lord now challenges Peter to “... *Launch out into the deep.*” (Luke 5:4)! Peter had become comfortable with the shoreline. He had returned to its shelter and was resigned to its presence. Like Peter, we have become too content with the shallows of life: the shallows of politically-correct thought versus independent thinking, the shallows of fear versus faith, the shallows of tradition versus God’s good pleasure, and for good reason. The shallows are where the shore is, where there is safety, where the crowd assembles, and where there is rest! Christ knew for Peter and He knows for us that, although the shallows represent all these things, IT IS NOT WHERE THE FISH ARE! He has a plan for Peter, not only for the moment, but for his life! It involves going back to the place of his failure, to the site of his embarrassment, to the reminder of his discouragement, so that He can work a miracle.

Peter wasn’t exactly the model volunteer for this project. He made it clear to Jesus that he had tried this already and it didn’t work and that he was tired; but he reluctantly agreed to try it out of respect for Christ’s word. Even then, he wasn’t wholehearted. Jesus told him to lower his “nets,” but he only lowered a “net.” Despite the fact that he went kicking and screaming, with his heels dug in, and in spite of his lack of faith, he obeyed. If faith is acting on the revealed will of God, then it must be remembered that Peter acted on faith, albeit imperfect faith. He was being challenged beyond his ability, his preparation, and his training. No faith is required until we go beyond those things. As long as we serve within the comfortable and familiar zone of the routine and normal, we cannot test our faith. Christ pushed him out of this comfort zone and the results were miraculous; from a fishless sea came a bountiful harvest which threatened to capsize the boat; and in a hopeless heart was born a view of life which would change world history and the destinies of generations of mankind.

The supernatural harvest of fish which Peter witnessed was a miracle; a CONQUEST which inspired Peter in a way which would alter his life dramatically. It resulted in a new view of Christ. It is of no small significance that Peter called Christ, “Master” before the miracle of the fishes, and “Lord” afterwards. The former was out of respect for His authority; the latter out of reverence for His deity.

Peter “... *fell down at Jesus’ knees,*” (Luke 5:8), which means that Jesus was in the boat with him all along – an obvious deduction, but one often overlooked by visionless Christians. He did not ask Peter to launch out into the deep without going with him. Nor does He ever ask us to do His bidding without being there with us. How did Peter fall down at Jesus’ knees when the boat was full of fish? I can imagine him with mouth opened wide, eyes agog in amazement, staring at Jesus as the light of powerful spiritual illumination revealed

Him for who He really was! With his gaze fixed upon the face of his Lord, he sank slowly through the mass of writhing, wriggling creatures, which by now must have been squirming around his shoulders and thumping their tails in his face. Amazingly, this man whose entire life had been dedicated to the moment when his boats would be filled to capacity now had no interest in his success. He no longer cared for the blessings; he had eyes only for the Blessor. When the Blessor becomes more important than the blessings, when the presence of Christ overshadows human achievement, when a look in Christ's wonderful face causes the things of earth to grow strangely dim, when His glory drowns all our possessions in its iridescent light, when we see Jesus in all His loveliness, that is a moment which changes a life!

It changed Peter's life; he went from an accomplished excuse-maker to a self-avowed sinner in one ion of time. He changed his view of himself from "I did my best," (vs. 5), to ". . . *I am a sinful man.*" (Luke 5:8). What made the difference? It was the kindness of Christ to him even in the midst of failure, as Paul wrote that "*...the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.*" (Romans 2:4). The best of men who meditate on the goodness of God conclude that they are truly sinners after all. Even the venerable Isaiah, after he saw the Lord, concluded, "*...Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips .... for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.*" (Isaiah 6:5). The effect upon Peter was life-changing! From a listless, discouraged, wanna-be failure, he was transformed into a dynamo with a new and eternal vision. Recognizing the change in Peter, the Lord said to him, "*... from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*" (Luke 5:10). Talk about a new vision!

Years ago, in a frontier town, a young preacher began a church in a converted saloon. Crude benches lined rough lumber floors, and the wood from the bar was used to construct a simple pulpit and a rustic mourner's bench. The youthful pastor created a crude, hand-carved sign of individual letters, each of which he hung over the exit door. They formed the Scripture verse: "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*" (Proverbs 29:18). The church flourished until it was bulging at the seams. New converts packed the pews, joyful singing rang out, and the altar was lined with weeping penitents! A spirit of revival prevailed! The preacher was called away to a new work, but years later his journeys brought him back through the town, and he stopped in to see his old church. To his dismay, he found it boarded up and empty. He pried some boards loose and entered the musty, old building. The rough benches were still there as well as the mourner's altar and the pulpit, just as he had remembered them, but the church had died. He stood behind the old pulpit, lovingly stroking its rough-hewn surface. Tears welled up in his eyes, dropping into the dust on the pulpit and forming little mud balls as he cried out in anguish, "Why, dear God? Why has Your work died!?" He lifted his head and his eyes' gaze fell upon the back wall and he had his answer. Still hanging on the wall were the letters forming the scripture verse which had motivated so many for so long, but there was a difference. Instead of reading, "Where there is no vision, the people perish," a single letter had fallen to the floor dramatically altering the message. Now it read, "here there is no vision, the people perish."

Those same options face the Christian and the pastor today. Either there is vision and life, or there is no vision and the people perish. Which will it be?