

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY
Living By the Authority of Scripture
Luke 5:1-11
John Maxwell

INTRODUCTION:

Please turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 5 for our lesson this morning. Last week, we talked about the first core value of Skyline: integrity, or being salt and light in the world in which we live. This morning, I want to talk about something else that is very dear and precious in our hearts, and that's the subject of biblical authority, or God's Word being the authority and direction for our life. The final authority. The infallible Word of God. And in a few moments, we'll read about when Jesus told his disciples to go out into the sea and cast down their nets. Because today's lesson is on biblical authority and the Scriptures, I brought with me today some very humorous responses of English children to questions about the Bible. Just listen for a couple of moments and then we'll begin.

Here's how some British children understand the Bible: "Noah's wife was called Joan of Arc." "The fifth commandment is 'honor thy father and mother.'" I love this one: "Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night." "When Mary heard she was to be the mother of Jesus, she went off and sang the Magna Carta." "Iran is the Bible of Moslems." Here's a classic: "A Republican is a sinner mentioned in the Bible." I wonder what a Democrat would be. Anyway, "The natives of Macedonia did not believe so Paul got stoned." I love this one; I'll close with this one. The first commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple." And we've been taking commandments ever since. Alright.

In Luke chapter 5, we begin with verse 1. *Jesus was standing on the shore of the Lake Gennesaret, teaching the people as they crowded around him to hear God's message. Near shore, he saw two boats left there by some fishermen who had gone to wash their nets. Jesus got into the boat that belonged to Simon and asked him to row it out a little way from the shore. Then Jesus sat down in the boat to teach the crowd. When Jesus had finished speaking, he told Simon, "Row the boat out into deep water and let your net down to catch some fish." "Master," Simon answered, "we worked hard all night long and have not caught a thing; but if you tell me to, I will let the nets down." They did it and caught so many fish that their nets began ripping apart. Then they signaled for their partners in the other boat to come and help them. The men came and together they filled the two boats so full that both began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this happening, he kneeled down in front of Jesus and said, "Lord, don't come near me. I'm a sinner." Peter and everyone with him were completely surprised at all the fish that they had caught. His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were surprised, too. Jesus told Simon, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you will bring in people instead of fish." The men pulled their boats up to the shore, and they left everything, and they went with Jesus.*

It's a beautiful story, of our Lord coming into the lives of the disciples and His Words changing their life. This morning's lesson is on God's Word, and what God's Word will do for you and me when we allow it to have the same place in our hearts that the disciples allowed Jesus that day.

I'd like for us to share five things from this story.

Five Observations About Luke 5:1-11

In this text, we see a dramatization of this core value in Peter's life.

As with Peter...

1. Jesus makes requests of us to see how we will respond.

Jesus comes into our lives and asks certain things of us. And he's very interested in our response. Now, just as in the story, Jesus gradually asked for the disciples' obedience, that's usually the way God's Word speaks to our heart. First of all, he asked them to let him get into their boat. Then he asked them to take the boat out into the middle of the sea. Finally, he asked them to cast their nets down. He gradually unfolded his will to them. As with the disciples, he makes gentle requests of us; and he is vitally interested in how we respond.

2. Jesus challenges us to trust and obey.

Jesus challenges us to obey him in the most important areas of our lives. Interestingly enough, when he came into the disciples' lives, he talked to them about something they understood -- fishing. Then he began to make requests of them, requests that were very important to their lives, things that they knew about. The question was, could they trust him? Could they obey him in areas which they already knew something about themselves? We never wonder if we can trust God in areas that we are uncertain about. If we can trust God to give us direction when we are kind of stumbling along and searching for answers. The question is always about whether we can trust God in areas that we are pretty sure about. Here in this story, Jesus walks into their life and talks to them about something that they have done all of their lives. They grew up on the water; they understand fishing. And he challenges them to obey in an area where they feel very certain and secure.

3. We struggle in the areas where we have control and experience.

The moment when Jesus walks into our life, and through his Word or the voice of the Holy Spirit, begins to challenge us in the areas where we are secure, where we have control, there's a tendency for us to struggle. We can see this in the life of Peter. When the Master walked into Peter's life, and said, "I want you to cast your nets into the water," the first thing that Peter said was, "We've already done that. We've been fishing all night and we've caught absolutely nothing." In Southern California slang, Peter would have looked at the Lord and said, "Been there. Done that." We all relate to that. Everyone of us knows what it's like for God to walk into our life and tell us to do something that we thought we were already doing. We kind of say, "But, Lord, I don't think I really need a lesson in this area."

4. We are called to give God's Word final authority in every area of our life.

Even if it doesn't make much sense. In fact, in verse 5, after Peter said, "I want you to know, Lord, we've been doing this all night, and we've already tried there, tried this, been there, done that," he said, "*But if you tell me to, I will let the nets down.*" In other words, he said, "It doesn't make much sense. I don't want to agree with it; I don't think it will work, but God, I will let you be the final authority in my life. And that brings up a very simple question. When we hold God's Word in our arms, and we begin to read it, and look at it, and meditate on it (the psalmist said, "I meditate on his Word day and night"), when we begin to hold God's

Word in our life, does it change us? Do we obey it? Is it really the final authority within our life?

Chuck Colson, in one of his books, was talking about the fact that so many of us have Bibles, and yet the Bible doesn't change us. 81% of the people surveyed in a recent poll said that they were evangelical; and yet only 42% of them knew that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount; and 48% of them could name the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Out of the 1382 people that were surveyed, less than 1% of them said that their lives were directed and truly changed by what the Word of God said. In other words, many of us read it; but it doesn't always change us.

I was reading recently about a guest lecturer at a university. The only thing they asked him before he made the lecture was not to talk about the Word of God, the Bible. He noted how strange it was to speak at the university and be asked not to talk about the Bible. Especially when that evening, he went to do prison ministry and the first words from the warden were, "As you talk to the prisoners, could you talk to them about biblical principles?" That seems to me like the cart's before the horse. We're not supposed to share God's Word at the universities; but when we speak to prisoners, who've already messed their lives all up, then we can talk about it. It seems to me like we're building the hospital down at the bottom of the cliff instead of putting fences at the top. Seems to me that we don't really understand what the Word of God will do and how it can change our life, which brings me to point number five of this lesson.

5. Consistent obedience produces consistent results.

The disciples discovered this that day, when they brought up their nets so full that they began to break. They had to call their partners over alongside to share the load, and both boats still almost sank. The results they received that day were based upon their obedience to Jesus' Word.

Please turn to II Timothy 3 with me in your Bibles. In this passage, Paul, in writing to his son in the Gospel, shares with him the power of God's Word. You'll read four claims given to us in these two verses. II Timothy, chapter 3, beginning with verse 16. *"Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live. The scriptures train God's servants to do all kinds of good deeds."*

Answers to common questions:

Question: Does the Bible claim to be God's Word?

Answer: II Peter 3:15-16; II Timothy 3:16-17

1. All of it is God's Word.

The Bible is not half inspired and half uninspired. It's not partly fallible, and partly infallible. Now, we all have favorite passages, but it's all his. It is all life-changing. I'll admit there are passages of scripture that I've never preached on. There are passages of scripture that I don't understand; for example, I have never preached on the genealogies. But it's all God's, and it's all God-inspired, and every part of it is there for a purpose.

2. Its instruction is alive and profitable.

The Word is profitable for you and me if we follow and obey it. Get your pen out and in II Timothy 3:16, in that second part of the verse, underline some words. Where he says "*all of it is useful for*" -- here's a word to underline -- "*teaching*." God's Word teaches us, it's good for helping -- underline "*helping*," "*correcting*," and "*showing*." . It teaches what is right. It corrects us and helps us to get right, stay right, and live right. God's Word is very beneficial, and it's alive.

3. It is comprehensive.

God's Word meets every need. When I look out at you, and see this place full of people with hundreds and hundreds of needs, as a pastor, I often ask myself, "How can I meet the needs of everybody here?" And then I realize it's not my job to meet the needs; it's my job to preach the Word. The Word of God is comprehensive. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the Word, Jesus, and he comes and ministers to all the needs today. The Holy Spirit brings you here, and in this time together of worship and prayer, he meets your needs. Some of you have been struggling for a long time. You see, in our walk with God, we have what I call grace moments, when God comes especially to do a real, comprehensive work in our lives. These times are literally like the tide; they come and they go. Ecclesiastes says that there's a time to sow and a time to reap. There's a time to be born and there's a time to die. And there's a time for the grace of God. And today is one of those moments where the Word of God will be applied to lives. And for many of you, he will do a great work because his work is comprehensive. It meets every need.

4. It can completely equip us for both life and ministry.

God's Word has the ability to come alongside of us and enable us do that which we perhaps could not do ourselves. I learned a long time ago that if you have the Spirit without the Word, you blow up; and if you have the Word without the Spirit, you dry up. But when you have the Word and the Spirit together, you grow up. And sometimes I wonder, when we hold the Word, if we realize what we have in our hand. This morning, as the prayer partners laid hands upon me and prayed over me, one of them prayed a prayer I'll never forget. He said, "God, help the people who come to church today to appreciate the Bibles they hold and the price that's been paid for us to have them." I thought, "How true." Sometimes we just kind of take God's Word for granted.

I tell you, probably the worst thing for me is to have to get a new Bible after I've broken the old one. I mean, with this one here, about a half a dozen of you have bought me Bibles over the last year because you look at this Bible and you say, "Pastor needs a new Bible, cuz his is fallin' apart and he can't afford one." And so you give me one. I'm sorry. I'm not trying to offend you. I tried your Bibles, but they don't have the same verses mine has. Do you know what I mean? I've got mine marked and it just falls open to the right pages. You get a new book, and you have to break it in.

Let me give you some history of people's treatment of the Word of God. In 600 B.C. King Jehoiakim is literally tearing the Bible up page by page and throwing it into the fire, and imprisoning all the prophets and priests. Then, ninety years after the death of Christ, in 90 A.D.,

John is banished to the Isle of Patmos. He's in prison. He's on that lonely island, and why? Because of the Word of God and the word of his testimony.

In 1300 A.D. John Wycliffe translates the Bible into English, then everyone who possesses a copy in English is killed. They become martyrs. As these martyrs in England are burned, they hold those scriptures close to their breasts. 40 years later, in 1340 A.D., the Church is still so upset with John Wycliffe that they literally dig up his remains, and throw 'em in the river. In doing that, they declare that the Word of God will never again be translated into the people's language. They believe it will be completely washed from the memory of man.

In 1536, William Tyndale, who has again translated the New Testament, is burned at the stake. It is safe to say that literally thousands of people have written, translated, and distributed this Word, and then have died for their efforts. Let me read this to you:

□The Bible was written over a 1500-year span. It was written by 40 generations, by over 40 authors from every walk of life including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, and scholars. It was written in different places, including out in the wilderness, in dungeons, in palaces, inside prison walls, while traveling, on lonely islands, in the midst of war. It was written at different times, sometimes in peace, sometimes in battle. It was written during different moods, some writing from the heights of joy while others wrote from the very depths of sorrow. It was written in three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. And it was written in three languages -- Hebrew, Arabic, and Greek. It covered subject matters including hundreds of controversial subjects, yet with harmony and continuity from Genesis to Revelation, there is one unfolding story, and the story is the redemption of man through Jesus Christ.□

Voltaire, the French infidel who died in 1778, literally traveled the world, especially "enlightened Europe," speaking against the Word of God. And he predicted that 100 years after his death, the Bible would no longer be on earth. Well, Voltaire died, and 50 years later, the Geneva Bible Society bought his home. Using the presses he had used to produce his atheistic treatises, they have been producing Bibles ever since. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my Word will never die."

Question: How can I apply my study of the Bible to my daily life?

Answer: Ezra 7:10

Ezra tells us in Ezra 7:10, four ways to take God's Word and apply it. Let me just read the passage. "*For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it and to teach its statutes and ordinances to Israel.*"

- 1. Ezra prepared his heart to approach God's Word.** Ezra literally prepared himself in the way that he approached God's Word. He wanted to make sure that he entered into the presence of God's Word in an appropriate manner.
- 2. Ezra prepared his heart to study God's Word.** As Ezra read it, he allowed his heart to be tender and open to the voice of the Spirit.

3. **Ezra prepared to practice what he learned.** Ezra not only read it; but as soon as he read it, he practiced it. He began to apply it to his life.
4. **Ezra prepared to share what he learned.** Ezra not only learned it in his own life and practiced and applied it, but he took it immediately and he shared it with others, so they could apply it to their lives.

I want to share with you an experience I had recently. I was with my prayer partners, at our retreat. What a fabulous time we had -- men coming together to learn how to pray. I sat and shared with them ten simple things to do during one hour alone with God. One of the things I shared is how I pray the Scripture. Now, I was totally unready for the response that day. As I just sat on a stool and began to pray Philippians 4. I felt something happen to the men. In fact, literally dozens of them came to me after that and said, "John, it was truly a life-changing moment. For the first time in my life, I saw how to pray God's Word." I sensed from that conversation that perhaps I have neglected to teach you how to pray God's Word. To be honest with you, when I prepared to share those ten steps during the retreat, I just made a little note to myself, "pray one of the chapters," and I never gave it much thought, because I had assumed, wrongfully, that you knew not only how to read and study the Word of God, but also how to go through and pray and apply it to your own life. I was wrong, so I have concluded that in November, I want to spend a couple of weeks sharing with you ten things to do during an hour with God. And I will pray a chapter and just let you follow along. I promise you it will change your life. I was with one of my prayer partners yesterday and he said, "John, I tell you, I've been a Christian for many, many years, but to sit and watch you pray the Word has absolutely changed my time alone with God."

You see, God's Word is powerful. My father, when I was 8 or 10 years old, taught me something about the Word of God that I've never forgotten. He said, "John, when you come to the Bible, there are three things you have to do when you come to the Word."

Three key phrases:

1. **Learn It.**

It can't change you until you know it. So my dad said, "Learn it, and that deals with your head." Memorize scripture, that's the thing.

2. **Love It.**

You've got to begin to embrace the Word and let it embrace you.

3. **Live It.**

You've got to let the Word of God that comes into your heart go out through your hands, and you've got to apply it to others.

Question: What convictions should I have concerning the Bible?

Answer: My father taught me as a young kid to learn, love, and live God's Word. No wonder

the psalmist said, "Your Word I have hid in my heart so that I might not sin against you." Now what happens is, when we take the Word of God and learn it and love it and live it, we begin to develop biblical convictions. And there are three convictions about the Word of God that I want to make sure that you have today.

1. Even when I don't understand it, I'll trust what God said.

Even when I don't understand it, I will take what God has said at face value. I will place my trust not in my understanding, but in God's Word. Naaman did that, remember? Naaman, the captain of the Syrian army, had leprosy, and his little servant girl suggested that he go to her country and see a prophet who could heal him. So off Naaman went to Elijah's house. He arrives in front of the house in his chariot, and Elijah doesn't even come out -- he just sends a servant out. And the servant tells Naaman that the prophet says for him to go down to the Jordan River and dip seven times in it. This ticks Naaman off. In fact, he says, "If I just needed to dip in the water seven times, I could go back to my own swimming pool in Syria. At least, the water's cleaner there." And off he goes. But then remember, his colleagues talk him into going down to the Jordan and dipping seven times, and when he comes out, his flesh is like a newborn baby's.

Now, what's interesting about this is how Naaman responded. He said, "I had thought the prophet would come out and wave his hand, and I would be healed (he had preconceived how God would answer his prayer)." But now, after his healing, he said, "Now I know that there's a God of Israel." Now isn't this interesting? Haven't we all done the same thing Naaman did? Haven't we come to God with a prayer request and told him how to answer it? We have this preconceived idea of how he's going to answer it, and we're just ready for it to be step one, two, three, four. Now, the first conviction is that the Word of God is very important. And that is, even when I don't understand it, I'm going to trust what God has said.

2. Although it seems illogical, I'll obey what God has said.

I will obey what God has said, even if it doesn't make sense. Remember Mary? In John 2, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee? They run out of wine, and Mary looks at the servants, and says, "Whatever he says to you, do it."

3. While human opinions vary, God's Word is right on every subject.

While human opinions vary, while others will have all sorts of answers, God's Word is right. One more conviction that'll change your life. I need the Word of God as much as I need food. And when I realize that the Word of God, which is the bread of life, is my spiritual staple that allows me to grow in my walk with him, it begins to change my life. And it begins to build convictions that help me to stand. I have five for you.

Convictions come into our lives when...

- 1. We have learned what the Word says on a given subject.**
- 2. We choose to apply and obey the Word in daily life contexts.**
- 3. We have exposed ourselves to a need in that area.**
- 4. We have decided what is worth living and dying for.**
- 5. We have settled the issue before we are forced to.**

CONCLUSION:

In 1970 I read a book that changed my life concerning the scripture. In the back of the book in 1970, I wrote these words:

My desire is to be a spiritual leader with a likeness of Christ. Too many men are stereotype leaders. Their whole outlook is warped by their surroundings. I desire to follow the Word, fellowship with God, and dare to be different when I've prayed on different concerns. God is my idol, Jesus is my pattern, and the Word is my direction, and I hold strongly to the Word and feel all other ideas are either prejudices or personal convictions. I will not, with God's help, be poured into another man's mold or preach what I do not believe.

1970. God's Word has the power to change your life. I would encourage you this week, not only to read God's Word, and apply it to your heart and life, but also to be very grateful for this precious Word that's been passed onto us. Let's close with prayer. Take the Word, would you please and just hold it very close to your heart right now.

Father, as we hold the Word close to our heart, we recognize that literally thousands of people have paid an incredible price for us to sit here on Sundays and open it up and apply it to our lives. We are grateful for that. Help us to understand that this precious Word is from you to us. It's a love letter. You became flesh. You literally fleshed the Word out for us. It changes us. It stabilizes us. It gives us strength. It's our daily manna. So God, help us to always put it in its proper place in our lives. And God, help us not only to respect it and have a sense of reverence for it, but God, help us to utilize it and pour it into our lives. Help us to assimilate. Help us to grow strong because of it. And God, help us to let it flow through us, because the only open Bible some are going to see is our lives. And how can we live it, if we haven't learned it? May we love it like we love the newspaper and our favorite magazines and our favorite books. God, help us not to be guilty of putting other things before it. May it be the fertilizer of the seed that is planted that causes us to grow. Heaven and earth will pass away; but your word will remain. We're grateful for it. We leave this morning with a new determination: to in a greater way, apply it to our lives. And God's people said Amen.