

UNIT 3: BIBLE LESSONS FROM THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

Lesson 12

August 23, 2026

Spiritual Truths From Fishing:

Breakthroughs come to those who follow Jesus.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

The recurring theme in this lesson is fish and fishing, showcasing God's miraculous provision and call to faith. From the massive catch of fish from the Sea of Galilee that led Peter and the other fishermen to become the Jesus' disciples, to the post Resurrection miraculous catch of fish, these stories reveal Jesus' identity. The coin found in a fish's mouth demonstrated Jesus' power to provide in practical matters, while the parable of the dragnet illustrates the reach of the kingdom of God and the ultimate separation of good and evil. Collectively, these accounts inspire trust in God, submission to His call, and devotion to His grace.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Fishing in the Sea of Galilee – also called Lake Gennesaret or the Sea of Tiberias – was critical to the region's economy and culture. This lake, teeming with fish like tilapia, sustained villages such as Bethsaida and Capernaum, where Jesus ministered. Fishing was often a family trade, with families owning boats and nets. Although vital to food and trade, fishermen faced burdens like Roman and local taxes under leaders such as Herod Antipas. Beyond its economic importance, fishing carried spiritual symbolism, as seen in Jesus' call to make His disciples "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). This twofold significance shows fishing's important role in the region's life.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. A NEW KIND OF FISHING: Luke 5:1-11.

- A. The Ministry of Jesus, (1-7)
- B. The Mission of the Disciples, (8-11)

2. MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH: John 21:1-14.

- A. Fishermen Fishing Again, (1-8)
- B. Fish for the Fishermen, (9-14)

3. TAXES AND A DRAGNET: Matthew 17:24-27; 13:47-51.

- A. The Coin in the Fish's Mouth, (17:24-27)
- B. The Many Fish in the Sea, (13:47-51)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. A NEW KIND OF FISHING: Luke 5:1-11.

A. The Ministry of Jesus, Luke 5:1-7.

This passage is a compelling account that encapsulates the themes of faith, obedience, and the life-changing nature of discipleship. This passage recounts the moment when Jesus, teaching by the Lake of Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee), performed a miraculous act that led to the calling of Simon Peter, James, and John as His first disciples. As the crowd gathered to hear the Word of God, Jesus used Simon Peter's boat as a platform to teach the people standing along the shore. This illustrates how seemingly ordinary tools and lives can be employed for God's purposes. The scene set the stage for a miraculous event that not only demonstrated Jesus' divine authority but also called ordinary individuals into an extraordinary mission. Jesus' call of these fishermen to be His disciples was also strategic, as He used the Sea of Galilee to move quickly from one area to another. Therefore, experienced sailors were a significant asset to Jesus' ministry. Likewise, God can use our vocations for His purposes in reaching the lost.

The account begins with Jesus stepping into Peter's boat and, after teaching the crowd, telling Peter to put out into deeper water to lower the nets for a catch. Peter was an experienced fisherman who had fished through the night, and Jesus was raised as a carpenter in Nazareth, far from the sea. Despite Simon Peter's initial reluctance – having labored all night without success – he obeyed Jesus' word. The resulting catch was so abundant that it nearly broke the nets and filled two boats to the point of sinking. This miracle is a vivid illustration of the blessings that come from trusting and obeying Christ, even when circumstances seem unfavorable. It also foreshadows the spiritual harvest that Peter and his companions would experience as "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). For example, in Acts 2:41, after Peter's first sermon as a Spirit-filled preacher, "about three thousand souls" were added to the church.

B. The Mission of the Disciples, Luke 5:8-11.

Simon Peter's response to the miracle is striking. He saw more than a carpenter in his boat at that moment. He saw divinity and overwhelmed by awe and a sense of his own unworthiness, he fell at Jesus' feet, saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (v. 8). This moment reveals a key theme in Luke's Gospel, namely, the recognition of one's sinfulness in the presence of divine holiness. Yet rather than turning Peter away, Jesus called him into a deeper relationship and purpose. Peter and his companions' response – leaving everything behind to follow Jesus – represents the radical commitment required of discipleship. Saying "yes" to Jesus means saying "no" to things that distract us from our purpose as disciples of Christ.

In this passage, we see how an encounter with the power of Christ can transform a person's life. Jesus called ordinary fishermen, burdened by their limitations and failures, into an extraordinary mission to spread the Gospel. The story reminds us that God often chooses unlikely individuals engaged in common vocations to accomplish His purposes, not because of their qualifications but because of their willingness to follow Him. This account challenges us to trust in Christ's authority, respond to His call with obedience, and embrace the life-changing mission of discipleship.

The story of the miraculous catch of fish, followed by the call to discipleship, shows what happens when we trust God and take steps of faith. After an unproductive night of fishing, Peter obeyed Jesus' unusual instruction to cast his net again and witnessed an astonishing miracle. This challenges us to trust Jesus, even when His guidance seems illogical, or the results aren't immediate. It's a call to step out of our comfort zones and fully follow Him, as Peter, James, and John did. Whether in work, relationships, or personal struggles, this story reminds us to listen to the voice of Jesus and trust His plan, which is far greater than our own.

2. MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH: John 21:1-14.

A. Fishermen Fishing Again, John 21: 1-8.

This passage recounts one of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, where He revealed Himself to His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. This account opens with a scene of the disciples, including Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two others, returning to their familiar occupation of fishing. Despite their expertise, they labored throughout the night and caught nothing, which highlights their human limitations. Jesus appeared on the shore at dawn, but they did not initially recognize Him. His instruction to cast the net on the right side of the boat resulted in an overwhelming catch of fish, a miraculous sign that opened their eyes to His identity. This miracle again revealed Jesus' authority over creation and His ability to provide abundantly when His followers rely on His guidance rather than their own efforts.

The passage also carries profound spiritual symbolism. Peter's impulsive response – leaping into the water to reach Jesus – demonstrated both his zeal and his recognition of Christ's lordship. The abundant catch of fish represents the fruitfulness of obedience to Christ. It also serves as a reminder of the disciples' calling to be "fisher of men" (Matthew 4:19). This account is not merely about physical provision but also about spiritual renewal and mission. By appearing to His disciples in the midst of their ordinary activities, Jesus affirmed His presence in their daily lives and work, transforming even ordinary moments into opportunities for divine encounter and purpose. This is a powerful testament to Christ's care, provision, and call to faithful service.

B. Fish for the Fishermen, John 21:9-14.

Upon returning to the shore, the disciples found Jesus preparing a meal of fish and bread over a charcoal fire. This scene is rich in symbolism and significance. The image of Jesus serving His disciples underscored His role as the Servant-King, a theme that ran throughout His ministry. Despite His resurrection glory, Jesus remained deeply relational and attentive to the needs of His followers. The meal itself echoed earlier moments in the Gospels, such as the feeding of the five thousand and the Last Supper, reminding the disciples of Christ's provision and fellowship. Additionally, the charcoal fire may have evoked Peter's memory of his denial of Jesus, setting the stage for his later restoration in this same chapter.

This passage also contains themes of abundance and divine provision. After their fruitless labor, Jesus directed the disciples to cast their net on the right side of the boat, resulting in a miraculous catch of 153 fish. Symbolically, this act reinforces the disciples' dependence on

Christ for success in their endeavors, foreshadowing their future mission to ‘catch men’ (Luke 5:10). The invitation, “Come and dine” (John 21:12), reveals Jesus’ desire for communion with His followers, bridging the sacred and the ordinary. In this simple yet profound act, Jesus demonstrated that He is not only Lord over spiritual matters but also intimately involved in the daily lives of His disciples. This passage serves as a reminder of Christ’s enduring presence, provision, and call to fellowship, even in the most routine aspects of life.

John 21:1-14 shows that trusting Jesus during times of frustration and failure can bring renewal and abundance. His care extends to both our physical and spiritual needs, as evidenced by Jesus preparing breakfast for His followers – an intimate act of love. It encourages us to invite Jesus into our everyday tasks, trusting His guidance and timing. Whether facing challenges at work, in relationships, or in personal growth, this story inspires us to stay attentive to His presence and provision, even in the routine moments of life.

3. TAXES AND A DRAGNET: Matthew 17:24-27; 13:47-51.

A. The Coin in the Fish’s Mouth, Matthew 17:24-27.

In this passage, Jesus addresses the issue of the temple tax after tax collectors question Peter about whether their teacher paid it. Peter told the men who collected the temple tax that his Master (rabbi, teacher) paid the tribute (tax). Jesus used this encounter to teach a profound lesson about His identity and the nature of His mission. He began by asking Peter a rhetorical question: “What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own children, or of strangers?” (v. 25). Peter rightly answered, “Of strangers,” to which Jesus responded, “Then are the children free” (v. 26). Here, Jesus reveals His divine sonship and authority. As the Son of God, He was not obliged to pay the temple tax because the temple was His Father’s house. This statement reveals His unique relationship with God and points to the new covenant He was instituting, where the temple’s role would be fulfilled in Him.

Nevertheless, Jesus chose not to offend the tax collectors and instructed Peter to catch a fish, in whose mouth he would find a coin sufficient to pay the tax for both of them. This miraculous provision demonstrates Jesus’ sovereignty over creation and His willingness to humble Himself for the sake of others. By paying the tax, He modeled submission to earthly authorities without compromising His divine identity. The passage invites reflection on the balance between asserting one’s rights and choosing humility for the sake of peace and witness. It also reminds us of God’s providence as Jesus provided exactly what was needed in an extraordinary way. Ultimately, this passage points to Jesus’ selfless nature and calls us to live with a similar attitude of humility and trust in God’s provision.

B. The Many Fish in the Sea, Matthew 13:47-51.

The parable of the net is a powerful metaphor used by Jesus to illustrate the nature of God’s kingdom and the final judgment. In this parable, Jesus compared His kingdom to a fishing net thrown into the sea, which catches all kinds of fish. Once the net is full, it is drawn to shore, and

the fishermen sort the good fish into containers while discarding the bad. Jesus explained that this imagery reflects the end of the age when angels will separate the righteous from the wicked. This parable portrays the inclusivity of God's kingdom in its present stage, extending an invitation to all people without discrimination. However, it also highlights the inevitability of divine judgment, in which a separation between righteousness and wickedness will occur. As Jesus warned in Matthew 22:14, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

This passage serves as both a warning and a call to self-reflection. It reminds us of the seriousness of living in accordance with God's will, as accountability cannot be avoided. It invites contemplation on our spiritual state and encourages us to pursue righteousness in preparation for the final reckoning. At the same time, it reveals God's grace by inviting all to enter His kingdom and benefit from it before judgment is executed. The dual themes of grace and judgment make this parable a profound teaching on the balance between divine mercy and justice.

In Matthew 17:27, Jesus casually told Peter to get tax money from a fish's mouth, proving that divine solutions can be oddly specific and hilariously creative. God often provides for His people in ways that logic alone cannot explain. To his credit, Peter believed Jesus and did as he was told, thereby finding the coin to pay the temple tax. God will never violate His Word when guiding us in obtaining the resources necessary for our personal needs or for the needs of the church. However, he may lead us to unconventional methods or sources to procure the necessary resources.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have been called to follow Him and to prioritize evangelism. God often uses our workplaces as a spot to fish for souls.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Every church should seek creative ways to reach the lost and be willing to cast a net that may draw in all manner of people. We must then trust God to separate the good from the bad.

Laws About Animals in the Bible

Rest for animals on the Sabbath: “The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you ... nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle” (Deuteronomy 5:14).

Regarding an animal that kills a human: “Surely for your lifeblood I [God] will demand a reckoning: from the hand of every beast, I will require it, and from the hand of man” (Genesis 9:5). “If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten” (Exodus 21:38). Note: Human life is so precious in the sight of God, neither animals nor humans are to be excused from murdering a human.

Help for an animal in distress: “If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under the burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it” (Exodus 23:5). Note: We must not allow dislike of an animal’s owner to keep us from helping an animal in distress.

The humane treatment of birds: “If a bird’s nest happens to be before you along the way ... with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days” (Deuteronomy 22:6-7). Note: The protection and wise conservation of birds and animals is not only for their benefit, but also for our benefit.

The humane treatment of animals: “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together” (Deuteronomy 22:10). “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain” (Deuteronomy 25:4). Note: Working animals unequally yoked together made the work unnecessarily difficult for both animals. A working animal is not to be deprived of food as needed.

God cares about animals: God had pity for Nineveh, for the sake of the children living there, too young to know right from wrong, and also for the sake of them many cattle living there (see Jonah 4:11).

WORKSHEET

Fishing and Evangelism

Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of Men” Matthew 4:

1. See the potential – there are lots of fish.
Jesus told His disciples, “The _____ truly is _____” (Luke 10:2).
2. Go where the fish are – the water.
Jesus told His disciples, “_____ your way; behold, I _____ you out” (Luke 10:3).
3. Wear the right clothes for fishing.
Jesus told His disciples, “Stay in the city until you have been _____ with _____ from on high” (Luke 24:49 NIV).
4. Don’t try to catch just one kind of fish.
Paul said, “Having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to _____ and _____” (Acts 26:22).
5. Use the right bait.
“And on some have _____ ... but others save with _____, pulling them out of the fire” (Jude 22-23).
6. Fishing takes practice.
Paul wrote, “Let us not grow _____ while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not _____” (Galatians 6:9).