

INTRODUCTION

You've probably heard of a town so small it's called a one-horse town. Well I grew up in a one-doctor town. In my little hometown of Florala, Alabama, Dr. Matthews was the only physician and everybody just called him "Doc." My mother was an R.N. and she worked as his nurse for several years. Florala is built around Lake Jackson, the largest natural lake in Alabama. It was named after Andrew Jackson, because he and his troops stopped to camp there on their way to fight the battle of New Orleans in 1815. Lake Jackson is a great fishing lake and Doc Matthews loved to fish. On any afternoon when there were no patients scheduled, he would leave his office and head two blocks down the hill to his boathouse and out on the lake to fish. My mother told us about times when patients would arrive at the doctor's office with an unexpected illness or injury and she had to explain that Doc had gone fishing. If she couldn't treat the problem, she had to send someone out in a boat to fetch doc Matthews back to the office.

The stories of Doc Matthews' fishing reminds me of a picture of a sign someone sent me. A true fisherman hung this outside his office: "If the keys are missin' I've gone fishin'"

My memories of Doc Matthews are sweet, because not only did he sew up my many childhood injuries, he was a godly man who faithfully taught Sunday School in our church. So I've always had a special place in my heart for doctors and fishermen. And that's how we see Jesus in our text today. He was the Great Physician who was also a Master Fisherman.

We're in a series from Matthew entitled "Parables and Miracles" and in this message we're going to look at both a parable and a miracle. There are two metaphors in this passage that help us understand Jesus. The parable we'll study reveals that Jesus is a Fisherman—but He fishes for people, not for fish. The miracles of healing reveal He is the Great Physician who heals the sick. So when you combine these two images, you understand why I've entitled this message, "The Doctor's Gone Fishin'."

The passage that introduces us to Jesus as the Fishing Physician is Matthew 4:18-25:

"As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fisherman. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him."

Let's talk about the parable of fishing for people, and then we'll talk about what it means to relate to Jesus as the Great Physician.

1. THE PARABLE: WHEN YOU FOLLOW JESUS, HE'LL TEACH YOU HOW TO FISH FOR PEOPLE

Our definition of a parable is when a natural image is given, and alongside that natural image, a supernatural truth can be found. We all understand what it means to go fishing for fish, but Jesus introduced the supernatural image of fishing for people. There is ample evidence that Jesus loved to fish and to eat fish, but mainly He loved fishermen. Peter, Andrew, James and John were the first who were called to be His disciples, and they became the group who were closest to Jesus. Their whole lives had been devoted to fishing, so Jesus used the picture of fishing to call them to follow Him. Jesus always uses something familiar to us to call us. The only other profession of a disciple we know is Matthew. He was a tax collector. Jesus didn't tell Him that He'd make him a fisher of men. He simply said, "Follow me." But Jesus might well have said something like. "Matthew, you record people's names and amounts in your book. Follow me and I'll show you how people's names can be written down in the Book of Life."

This parable of fishing for people is one we can all visualize, because most of us have been fishing, or we have watched people fish. This is Jesus' call for us to be involved in personal evangelism. If you want to be an effective fisher for people, there are four fishing principles that apply to personal evangelism as well.

(1) Have a passion to fish

I play golf these days, and the only fishing I do is fishing the golf ball I just hit in the water hazard. But I grew up fishing with my dad, and I sometimes fish when someone invites me now. But to be honest, I don't really have a passion for fishing. I don't own a boat, or even have a fishing rod or tackle box. But I know some guys who love to fish. I'm not just talking about the professional Bass fishermen either. I know some guys in our church who are passionate about fishing. They have all the equipment, and they spend most of their spare time fishing. They think nothing about spending money on their hobby. They'll travel to Mexico, Brazil, or Alaska to catch a certain kind of fish.

That reminds me of the story about two rednecks who went on a weekend fishing expedition. They bought airline tickets to Canada, rented a truck and drove to a cabin on an isolated lake that had a fishing boat and equipment as part of the rental. They fished all day the first day and didn't catch a fish. They didn't catch a fish on the second day either. Finally, on their last day, one of them caught a fish just before it was time to head in and return home. As they were flying back, the guy who caught the fish said, "All that expense for one lousy fish! Do you realize that one fish cost us \$2,000 each?" The second redneck said, "Really? It's a good thing we didn't catch any more!"

If you are going to be an effective people-fisher you've got to have a passion to fish for people. My dad was a real fisherman and I recall that whenever we'd drive by a lake or pond, he'd say, "That looks like pretty good fishing, I'll bet there are fish just waiting to be caught there." Do you have that same kind of passion to see people without Christ brought into a relationship with Him? When you look at a crowd of people at the mall do you ever think, "Wow! I wonder how

many of those people don't know Jesus?" If you don't have a burden and a passion for lost people, you'll never be a fisher for people.

(2) Use the right equipment and bait

Good fishermen know how to use the right equipment and bait for the kind of fish they're seeking. If you're fishing for sharks, I don't advise you to use a cane pole with a little bream hook with a worm on it. By the same token, if you're fishing for bream, a huge shark hook won't work—the hook itself is bigger than the bream!

When it comes to fishing for people, I've known folks who have tried using the wrong bait. The purpose of bait is to attract the fish to the hook. Some people think the best bait to use is a big King James Bible and hit someone over the head with it. They think telling non-Christians they're going to hell and condemning their behavior is what it means to share the good news. What's good about that? That only scares the fish away. Only the message of forgiveness that Jesus offers by His death on a cross will attract sinners to faith.

I'm excited that our adults will be studying the book *SPLASH* written by my friend Ken Hemphill. *SPLASH* stands for Show People Love And Share Him. When we show people God's love, then they're drawn to Him and we'll have an opportunity to share Christ with them.

(3) Understand how fish act

When I fished with Jay Yelas, a Bassmasters Champion, he told me he studied how fish act in different weather and water conditions. He had learned to think like a fish. He didn't become a fish—he just thinks like a fish.

Jesus was a friend of sinners who was criticized by the religious professionals of His time for spending time with tax collectors, drunkards, harlots, and lepers. He spent time with them and loved them. He didn't become a sinner, He just understood sinners. If we're going to be effective at catching people for Jesus, we've got to have an understanding of how people without Christ think and act. We don't have to become like them, but we should befriend them and try to win them to faith in Christ. The sad thing is the longer a person has been a Christian, the fewer friends they have who aren't Christians, and the harder it is for us to understand how people without Christ feel and think.

(4) Go to where the fish are

I heard a joke about a lady who went to see a psychiatrist. She said, "Doctor, I'm worried about my husband. Every day he takes a fishing pole and fishes in our bathtub." The doctor said, "Why don't you just tell him to stop?" The wife said, "Well, I would, but we really need the fish!" You can't catch fish in bathtub; you have to go out to the lakes, rivers, or oceans where the fish are. And if you're going to fish for people, you can't do it sitting in a pew, or sitting in your easy chair at home. You have to go out to where the people without Christ are.

The sad thing is Christ has called us to be fishers of people, and too many of us have become content to be keepers of the aquarium. There are plenty of people here who have been caught for Christ, so trying to catch people for Christ here at church is like fishing in your bathtub. The people who are the best prospects to be brought to Christ are out there in your neighborhoods, your classrooms, your workplaces, and even in the bars scattered around East Texas.

Have you have ever been fishing? Have you have ever caught a fish? Now, I'm not a rocket surgeon, but I'm smart enough to know if you didn't answer "yes" the first question there's no way you could have answered "yes" to the second question. You may go fishing and not catch any fish, but there's no way to catch a fish unless you go fishing.

Now let me ask those two questions in a different way. Have you have ever tried to lead someone to faith in Christ? Have you have ever led someone to Christ? There are times when you go fishing for people, and they don't respond, but for sure, you'll never lead anyone to Christ unless you GO fishing!

Each week in the Sunday edition of the Tyler paper, you'll see pictures in the Sports section of people holding up fish they've caught. Some pictures show someone holding one large fish, or sometimes there will be a whole string of fish. Their names are printed there, and they're usually smiling because it's fun to catch fish. (The fish don't look too happy, however.)

Imagine for a moment there's a newspaper in heaven called the *Celestial Times*. Every week, it displays display pictures of Jesus-followers who are proudly standing beside men, women, teenagers and children they have brought to Christ. In these pictures, everyone is smiling. But we can't take any credit ourselves. If we're following the Master Fisherman, we're just catching the ones He provides for us, and His name is the only one listed in the credits below the pictures. Has your picture ever appeared there? Would you like for it to be?

You may be thinking, "I'm too shy, I could never talk to anyone about Jesus." Notice Jesus didn't say, "Be fishers of men." He said, "Follow me and I WILL MAKE YOU fishers of men." In other words, our main task is simply following Jesus. But when you follow Jesus, then you will be going to people who need to be "caught for Christ."

I see a real connection between Jesus as the Master Fisherman and Jesus as the Great Physician. He told the disciples to follow Him and He would make them fishers for people, and then immediately Jesus went to people were hurting and needed His healing touch. In other words, the best "fish" to catch for Jesus are people who are suffering and hurting. Now let's look at:

2. THE MIRACLE: JESUS HEALS HURTING PEOPLE

Verse 23 says, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." Our passage today introduces us to the healing ministry of Jesus. We don't know the names of those who were healed. We're told Jesus performed a variety of healing miracles including those who suffered severe pain, those who were tormented by demons, those who were suffering from seizures and paralysis. Since this speaks of Jesus healing in a general sense, I want to give you

an introductory overview of the doctrine of divine healing. We'll be talking much more about it as we study the specific healing miracles of Jesus in Matthew. For our purposes today, I want to share with you three important principles about the healing power of Jesus.

(1) All healing is the work of God

How many of you have ever been healed? Oh, not many? Well, let me rephrase the question. How many of you have ever had a cut or wound, and today that cut or wound has healed over and it's no longer bleeding? I thought so. That means you've been healed. Go to a medical dictionary and look up the word healing and you'll find, "Healing is the process by which the cells in the body repair and reduce the size of a damaged or necrotic area."

I have a nasty scar on my right thumb. In 1981 we were building a house in Alabama and I was putting in a great deal of sweat equity into the construction. While I was assembling the sheet metal for the chimney flue, I fell off a concrete block and as I tried to break my fall, my thumb was sliced by the edge of one of the chimney sections. It was cut down to the bone. I went to the hospital and had it sewn up. Over a period of weeks, the wound was healed and the pain disappeared. And today, there's no pain. Hallelujah, I've been healed! Why do I say this? Maybe you've never considered it, but every occasion of healing is the work of God. He designed us in such a way that our damaged cells are slowly replaced by new, healthy cells. Perhaps the miracles of healing during the time of Jesus were simply a supernatural acceleration of this regenerative process. Instead of taking weeks, it only took nanoseconds.

All healing comes from God. He uses doctors, medicine, surgery, and prayer. I've spoken with many Christian physicians who have realized they can't cure anybody: God does. Their job is to simply remove anything that may be hindering or slowing down God's process of healing. One doctor told me, "I only dress the wound. God heals it." People often ask me, "Pastor, does God still heal people today?" My answer to that is, "Absolutely!" Every time someone is healed, God did it.

(2) Jesus didn't heal every sick person

As the Great Physician, Jesus healed every disease. He is still able to heal every disease. In the four gospel accounts there are 25 specific healing miracles of individuals who sought out Jesus for healing. I don't find one example of Jesus turning away someone who sought Him for a healing miracle by saying, "Sorry, I can heal leprosy, but not migraine headaches." He could heal anyone, but He didn't go around indiscriminately healing every sick person in sight. For instance, when Jesus visited the Pool of Bethesda in John 5, there were many sick people gathered there waiting for the waters to be stirred but Jesus only healed one man there.

These are the first healing miracles recorded in the ministry of Jesus, and there was a huge multitude of people, both Jewish and Gentile who were healed. Jesus had thousands of followers at the beginning of His ministry, but the closer He got to the cross, the smaller the crowds became. When the fickle crowd determined He wasn't going to heal everyone and feed everyone with a few fishes and loaves every day, their interest evaporated.

The reason Jesus didn't heal everyone is because His main purpose in coming to earth was not to heal. All the people He healed eventually got sick again and died. Jesus came to heal a much greater disease than any physical ailment. He came to heal the ruin and damage caused by the sickness of sin in our lives. He came to heal the broken relationship with man and God. That leads us to the final principle about healing.

(3) Jesus will meet you at the point of your pain

Jesus is still in healing business, and you may need to call on Him as the Great Physician. Your pain may be emotional today, and Jesus has promised to give you a peace that passes human understanding. You may be suffering from relational pain today, and Jesus is the only One who has promised to heal the broken hearted. Your pain may be physical today, and you may need to call on Him for physical healing.

Many of you have heard I was recently diagnosed with a moderate form of prostate cancer. I'm praying for and trusting God for healing. I've been so encouraged by the many cards and emails that I've received from you telling me you're praying for me. I've learned prostate cancer is very common and very treatable and that many men in our church have successfully dealt with it. Ken Dance teaches the oldest group of men in our church who are in their eighties. He told me he asked his class a couple of weeks ago to pray for me since I have prostate cancer. He said his men just said, "Oh, that's nothing. All of us have had it for 20 years!" I laughed when I heard that. I read again this week in Exodus 15:26 where God says, "I am Jehovah-Rapha, the God who heals you." I'm trusting God for physical healing and believe God is going to be glorified in this latest physical challenge I face.

But the greatest healing any of us need is the spiritual healing that comes when we trust Christ as our personal Savior. I was once a sinner bound for hell, but when I placed my faith in Jesus, he healed my heart of my sin sickness, and now I am a new person in Christ.

Do you realize that every experience of healing costs Jesus something? When the woman slipped through the crowd and touched the hem of His garment, Jesus said, "I felt power go out of me." All healing from the hand of Christ—emotional, relational, physical, or spiritual—comes at a high cost to the Savior. In order for us to have our sins removed, Jesus had to bear them Himself. The Bible says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24)

Don't take your salvation or your healing lightly. It cost the Great Physician to heal you.

CONCLUSION

Writer Tony Campolo tells a story about being in a church in Oregon where he was asked to pray for a man who had cancer. Tony agreed and he placed his arm around the man and prayed for him. He prayed boldly for the man to be healed.

One week later he got a phone call from the man's wife. She said, "Last week you prayed for my husband who had cancer." Tony thought when he heard her use the past tense (HAD cancer) that

his cancer had disappeared. But before he could say anything the woman said, "He died." Tony felt terrible.

She continued, "But don't feel bad. When he came to church that day he was filled with anger. He knew he might die and he hated God. He was only 58 years old and he complained that he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He was angry that this all-powerful God hadn't taken away his cancer. He would lie in bed and curse God. The more his anger grew towards God, the more miserable he was to everyone around him. It was an awful thing to be in his presence. But after you prayed for him, a peace came over him and a sense of joy returned in him. Tony, the last three days have been the best days of our lives. We've sung. We've laughed. We've read scripture. We prayed. Oh, they've been wonderful days. And I called to thank you for laying your hands on him and praying for his healing." And then she said something profound. She said, "He wasn't cured, but he was healed." (Tony Campolo, "Year of Jubilee" Preaching Today, #212)

The Doctor's gone fishin.' Remember that I told you when Doc Matthews had gone fishin' my mom sometimes had to send someone out on the lake to bring him back to the clinic? The Great Physician is fishin' right now. His name is Doctor Jesus and He isn't out on some lake where you have to send for Him. He's here right now. He's fishing for you. He wants to bring you to Himself so He can touch you and heal you? Will you allow Him to change you forever?

OUTLINE

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To be an effective fisherman, you must:

- (1) Have a passion to fish
- (2) Use the right equipment and bait
- (3) Understand how fish act
- (4) Go to where the fish are

2. THE MIRACLE: JESUS HEALS HURTING PEOPLE

- (1) All healing is the work of God
- (2) Jesus didn't heal every sick person
- (3) Jesus will meet you at the point of your pain



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes