

Becoming Fishers of Men
Part 2
“Preparing the Nets”
Matthew 4:18-22
Pastor Charles Price

If you have got your Bible with you this morning I am going to read to you from Matthew’s Gospel and Matthew 4.

If you were here a week ago, I read the verses that I am going to read again this morning. Matthew 4:18. These record the first words that Jesus ever spoke to His disciples. There are words of Jesus prior to this but these are specific to His disciples.

And as we add weight to the last words that Jesus ever spoke to His disciples, equally we must give weight to the first words He spoke to them.

And I am going to read Matthew 4:18.

“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 fishermen.

“ ‘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.”

That’s as far as we are reading.

Last week we talked about the invitation that Jesus gave to Andrew and Simon Peter in Matthew 4:19:

“Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”

I pointed out there is an invitation and there is a promise in that statement.

The invitation is “Come, follow Me”. That is not about becoming a Christian. That is not defined as simply being a follower of Jesus. There are a lot of folks who are trying to follow Jesus.

But being a Christian is about being born again of the Holy Spirit, becoming regenerate.

But rather the term “Follow Me” in the gospels is a code word for living as a disciple. And discipleship is about working with Jesus Christ. He said in John 12:26,

“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.”

“Following Me is about finding out where I am and being where I am in the context of serving and working.”

It’s not a passive thing; it’s being available to the Lord Jesus Christ, that He directs us and guides us to put us in the right place at the right time with the right people, living in step with Him in order that we might become the vehicle through which He works and blesses other people.

That’s what’s involved in this invitation, “Follow Me.”

So that’s the invitation: “Come, follow Me.”

And if you do, there is a promise that is going to be implemented:

“I will make you fishers of men.”

That is going to be His business. He makes us fishers of men.

The context of this of course is that these were all fishermen, these four men, fishing for fish – Andrew, Peter, James, John.

“I am taking what you are familiar with and creating an analogy from that to what I want to do with you – I am going to make you fishers of men.”

“And it will not be a question of methods, though methods are good, or techniques, though techniques are good; it will be a case of living in such a relationship with Me that I put you in the right place at the right time and make you a fisher of men.”

And we talked about that last week, just to remind you for the setting this week, and for the benefit of those who were not here, you know the context. And for the benefit of those who were here, but who have forgotten, you know why I am going to build on that this week.

Because we are talking about how we, as a church, a community of people, can be effective as fishers of men, to use this particular analogy that Jesus used.

Now this is not the task of the evangelist – that is a gift given to some – to a few. This is the task of every Christian.

And you remember last week I asked how many of you here were fishermen, in terms of it's your hobby, it's something you do, maybe even your profession. And there were maybe a dozen hands that went up.

And then I asked you a second question: how many of you have ever caught a fish? And hundreds of hands went up – probably 75% of you.

We're not talking about being fishermen; we're talking about catching fish. And that's something which is open and possible to every one of us.

And fishing for men is bringing people into that relationship with Jesus Christ.

My wife Hilary made an interesting observation to me earlier this week. She said there's a big difference between fishing for fish and fishing for men or for people.

When you fish for fish, you catch the living and they die. But when you fish for people, you catch the dead – that is, those described in Scripture as spiritually dead, separated from the life of God – and you bring them to life, which is the whole object of the gospel.

Now I want to talk about an aspect of fishing this morning that comes from these verses because in Matthew 4:21 it says about James and John that they were in the boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Or, as the King James Bible puts it, mending their nets.

And if you were to follow through in the rest of the four gospels, you find several times these disciples are described as mending their nets or preparing their nets.

In Luke 5, you have got Jesus coming alongside Galilee. These same men, these fishermen, who are now His disciples, are with their fishing kit. And it says this time they are washing their nets.

And in Matthew 18:4 (that we just read), it says that they were casting their nets.

So there are several things that go on with this net. The net is the basic tool of a fisherman out on the lake. It is the picture Jesus uses of bringing people to Christ.

And they are preparing or mending their nets. They are washing their nets. And they are casting their nets – those three things.

I like alliterations so they were cleaning their nets, they were caring for their nets (they were mending them and preparing them) and they were casting their nets (they were putting them out to where the fish are in order to get a catch).

Now it's no good casting our nets if we haven't first cleaned our nets and mended our nets and made them fit. And to use this analogy that Jesus uses here, I would suggest to you this: if a church is not catching fish, not catching people, maybe it is time to mend the nets and have a look at what kind of netting is necessary and what kind of condition the net needs to be in if we are going to catch fish.

Now I know there are two ways to catch fish. One is the sort of lonesome way when you sit on the bank of a river or a lake and you have got a fishing pole and you kind of throw out the line with a hook and a float and a worm or some bait and you sit there for hours on end.

And I admire people who do it. I am sure their minds are able to be creative during that boring time that they are sitting there, but it's not for me. And although I did try fishing once or twice, it's not in my natural makeup to sit on a bank all by myself catching one fish at a time.

That's one way to catch fish. That is a good way, a legitimate way. And of course we are individually called to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are doing this solo as well as the other way in which we catch fish is the way they were catching fish here.

There were two brothers (Andrew and Peter) in one boat (in Matthew 4), and two other brothers (James and John) in another boat. Two boats; it looks like two family businesses.

But when you get to Luke 5, after they have already become disciples of Jesus and have not yet left their fishing totally behind them, they are all together in the same boat and they are called partners.

So this idea of fishing that Jesus talks about here is not the individual fishing pole fishing; this is the corporate working together as a team of fishermen, with a net, behind a boat, catching all kinds of fish together.

And therefore the application of this is about the corporate responsibility of the church to preach the gospel and to seek to catch fish.

Preaching the gospel and reaching others for Jesus Christ is of course – I was going to say one of the most important tasks of the church – we probably can go beyond that and say it is the primary task of the church, recognizing we need to nurture those fish who have come alive in Christ.

And of course all of that is part of our responsibility. But we are not in this just for ourselves; we are in this to reach out and bring others into the living, wonderful, exciting relationship that is possible with God through Jesus Christ.

Now I don't have too much experience of fishing with nets. I have seen a lot of fishermen. This is a picture on the screen of fishermen in Kerala in South India - I have seen these nets, I have seen these folks. I think it's called Chinese fishing. But that's one way of catching fish.

I was down in Brazil a few months ago, a little while ago, when we were preparing the Living Truth telethon this year, which is about helping a mission to reach the fishing communities in the Amazon River and along the coast of Brazil.

33,000 communities in the Amazon River are approachable only by water, no roads. Some of them are islands – many of them - some of them on the banks of the Amazon but unapproachable from outside. Because the Amazon is this vast rainforest area and the rainforest itself is the size of the United States mainland. Can you believe it?

And we are going to help them reach out and spread mission bases up the Amazon River. But, when I was there and we were doing this filming, there were fishing boats going out every morning, coming in. And I saw many of them - I got on some of them, saw the nets they used.

And of course every net has several components to it. It has the net itself, the mesh. You have got to be sure the size of the netting is not too large, otherwise a lot of the fish you want will swim right out of the net. And if it's too small, you'll get old boots and everything else that you don't want as well.

And not only that, but every netting has two contrary forces that work in it. You have got the floats that keep one side of the net on the surface of the water - usually cork floats.

And then you have got weights (usually pieces of lead) that are just placed (not very big ones – just enough) along the other side of the net to cause the net to drop and sink down into the water.

If you only have floats, of course the net will stay on the surface of the water and you won't catch anything. If you have only have weights, the whole thing will sink and eventually just rest on the bottom and you won't catch anything.

You need the floats that keep the net on the surface, and the weights that cause it to hang down in order to pick up the fish that it catches within them.

You say, well thank you very much for that instruction about fishing nets. So what?

Well, in the gospel net, in the analogy that Jesus uses here of being fishers of people, we need to have a net that has the floats that tell us the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ (but if that's all you have, it will become superficial and just float around on the water) and the weights to tell us the bad news, which is why we need the good news, the fact of our own brokenness and sinfulness and corruption.

When I started to think about speaking on this theme for a few weeks, I came across a booklet that has just been reprinted that was first written 300 years ago by a Scottish preacher called Thomas Boston. And in 1699 he wrote this little book called "The Art of Man Fishing".

I read this on a flight from London to Toronto a week last Friday. And at one stage I left it on the table and I suddenly thought, if the guy next to me looks across and sees the title "The Art of Man Fishing", I wonder what he will think.

I asked the staff earlier, "What does this sound like – "The Art of Man Fishing?" in the prayer meeting at the beginning of this morning. And one of them said, well it sounds like a handbook for women on dating.

But it has a subtitle: "A Puritan's View of Evangelism."

And it's a fascinating book. When they reprinted this recently in the Christian Heritage Series, it would have been good if they had updated the oldie 'Englishy' 'languagey', but they didn't.

But he has one chapter on the net, and I find it very interesting. And he tells us ten things about the net. Well, I am going to pick out the 8th thing he says and it stimulated my thinking and so thank you, Thomas Boston, you have given me my message this morning. Because I am going to take what he puts in one paragraph – I'll read the paragraph to you – and I am going to talk about this.

He said, 8thly:

"Lest the net be lifted up with the water and so not be fit for taking fish, and the fish slighted and pass under it, there are some pieces of lead put in to hold it right in the water that it may be before them as they come."

And so lest the invitations and promises of the gospel be slighted, there must be some weight, some legal terrors and law threatenings to drive the fish into the net.

Thou seest then that both law (the weight) and gospel (the floats) are to be preached. The law as a pendicle of the gospel net, which makes it effective, the law being a schoolmaster that brings us to Christ."

Well, I like the imagery that Thomas Boston gives us there and have spent some time thinking about it because sometimes we are very tempted to offer the goodness of the good news, and people don't know why there is some badness that needs to be corrected, why there is good news.

If you go into your doctor's office and all he ever does when you walk in is say, "Hey, I have got six flavours of medicine here; take your pick. Go on, have it; here's a chocolate flavoured one for you."

You say, "No, no, that's not what a doctor does." What a doctor has to do first, what a physician has to do, is to diagnose what exactly is wrong with you.

Now I know some people are very much into positive thinking and they don't like this sort of negativity of this kind of thing. But actually it is absolutely essential; any physician (and there are a number of physicians here this morning) will tell you that the most important thing they have to do is to make a right diagnosis, because only then will they provide anything that is close to a right remedy. If the diagnosis is wrong, you can be sure the remedy will be wrong as well.

Now I know some people who don't like talking about what is wrong. But you imagine going to your doctor's office like that. And you go in and you know, to be honest – and forgive me, if you are a physician – doctors tend to be fairly negative people, because they tend to talk a lot about what's wrong with you. Isn't that what they do?

Suppose you want avoid that so you walk into your doctor's office, you sit down. She or he comes in or they are already there and you say, "Good morning, doctor, before you say anything, I'll tell you why I am here. I want a bottle of pink medicine please."

"I can't just give you some pink medicine."

"Yes, you can. You gave me some before – that strawberry flavoured stuff, you remember? I'd like a bottle of that strawberry flavoured pink medicine."

“I can’t just give you strawberry flavoured pink medicine. What’s wrong with you?”

And you think, “Uh-oh, here we go again. Why do they have to be so negative?”

So your doctor asks you some questions. Some of them are very embarrassing questions, very personal questions. “Do you get up in the night?”

“Yep.”

“How many times last night?”

“I think it was 64.”

“Really?”

“What color was it?”

“It was blue.”

“Really?”

“I need to fiddle around down here a little bit. Now tell me if this hurts.”

“Ah, yes, that hurts.”

“Good. What about this side?”

“Ah, yah, that hurts as well.”

“Uh-uh. Now I need some blood.” So he gets his nice needle and he sticks it in and you watch this syringe fill up with your blood. “Send this away and get it tested.”

“Man, I came here to get some pink medicine, not to poked in the ribs and asked embarrassing questions and have my blood sucked.”

And then he says, “Okay, I have got some bad news and some good news. We checked your blood, we checked where it hurts; we checked the fact you get up 64 times in a night. Here’s the bad news and then I will give you the good news. Here’s the bad news: you are sick. You have got ‘bleblebleble’ (that’s how they normally pronounce these diseases). Here’s the good news: we’ve got a solution: a bottle of pink medicine.”

But the physician can't apply the good news, the medicine, until first they've diagnosed what the problem is.

Now, a lot of folks are wanting remedies. They want anything that is going. But it doesn't work because they don't actually know what the problem is.

I remember hearing a well-known preacher being interviewed by Larry King on CNN. This was one of several people Larry King was interviewing at the same time. And this guy has a very positive message about abundant life – that's the recurring theme – abundant life, which of course is something Jesus talked about.

And then Larry King said this – he said, “Where do things like sin and judgement and hell fit into what you preach?”

And this guy smiled and said, “Well, Larry, I don't get into things like that. People know things are wrong – you don't have to tell them. I just tell them about the good things that God will do for them.”

Can you imagine a doctor who treats you like that? You go into your doctor and you say, “Well, doctor, I have got this problem.”

“I don't want to know about your problem because, you know, we all know everybody has got problems, there's a lot of sickness in the world. We know that. I have got a bottle of pink medicine I'll just give you.”

That's why Thomas Boston wisely says that if we are going to see people brought into the kingdom, we have to teach the law of God, which prepares people for the grace of God, because the fundamental problem that you and I have is the problem of our sin.

Now the word sin is an unusual word. I have said this here before, and many of you know it anyway. The English word sin originated in archery where, if you take an arrow and you fire the arrow, shoot the arrow at a target and you miss the target, it is called sin. That's where the word comes from.

It doesn't matter by how far you miss. If you miss by a millimetre, it's sin. By a centimetre, it's sin. You miss by a metre it's sin. Miss by half a kilometre, it's sin. Shoot in the opposite direction, it's sin. Because sin is a relative word.

You have no idea what sin is unless you know what the target is. If you have a boy out in the field with a bow and arrow he has been given for Christmas and he loves the feel of pulling the arrow back in the bow and he feels his muscles tense all up his arm and ripple across his chest, and he pulls it back as far as he can and releases it, and the arrow takes off and shoots, you know, a great distance. And he feels, wow, that was fun, that was a great feeling. Goes and gets the arrow again, picks it up, does the same thing, same muscles rippling across his chest and all up his arm. He'd say he's having great fun.

But supposing somebody comes into the field and says, "Hey, hang on a minute, hang on, hang on," and they put up a target. And say, "Okay, now hit the target, hit the bull's eye."

And he pulls back the same arrow in the same bow with the same muscles tensing up his arm and rippling across his chest and he aims as best he can and releases it. And it shoots and it misses the target. Now you spoiled his fun. Before he was just enjoying the fun of playing with the bow and arrow. Now you set up a target and he realizes he's not very good.

And you see, if sin is missing a mark, we do not know what sin is, nobody on the street is going to be impressed with you when you call them a sinner for the simple reason they have no idea what you are talking about. They don't know what they have missed. "What have we missed?"

Well, Romans 7:7 says,

"I would not have known what sin was except through the law."

Now he says, "What makes me aware of sin is the law of God" because the law of God is the target by which we measure where we have come short.

1 John 3:4; John writes there:

"Everyone who sins breaks the law...sin is lawlessness."

Now, by definition, says John, sin is that which is not true to the law, breaking the law. Now the law are the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses in the Old Testament.

Now why are those Ten Commandments what they are? Why didn't God give us 6 to make it a bit easier for us? Why did He give us ten, and why did He give us ten that are very difficult for us?

Well, another verse that defines what all sin is, is in Romans 3:23 where Paul writes there,

“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

We have sinned and we have missed the target, which he says now is the glory of God.

So what is the glory of God? The word glory has different connotations depending where it appears in Scripture, but essentially the glory of God is the character of God, the moral character of God.

Now put those two verses together. If John says sin is breaking the law, my right hand represents the law and sin is coming short of the requirements of the law. And Paul says sin is coming short of the glory of God; my left hand represents the glory of God.

Put those two verses together; that means that the law of God and the glory of God are equal to the same thing. Therefore, to ask the question, why is the law of God what it is, we ask what is the glory of God? It is the character of God.

The law of God therefore is given to reveal what God is like in His character for the simple reason you and I were created to be in His image. And that image is a moral image. The way we live and behave and act and treat each other is supposed to show what God is like.

But we have sinned and come short of the glory of God and because we are not altogether sure what that is, God gave the law to Moses and the law reveals the character of God. So when God said, “you shall not steal,” the reason is not because stealing is not nice; the reason is because God is not a thief and you were made to be in His image, so don’t steal.

When He said, “you shall not bear false witness,” it is because God never tells lies; you were made to be in His image. Do not bear false witness.

When He says, “you shall not covet,” it is because God is not greedy. You were made to be in His image.

When it says, “you shall not commit adultery,” it is because God is totally faithful and we are made to be in His image.

You go through the Commandments and they reveal what God is like. “Six days shall you labor; on the seventh day, do not work.” Why? It tells us because God rested on the seventh day, not because He was tired but because He was finished. And we rest in the finished work of God.

And the law is given to reveal what God is like in order that we might discover what we are like, that we cannot be what we were created to be, that we are sinners; we missed the mark.

And so Romans 7:7 says,

“I would not have known what sin was except through the law.”

Romans 3:20 says,

“Through the law we become conscious of sin.”

And therefore we need to declare to people and people need to understand the law of God. If you don't understand the law of God, you can be up to your neck in sin and enjoying it oblivious to the fact that it is sin.

I remember some time ago I was in Australia. I had arrived there the first week of January. I had left behind a cold, wet, miserable England in mid-winter and I had arrived 24 hours later in a beautiful, hot, blue-skied Australian summer.

I had arrived on a Saturday, taken to where I was staying about 100 kilometres west of Sydney. I had a good sleep that night and the next morning I had a car that was available to me and I was driving into Sydney to speak the first message I was to give at a conference there in Sydney.

And as I was driving along on this beautiful Sunday morning, very little traffic on the road, I was enjoying the benefit of a good sleep. I was enjoying the fact that the sky was blue, the sun was shining, it was mid-summer.

I was thinking about the message I was going to speak in a couple of hours' time. And I was just driving along with a totally clear conscience enjoying myself when suddenly a gentleman stepped into the road in front of me, held up his hand and it was a policeman.

So I pulled up, opened my window, he came to me and he said, “What speed were you travelling at?”

I said, “To be honest, I am not sure.”

He said, “Take a guess.”

I said, “Well, I live in England (which I did then) and we measure in miles. I don't know how to guess in kilometres.”

He said, “Okay, guess in miles and we'll convert it.”

So I guessed 80 kilometres (which is 50 miles).

He said, “You are not even warm.” And then this gun; he turned it around; there was a screen on the side that he was looking at and he had left on the screen the figure at which he had picked me up – 93.

He said, “What is the speed limit on this road?”

I said, “Well, I’m sorry, but to be honest, I don’t know. I only arrived from England yesterday.”

He said, “Well, in Australia, we put signs up on the road, and you passed the sign.”

I said, “I’m sorry. I didn’t notice.”

He said, “May I see your driver's licence?”

I said, “I don’t have it with me.”

He said, “Did you know that is illegal?”

I said, “No, I didn’t. In England it is not illegal to not have your drivers licence.”

He said, “Sir, we are not in England. We are in Australia. Get out of the car.”

And I got out of the car, stood at the side of the car with him and I felt like a common, dirty criminal.

A few minutes before I was driving along with a totally clear conscience, enjoying the beautiful morning, enjoying what I was going to preach to people about in a couple hours’ time.

And now I am standing like a common criminal. Why? Was there something wrong with the policeman? No, he simply exposed me to the criminal he made me feel that I was.

You see, when Paul says, “I would not have known what sin was except through the law”, it is absolutely true that folks who live a life that is full of sin with a totally clear conscience – they have no idea, no idea, as I had no idea – at what the law was.

And so the law, as Galatians 3:24 puts it, is our schoolmaster that brings us to Christ. It is the law that drives us into a corner of realizing I cannot be the person I need to be and want to be.

Somebody came to me after the first service this morning and we had a good conversation. He said to me, “I am known as a Christian in my place where I work and I have opportunity to talk about this.”

He said, “But how in the world do I talk about the law? It is politically incorrect to be in any way seeming to be judgemental by saying this is wrong or that is wrong.”

And he said, “You can be sure that if we start to talk about Christianity or about the gospel, it won’t be long before somebody says, “Why are you so anti-homosexual, why are you homophobic, because Christians don’t like it?”

And he said, “That’s the last thing I want to talk about but they drive me into it. What do I do? How do we do this?”

Well, of course he is right. We don’t go around saying, “You shall have no other gods but Me”, “you shall not make any graven image”, “six days shall you labor; seventh day, do nothing.” “You shall not steal.”

We don’t go around saying that, do we? So his message was, “That’s okay what you said this morning but it’s totally impractical.”

Well, where has God written the law? Yes, it’s on tablets of stone. But Paul tells us in Romans 2 and I think it’s Romans 2:15, he says (let me read it to you to make sure we get it right). But basically what he says there – we’re talking about Gentiles – Romans 2:14:

“Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they don’t have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”

So I said, “Why don’t you ask them if it’s okay to murder? And if they say, no, it’s not; ask them why in the world they think that. And they will probably tell you, because it’s obvious.” Why is it obvious? Animals don’t have that sense.

Hilary and I were woken up two nights ago by screaming outside our house. And Hilary woke up first, woke me up and said, “What in the world is that?”

I said, “You go and check.”

She said, “No, you go and check.”

It was our cats killing a big bird. I tell you this bird was screaming. I didn’t say, “Hey, come here pussy cat. It’s wrong to murder birds. It’s written in your heart.”

They say, “No it is not; it is written in my heart, if there’s a bird, catch it.”

But in human beings it is written in our hearts isn’t it, because the law is in our hearts. Why do we have a conscience at all?

You know a conscience, although we are separated from God, there is a legacy of the image in which we were created in the hearts of everybody and there is a conscience in our hearts.

Now we can break that conscience, we can silence it, we can mould it, we can cause it to die. So a man like Adolph Hitler, who so violated his conscience, can say of a group of people who are in his way, “Eliminate them, get rid of them.”

But everybody else says, “Wow, that is a terrible thing.”

Why? Because we have a conscience too.

I mean things like sexual ethics; if you see life like a tree, you’re out on the end of a branch somewhere; they are important but you won’t understand until you go back up the branch and down the trunk and look at the roots and see what it is about. So take them back to the roots of Christ and of God. Forget about those other things there at first because that’s putting the consequences of the gospel before the cause of the gospel.

But nevertheless, we need to be aware that we are fallen people. Hebrews 10:22 talks about a guilty conscience that needs to be cleansed. What creates a guilty conscience? The awareness that there is something, which is right but something in me, which is wrong, and the difference between those two, is what creates a sense of guilt.

And by the way, although there is false guilt that is bad, guilt is a good thing. A sense of guilt, the capacity for feeling guilty is a good thing. It’s like the capacity for pain. I am glad, if I get my finger caught in the door, I get a lot of pain that causes me to pull it out. I’m glad about that. I don’t like pain but I am glad I have pain.

A guilty conscience is God’s tool in our lives to make us seek for cleansing.

I remember talking to a student when I was at Capernwray some years ago. I have forgotten what the issue was about altogether, but obviously something had not been good and I was reprimanding this student. And as we talked, sitting in my office, and he was there and I was here, he said to me, “If you go on talking like that, you are going to make me feel guilty.”

I said, “Do you know why?”

He said, “Why?”

“Because you are guilty and I want you to feel guilty and I want you to know you are guilty.”

Now to him this was a shock. “Oh, you’re not supposed to make people feel guilty.”

Of course you are, if they are guilty. The Spirit of God convicts us in such a way. He convicts us of guilt – one of His ministries in regard to sin.

But you know, that guy on TV talking to Larry King: “everybody knows something is wrong.” That’s true, they do, and it’s always everybody else that’s wrong, except me.

I talked to a lady one day and she was a real grumbler and talking about one thing to another and everything was wrong and everybody was wrong, and she was giving me her opinions about all these things. And I got more and more cross with her, and eventually I said, “Madame, do you think there is anything wrong with you?”

And she was rather indignant about that.

I remember once being in a high school. I had been asked to speak to the kids in a class and I began by saying to them, “When you were born into this world, 14-15 years ago, you had not been responsible for the kind of world you had been born into. That was the responsibility of your parents before you and your grandparents’ generation before them and your great grandparents’ generation before them.

But do you like the world you have been born into? Do you like the world?”

And to simplify the conversation, because I can’t tell you everything they said, but they basically said, no they don’t.

I said, “Well, what’s wrong with the world? What do you think is wrong with it?”

So they said things like teachers, cops, terrorists.

And I said, “Okay, this is very interesting. You don’t like teachers, you don’t like cops, you don’t like terrorists, all this kind of thing. Okay, but have you noticed that it’s all people that you say is wrong with the world?”

“Nobody says what’s wrong with the world is dogs, snakes – no, it’s people. So I want you to do is tell me what you think is wrong with people. And I’ll write on the chalkboard what you tell me. So tell me, what’s wrong with people?”

And when I got them talking sense, which we did eventually, they began to say things like – somebody said, “People are proud.”

I said, “What do you mean by that?”

“Well they think they are better than everybody else and they should have preference over everybody else.”

“Okay, that’s a very good one.” Wrote down the word proud on the board.

Somebody else said, “People are greedy.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, they want everything just for themselves and they trample on people to get it.”

“Okay, good one. Greedy. Somebody else.”

“Yah, some people are jealous.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, they haven’t got what somebody else has got, so they want to spoil it for the people who have got it.”

“Okay, good one. Jealous – what else?”

“Selfish.”

“Okay, good one.”

And they gave me a whole list of things. I have forgotten the whole list. When they finished I said, “Okay, is that what is wrong with the world?”

And they said, “Yes.”

“Alright, just supposing, instead of going home after school today, you got the whole school together in the school hall and one of you got up and said, ‘Hey, our world’s in a mess. People are proud, people are selfish, people are greedy, people are jealous. Let’s see if we can work out how we can put the world right.’

“And suppose you stayed there as a school all night; do you think by tomorrow morning you might realize that there are some people in your school who are proud and a few people who are greedy, a few folks who are selfish and a few folks who are jealous? Do you think you would find that here in this school?”

And they said, “Yes,” and began to give me some names.

So I said, “Well, don’t give me any names, but this is interesting. You just said this is what’s wrong with the world; now you say that’s what’s wrong with the school.

“So supposing you didn’t do that, supposing you went home and got all your family together. If you have got a mom and a dad or just a mom or just a dad, or whatever your family is like, and your brothers and sisters if you have got any; maybe your granny and granddad and maybe a few uncles and aunts and cousins; and you got together in your house and you said, ‘Hey, listen our world’s in a mess. People are proud, people are greedy, people are selfish, people are jealous; let’s see if we can work out how we should put the world right.’

“Do you think if you did that all night, by tomorrow morning you might find that in your family somebody is proud, somebody is greedy, somebody has gotten jealous sometimes, somebody’s selfish? Do you think you would find that in your family?”

One boy said, “Yah, my sister.”

I said, “Leave your sister out of this.”

Somebody else said, “Granny!”

“And especially, leave Granny out of this. But what you are saying is this: ten minutes ago you said this is what’s wrong with the world. Then you said no, this is what’s wrong with the school. Now you say this is what’s wrong with your family.”

So, supposing you didn't go home tonight; you went down the road, climbed a tree or something and sat up in the tree all night and said, you know, the world's in a mess, now school's in the same mess, my family's in the same mess – they are proud, greedy, selfish (what was the other one?), jealous.”

I said, “Supposing you tried to sit up there all by yourself to work out how to put the world right; do you think by tomorrow morning, you might find that you are a little bit proud, that you sometimes get jealous and greedy and a little tiny bit selfish? Do you think you would find that?

And they were quiet, so I pointed out one boy who had been quite vocal earlier. I said (his name was Peter), “Hey, Peter, what about you?”

And everybody else said, “Yah, Yah.”

I said, “Look, the rest of you keep quiet. Peter, what about you?”

He said, “I don't know.”

I said, “Peter, that's not good enough. Yes or no?”

He said, “I suppose, maybe.”

I said, “That isn't good enough either. Peter, are you proud, are you selfish, are you greedy, do you get jealous? No maybe's; yes or no.”

He said, “Yes.”

I said, “What about you?”

“Yes.”

“What about you?”

“Yes.”

“What about you?”

“Yes.”

I said, “This is interesting. Twenty minutes ago you told me this is what’s wrong with the world. Now you are telling me this is what’s wrong with you. So what’s wrong with the world? I am.”

So where do you start to fix things? By blaming what’s going on? No. There has to come a time when metaphorically, if not literally, you and I have to look into a mirror and maybe we have to do it more than once, and we look into a mirror and say, “My biggest problem is looking back at me right now. My biggest problem is not my wife. It may sometimes seem that way, but it’s not. It’s not my husband. It may sometimes seem that way, but it’s not. My biggest problem is not my kids, my biggest problem is not my mother-in-law. My biggest problem is not my job I have to go to every week, it is not my government and it is not Osama Bin Laden. My biggest problem is me.”

Have you ever honestly realized that? The law of God, the weights on the net, have got to bring us to the point of saying to the Great Physician, “It is me that is sick.”

And we call that sickness sin. I have missed the mark. I am not what I was created to be. And I go on missing the mark. I know what is right; I want to do it, but I don’t.

I know it is right and I want to do it – sorry, I know it is wrong and I don’t want to do it, but I do.

On the other hand, I know what it right and I want to do it, but I don’t.

In me, Paul then says, in Romans 7, there dwells no good thing.

And it is these weights on the net that make us aware of our condition, our heart, that then gives us a reason to take the good news, the goodness of the good news.

The sicker a man or woman knows them to be, the better the medicine tastes, because this is going to fix me.

What’s the remedy? I am out of time, but very briefly this: that the problem is my sin is I have come short of the glory of God. Paul, in Colossians 1:5-27, talks about the gospel in its fullness that he is preaching, which involves a mystery that has been hidden up until now. But at last that mystery has been revealed, he says. He says,

“God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery” (this is the solution) “which is Christ in you” (living in you), “your hope of glory.”

Which does not mean heaven by the way – in Christian slang we talk about going to glory when people die. But glory is not heaven in the Bible. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” It’s the target we have missed – it’s the character of God.

So if sin is coming short of the glory of God, the solution, says Paul, is Christ living in you is your hope, your hope of hitting the target, your hope of being restored into the relationship you were created for.

And that means that we recognize that my sin has to be dealt with, that Jesus Christ came as a perfect substitute.

I had another conversation this morning with a man who said to me, “There are so many religions in the world. Why in the world do you say Christianity is the only one that is true?”

I said, “Well, they can’t all be true, can they, because they are very contradictory. And if Jesus Christ is true, He said, ‘No one comes to the Father except by Me.’ and if that isn’t true, because there are lots of other things that are true instead, then Jesus Christ is nonsense and what He said is nonsense, so totally ignore it.”

He said, “Yah, but how do you know it’s true?”

I said, “You have got to go back to who is Jesus. Don’t let your questions be a barrier to your finding Him. Sometimes questions are a very convenient excuse. “Oh, I have got my questions; you can’t answer them.”

But I said, “There has to come a moment when God opens your heart and your mind because no one can say, Jesus, Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

So do two things: keep asking the right questions – that’s important – but say, ‘God, if You are there, if You are real, if You open people’s eyes at all to see something they can’t see with their natural mind, then please open my eyes that I might see that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be, and that He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins. And so that in so doing we are able to be forgiven because, as our substitute He took our sin, all the penalty of it on Himself. And having taken our sin, He was buried and now makes possible our forgiveness.

But that isn’t enough. We are forgiven; that’s wonderful and we confess our sin. But He rose again now to live His life in us and to give us the strength and the ability and the power to be something of the people we were created to be – never perfect in this life, but that’s the gospel.

And as I finish, without having a chance to say more that I wanted to say about the remedy because I took too long talking about the law, but that's okay, we need to understand that.

But there may be some here this morning and although, for most of us, we are talking about what it is we are presenting – what is the message? What are we doing? How do we throw out this net? How do we corporately say, here's the net that we are throwing out? You put the weights on it and you put the floats on it and you make the mesh (which we haven't talked about) the right size.

But there may be some here this morning and you are not a Christian. Those two conversations I said to you before were from two people this morning – two men who both came to me and said, "Well, I am not a Christian and I am here today."

And there will be a number of you here like that this morning. Then you, this morning, maybe as God has spoken to you, have understood perhaps in a way you haven't before, why you need Christ. If you take gasoline out of your car, the car is not going to work; it'll come short of its expectation. You put gas in the car; it'll work.

The presence of the Spirit of God is the gas in our lives. Take Him out and that's the condition which we were born; we cannot function. Put Him back in and we have the ability to live as we were designed to live.

Now I'd love you to come to Christ this morning. I am going to lead you in a prayer just now and just a prayer that says, "Lord, I need You because I am a mess and it's not everybody else; it's me. I need to be forgiven. Please cleanse me and by Your Holy Spirit, come and live in my heart." And He will, He will.

I would love you to come and talk to us – there will be folks at the front at the end of the service and we would love to talk to you, pray with you and help you in that new response in which you have surrendered your life to Christ.

Let's mend the nets, make sure the nets are good and anticipate that God will bring people in because "I will make you fishers of men."

Let's pray together. And if you are here this morning and you have never yet given your life to Christ, I am going to do something I hadn't planned to do. I am going to pray a prayer and I am going to ask you to pray with me quietly in your own mind. Then after I have prayed that prayer, if you prayed it with me this morning, I am going to ask you to stand wherever you are in this building. Just stand to your feet. Others will be in an attitude of prayer, and let's be praying for those in whose hearts God is at work.

And then I am going to pray for those who will be standing that the Spirit of God will give a real confirmation with your spirit that you belong to Christ now.

Would you pray this with me if you have never yet surrendered your life to Jesus?

Lord Jesus, thank You so much that You created me, You gave me life, You gave me purpose. But I realize that I cannot live that purpose apart from You being in my life. I acknowledge that I am a sinner. I miss the mark again and again. Please forgive me. Thank You Jesus died to pay my debt. And on the basis of His death, I ask You to forgive me today, make me clean and thank You that Jesus rose again from the dead and, by His Spirit, will come and live in me. Please come into my life. Please be Lord in my life. Please give me the strength to live a new quality of life that makes sense and fulfills the purpose, which You made me.

Thank You for hearing me. In Jesus' Name.