

June 2007 Letting down the nets

On a familiar occasion recorded in chapter 5 of Luke's Gospel, Jesus was beside the Sea of Galilee. He gave Simon Peter this instruction: 'Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught' (a draught being a catch of fish). Simon replied to Jesus: 'Master, we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing'. But he does not leave things there. Since it is the Lord Jesus Christ who commands him, and in no way wishing to be disobedient, he adds: 'nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net'. So he does – and with what results! So many fish were enclosed in the net that it was breaking. And after help was summoned from another boat, the weight of fish, filling both boats, made them begin to sink! Eventually people, boats and fish all reached shore safely.

This principle of *letting down the nets* is of great spiritual significance in the Christian life. However much we have toiled and (we feel) made little progress; however weary we may have become; however much our spiritual vision and vigour has begun to wane, here is something we must persevere with – at Jesus' command, *letting down the nets*. What nets are these? There are many, but these are a few of the key ones.

We need to *let down the net of prayer*. How easy it is to lose our drive at this point. Yet Scripture calls us to 'pray without ceasing' and 'to pray, and not to faint'. The Puritan minister, Thomas Watson, writes: 'It is violence in prayer that makes heaven's gates fly open and fetches in whatever mercies we stand in need of'. Constant praying keeps alive in us the attitude of absolute dependence upon God and of needful humility before him.

We need to *let down the net of the gospel*. When calling some of his disciples who were fishermen, Jesus spoke to them of catching men. The gospel net is the best place to get caught – to be saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! And it is our business (whether we are seeing results or not) to keep on letting down the gospel net, preaching Christ to all, offering him freely to sinners.

We need to *let down the net of holiness*. This is another of our lifetime occupations – seeking to live lives that adorn the gospel, longing to have more of Christ formed in us, ever learning to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' and 'make not provision for the flesh'. No gains without pains!

And we need to *let down the net of patience*. The sort of patience which applies to God and asks for: 'Patience to watch and wait and weep, Though mercy long delay; Courage, our fainting souls to keep, And trust thee though thou slay'.

Keep on, dear saints, letting down the nets. It will not be in vain.