

Following Jesus

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Bible Text: Matthew 4:18-22

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If you have your Bible turn with me to Matthew chapter four. This text is very much in line with what we sang in the days of Elijah.

“We are the laborers in your vineyard declaring the Word of the Lord.”

This text says that if we follow Jesus in the following, we will become laborers in his vineyard. That is what has to happen. “Follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men, laborers in the vineyard.”

And that is the kind of task that we will be glad we were a part of when we come to the end of things. Tonight in the evening service—I forgot to mention that. We come out. We will sing, share a little bit, looking at 1 Samuel 28 where you find Saul who has had a tremendous career. He has been king for 40 years. He is coming to the end of his life. He did more, accomplished more, was more, more accolades, more honors, more glory than he ever would have dreamed. It just wasn't enough. It was too fast. It is nothing without transcendent purposes in human life, the columns won't add up. It won't make sense. It won't come together. It won't be significant. It won't prepare a person to die.

But if you become a laborer in his vineyard, if you follow Jesus then you will be ready and your life will have transcendent significance.

Let's stand one more time and read Matthew 4:18-22.

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he

called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.¹

Let's look to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, you tell us that the man is blessed who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, but the man is blessed does not stand in the way of sinners and that the man that is blessed who does not sit in the seat of scoffers. But rather the person who truly has your blessing is given by grace to delight in your words and to meditate on them day and night. And we at this early stage in the new year ask that you might increase our sense of delight in what you say in this coming year and that you might make it our meditation such that we will become like trees planted by streams of water and that we would be more fruitful in our service, in our witness, in our living and that we might see impact flow out of our lives as laborers in your vineyard because we have been transformed by following the Lord Jesus into fishers of men.

At the same time we have many obstacles in the path and many disappointment and many setbacks and many fears and many trials and we thank you, Lord, that you are with us always in these things, but not merely just to fix them, but that we might be transformed in the fixing simply by following after you.

So come and meet us to this great end. Encourage us with the privilege in spite of everything else that might be going on right now in our hearts and minds and lives, the privilege of being able to follow you in and through and from where you have brought us. We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Be seated.

The New Testament teaches us very, very consistently as believers to always think of ourselves in Jesus related categories, also God related categories, really, trinitarian categories. But very prominently, Father and Son related categories.

Our call to worship text this morning was chosen for that reason because as you find Paul writing the introduction to his letter to Timothy he introduces himself so clearly in Father and Son saturated categories.

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God.”²

So you have got the Son and the Father.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus [the Son] by the command of God [the Father] our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy my true son in

¹ Matthew 4:18-22.

² 1 Timothy 1:1.

the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.³

Have you ever seen? It was a number of game shows. But have you ever seen the game show *Wheel of Fortune* Pat Sajack, you know, does a little interview of the contestants just as the show begins. You know, what is your name and where do you live and what do you do?

And it is striking that most people who work for a company, they all work for a major company. You know, if they are a consultant, they are a consultant for a major investment firm or they work for a major medical center or they work in a major law firm. It is all major. It is big kinds of stuff that everybody does for a living.

But if Paul was ever on the show he would have been able to trump them all. You know.

“And what do you do?”

“Well, I am an apostle of Jesus Christ by the command of God. God came to get me. God signed me up. God goes with me. I work for God.”

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus.”⁴

Who is he?

Well, he is the one that has all authority in heaven and on earth by his own testimony. He is the one by the testimony of the author of the epistle to the Hebrews who upholds all things by the word of his power.

So Paul could say to Pat Sajack, “Yeah, I mean, I work for Christ and I work for Christ Jesus. You know, he upholds all things by the word of his power. He is holding us in existence right now, Pat, and the entire universe. That is whom I serve. That is whom I serve.”

Paul actually thought that way.

You and I are supposed to think that way. You and I are supposed to think that way.

Now our text for this morning tells the story of how 33 percent of the apostles came to be in that position. Fully four of the 12 are called into service in these few verses in Matthew chapter four. The call in one sense is marvelously simple, very unassuming, inspiring. But on the other hand their response is as a model intimidating, a little overwhelming. It raises us questions.

³ 1 Timothy 1:1-2.

⁴ 1 Timothy 1:1.

The story of their calling as it is told here... And by saying story I don't mean that it is a fable or a parable. This is actual history. It really happened. But it is not dragnet Joe Friday history. That is, the facts man, just give me the bare facts, one, two three, four, three in the afternoon came by said...

No, no. It is very carefully storied history. The story doesn't make it less accurate. The story makes it more meaningful because at the end of the day, you see, the Bible is never ever merely teaching us history. You are never supposed to come to an extra text and walk away with a history lesson. Though everything is historical, you are supposed to come to the end of the story and walk away with a theological lesson that comes out of what actually happened on the historical plane, but the theology is in the story and in the carefully told nature of the story. And we have that definitely happening again in this text.

In our passage for this morning we are commanded, slash, invited to be followers of Jesus unto the transformation of our lives. Commanded, slash, invited to be followers of Jesus unto the transformation of our lives.

Just three more or less factual statements about discipleship that can be drawn from this text.

Number one, there is such a thing as a calling that comes from Jesus. There is such a thing as a calling that comes from Jesus. Because of the way this passage works, you really can't go through it verse by verse because it is a parallelism. You have got two sets of brothers called and their callings are very parallel. There is a slightly different nuance to each one. But what you have to do with this story is run through it once and find a few things and then run through it again and note a couple of other things and then run through it a third time. The third time the thing that we pick up is really only mentioned once, but it is certainly true of each set of brother as they were called.

Let me read the text to you again.

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.⁵

Now under this there is such a thing as a calling that comes from Jesus, four observations.

⁵ Matthew 4:18-22.

First, note where the calling takes place with both sets of brothers. They are called at work. They are not at a series of special meetings. They are not at a synagogue service. They are out doing what they do to put food on the table. Peter and Andrew are actually in the act of fishing. They cast their nets. How it works, you cast out your nets. There is weights attached to the corners of the nets and the sides of the nets and the weights pull the nets down. As the fish panic and swim up, they swim upward into the net. When you feel the net has gone a certain distance, they yank a rope. The net is drawn together and they draw up whatever fish they caught. That is what they did. That is how they did it and that is what they were doing when Jesus came by.

James and John are at the end of the day we are told. They are mending their nets. They are done fishing. They are in the cleanup portion of the day.

When I was first married I worked in a manufacturing plant. Our shift ran from 6:30 in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon every day, 10 to four a little whistle blew. You had to let everything shut down and you spend the last 10 minutes cleaning up your workspace so that the guy for the next shift inherits a clean workspace.

And so it is like Jesus comes by at, you know, five to four at break parts and starts to have a conversation with somebody in the clean up portion of their day. This grand calling takes place within very mundane, every day circumstances. People are simply out there doing their job and Jesus comes by. And that is the second thing to notice.

The second observation: It is Jesus that comes by, Jesus to whom belongs all authority in heaven and on earth, Jesus whom we are told by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews upholds all things by the word of his power, Jesus comes by and Jesus invites us and Jesus calls us.

Anybody who follows Jesus follows Jesus by means of Jesus. If you are a follower of Jesus, it is because Jesus came and found you and brought you.

Now it can also be said Jesus came and the Father drew you to him. But that kind of language is the language of the Bible and you are a follower of Jesus because Jesus came and found you, as Jesus says to his disciples in John 15.

“You did not choose me. I chose you.”⁶

That is why you are a follower. Jesus came by. Jesus found us. And we are called to live Jesus related lives.

Thirdly, the calling is highly individual. He comes to Simon who is called Peter and Andrew. He comes to James. He comes to John. They are very much named out.

Nowhere does this individuality of the calling stand out more—let’s go back to our reference to the apostle Paul—than when you watch Paul’s calling in Acts chapter nine.

⁶ John 15:16.

Because in Acts chapter nine Paul is not by himself on the road to Damascus. He has his whole search and destroy team with him and they are going down to Damascus. They have got letters. They are arresting people. They are throwing them in jail. He is not doing that all by himself. He has got a whole team with him.

But when Jesus comes and meets him on the road he comes and meets him. Nobody else. Oh, they all hear things. They see something. They don't see and hear exactly what he hears, however. Here is, again, how it, the text goes.

Remember, it is, "Saul, Saul."

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.⁷

But they don't hear the voice talking to them. They hear the voice talking to Saul. It doesn't say anything to them.

"Saul, Saul, you go. You do. You meet me." Very individual.

When you came to Christ came for you, for you, to your work place, to your situation, to you.

Fourthly, Jesus' call is a combination of command, invitation. In the first two the command is emphasized. The text says, "Follow me," literally just "come after me." It is not the same verb as when they actually follow. It is different. "Come after me. Come after me." It is a command.

He comes by and he says, "Come after me." He moves on.

It is not, "Hey, what do you guys think? I mean, you have been around me a little bit." We know from, you know, John's gospel that Peter and Andrew had met him before. "I am gathering a group of guys. Why don't you think about it. Pray about it for a few days, you know. Talk to some trusted friends. See if you might be interested. I will be back, oh, let's say day after tomorrow and we will talk about the possibilities."

That is now how it is presented. He comes by and says, "Come after me." That is the emphasis in the first one.

⁷ Acts 9:3-7.

The second one, the emphasis is different. It is a little bit more what we would expect, at least terminologically. He simply calls to them. And calling in Matthew is not like calling in Paul which had the same emphasis of effectual, you are coming right now. Calling in Matthew is invitation. Calling in Matthew is the Billy Graham Crusade. It is, "Come. Come. You can be part of this if you like. Come."

Now the tension between those two things. Ok, which is it? Does he do one thing one time? No, I think they meld together and the tension is necessary. That is, it is this constant tension between how can there be an absolutely all encompassing sovereign God who moves every, you know, atom of the universe and at the same time genuine human beings who make real choices that they could righteously and meaningfully and rationally be held responsible for.

See, the Bible creates that tension and never pulls it down, never explains away one side or the other, just talks bout command, demand, sovereignty, effectual calling, real choices, real response to real words, both being the way life and reality are.

And that is how we have come and that is where we live.

And I ask: Where were you when Jesus called you?

Just think within your mind. If you are a follower of Jesus right now, how did that come to be? Where were you? What were you doing? Why did you follow?

Or if you are thinking about a particular ministry, how did you get into that? Where were you when you got invited or you got called to be a part of this particular ministry? And how did it work and why did you follow?

In this story it is told with a sense of almost nonchalance.

"While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he [found] two brothers."⁸

Jesus is just out taking a walk.

"While walking by the Sea of Galilee... two brothers."⁹

And then in verse 21.

"And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he [invited] them."¹⁰ He called them. And it was the call of God and they became followers of Jesus.

Secondly, there is such a thing as following Jesus.

⁸ Matthew 4:18.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Matthew 4:21.

I was surprised here. I thought when I punched in the concordance and watched how Matthew used the word “follow” I was going to find a lot of metaphorical usage of follow like you do in John’s gospel where at least the metaphor, it is metaphorical and actual. The followings are mixed together. In Matthew it is almost always geographical. You can’t even miss it because you have got unbelievers following Jesus all over the place.

So following is largely geographical. When he comes and says, “Follow me,” what he means is, “Move about with me to the geographical location that I move about to.

Now the reason for that, however, is related to what I expected to find, namely in metaphorical following where you allow Jesus to be shaping your life. Well, that is why you need to be in this setting in the same geographical location of Jesus because there is no ipods or tape recorders or CD players or radio broadcasts. If you are not around him, you can’t hear him and if you are not around him you can’t see what he is doing. So the only way to hear what he says and to see what he is doing is to be there.

So you have got to follow him.

But, as I say, when you go over to John’s gospel you find out that this business of following now has this double... well, it is geographical, but it is also metaphorical, paying attention to it, it is very Word of Christ related.

John 6:66 and 67, that famous text where everybody quits following actually doesn’t use follow language. It uses walk with language. But that is the point of it.

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with [Jesus]. So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?”¹¹

“Do you want to quit walking with me?”

Do you no longer walk with Jesus, clearly, no longer to follow Jesus?

“Do you want to quit following me?”

And then that is Peter’s, the volleyball set, for Peter’s famous response.

And Peter said to him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”¹² “That is why we are staying with you. You have the words. You have the words, the words that when believed bring forth eternal life, eternal transformation.”

Now a little bit later in John’s gospel, John 10:4, “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them and his sheep follow him for they know his voice.”¹³

¹¹ John 6:66-67.

¹² John 6:68.

You see? This is metaphorical. His sheep follow him because they know his voice. They pay attention to him because they recognize divine authority and divine eternal importance in the words of Jesus.

If you really believe the Bible is the Word of God, that is why. Nobody here has actually been rationally, conclusively, historically argued into an absolute confidence that in the Bible God speaks, because it can't be done. It can't be done. The best historical argument in the world are always provisional and open to future editing.

But that is not the kind of commitment that believers have to the Word of God. They believe they hear God speak from Scripture. Why? Because they hear his voice there. That is what he is saying. "My sheep hear my voice."¹⁴

When it goes out, they just say, "I know whose voice that is."

And for many of you, that is your experience and you wouldn't even begin to explain how that happens. You can't drill that into somebody else. You can't make that happen for somebody else. That is a miraculous thing. And it happens. And if you are really a believer it has happened to you.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."¹⁵

Back earlier in the chapter they don't hear the voice of strangers. They don't hear the voice of strangers. That is why I am not a Buddhist. I don't hear the voice of strangers. That is why I am not in Islam. I don't hear the voice of strangers. That is why I am not a secularist. I don't hear the voice of strangers. I am among the sheep. I know. I hear all the other voices, but this one, this is true. This is Jesus. This is God.

Now, all of that is what is at stake in staying geographically close to Jesus for these guys and go back to the passage.

Their response is two fold. It is immediate and it is costly. It is immediate and it is costly.

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."
Immediately they left their nets and followed him.¹⁶

Verse 22. "Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him."¹⁷

¹³ John 10:4.

¹⁴ John 10:27.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Matthew 4:19-20.

¹⁷ Matthew 4:22.

It was decisive. It was immediate. It was now. It was instant, instant, instant change and it was costly.

“Immediately they left their nets.”¹⁸ Entire source of income, everything they were used to, everything they knew much about.

Verse 22. “Immediately they left the boat and their father.”¹⁹

Now we are not going to have time to develop this at all, but I almost ask, you know, “What do you think Zebedee thought of this?”

“Oh, I am sure he was as pleased as punch.”

No, you are not. No, you are not. He may have hated this. He may have been mad at them for the rest of their lives for doing this.

Jesus said, “I did not come to call peace on the earth, but division. I divide father from son, mother from daughter, mother-in-law from daughter-in-law.” That is what he says.

Zebedee might have been really ticked off.

“Where are you guys going? You can’t leave me like this. We have got a business to run.”

Where did they go?

Luke five, the parallel is not exact. In fact, it is one of the difficult parallels to put together because the calling of all these four is placed into a fairly different context of catching a mass of fish in the first 11 verses of Luke five. But it ends this way by telling us the significance of the costliness better than Matthew does.

“And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”²⁰

You see, they left everything.

Now most people who are called to follow Jesus are not called to leave their profession that they are in. They are called to follow within their profession that they are already in. So, you know, business people are called to follow Jesus in and by doing their business in a certain way. And medical people and people in the law and people in the teaching professions and people in the trades and that is the majority [?]. There is still things to leave. There is still lots of [?]. There is still tons of change. But most people are called to

¹⁸ Matthew 4:20.

¹⁹ Matthew 4:22.

²⁰ Luke 5:11.

follow Jesus in the vocation and in the setting that they are in when he comes and calls them. But it still comes as the same thing. Come after me, follow me and they just go.

And you say, “Well, what did they see?”

They saw the divine significance of Jesus. That is what they saw.

“How did they see that?”

Miraculously, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, by what the Bible calls new birth. They saw it and they saw the absolute significance of Jesus and saw that he was the person to follow and that he was very, very, very worth following.

And I ask you. Have you seen that?

You say, “Well, you know, I am a... I grew up in a Christian home and, I mean, I am a follower of Jesus. I asked Jesus to be my Savior when I was 12 and I have kind of stayed there. I mean, I stayed with him.”

But honestly, do you see in Jesus someone of absolutely overwhelming importance, such that his Word is your command? And if he says, “Go,” then you go. And if he says, “Stop that,” then you stop that.

Is that the kind of relationship that you have with Jesus? He is just hugely, hugely, hugely significant such that he can tell you anything and he can send you anywhere. Are you a follower of Jesus in that immediate costly sense?

Thirdly, there is such a thing as being transformed by following. This is hugely convicting because the... Largely speaking, our failure here cannot be hidden. It is just obvious that there is all kinds of things malfunctioning within us.

I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, you know, the passages that every time you come across them they kind of poke you or prod you or stop you afresh and there is lots of them. I hope there is lots of them for you. There is lots of them for me. And this is one of them. Not so bad in Matthew account of it.

“I will make you fishers of men.”²¹

Mark’s parallel, though, adds one word that just kind of cranks it up a notch. He says—it means the same thing Matthew does, but he just clarifies it a little bit more.

“I will make you [to] become fishers of men.”²²

²¹ Matthew 4:19.

²² Mark 1:17.

See, in other words, “If you are following me, here is something certain to happen to you. You will become a fisher of men over time.”

It is just what happens. Where there is following this happens. You become, you become fishers of men.

It is not unlike work yourself up to running seven or eight miles a day and then run seven or eight miles a day, six days a week for the next three years trying to increase your time to the best of your ability and you will become a runner.

When you get to the end of that time you will be a different person when you run down the road than you were when you started. The person that started would not be able to stay with the person that you are right now for a quarter of a mile. And it is you. Both people are you.

But through the process, you see, of following this regiment, you have become, you have become something completely different.

You know, we spend a lot of time thinking about, you know, man, what is wrong with the church? What is... it is all kinds of things you could look at and there is a billion things wrong with the Church. There is at least, you know, like 450,000 wrong with this church. There is. There just absolutely is.

But what fundamentally, you know, why aren't we having more impact? Why aren't we...? Because we are not following Jesus? It is just that simple. Because when you have a group of people following Jesus you have a bunch of fishers of men and if you have a bunch of fishers of men, you have impact.

You know, as long as basically the Word of God and things consistent with the Word of God are coming off of the stage in the pulpit of any church anywhere, you have got the stuff of impact. If people... if it makes us follow Jesus.

I look at myself. I say, “How much of a fisher of men am I? After all these years, after all these books, after all this?”

I am shockingly disappointed, scandalous, scandalous.

The truth is there should rarely be a church where it would be hard to keep up with the building as multiplication takes place, as, you know, in our case, six, seven, 750 fishers of men immerse themselves back in to the sea every week. In every... you know, think about it. No evangelism program can do this. All of you, you have got a place this week where you show up. They just expect you to come. It is your office. It is your set of clients. It is your factory floor. It is your place. It is your employees. It is where you are supposed to be. And you show up as a follower of Jesus with the mission taking every thought captive to obey Christ as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians. That is the program. That is the program.

We are about to turn the corner. In a couple of weeks we will enter the Sermon on the Mount and I will just close off with this. Here is the stuff of becoming fishers of men. You know, here is... we will definitely come back to this much more in those weeks. We are about to slow way down as we enter Matthew chapter five. But there is... there is not a single person that you and I know, not one person who works for you, who you work for, who lives in your neighborhood that is not desperately serious about their own happiness. They want to know how to find happiness and they are having trouble. They are having trouble. There is not many people who work with you who are deliriously happy at least five days a week.

No, no. They are looking for it and they are having trouble.

Jesus comes along and says, "I know where it is. I can tell you how to have it."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."²³

You know, one of the reasons that you are so frustrated is that you are so stinking proud, to put it baldly. One of the reasons that you are frustrated, "Blessed are those who mourn,"²⁴ is that you don't care about your own sins and you don't care very much about what sin is doing for others. You think there is a bunch of morons wandering around you and they tick you off and they frustrate you all day. You don't see people as people in desperate spiritual trouble that bring tears to your eyes. That's trouble.

"Blessed are the meek,"²⁵ or the gentle.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness."²⁶

See, happiness, happiness, happiness, happiness. Just become this. Fish for men with it. Fish for men with it. And what will happen is impact.

"Follow me. I will make you to become fishers of men."

Who are you following? Whose voice do you listen to when you ask yourself: Where is happiness really found? What do I need to hear more of to be happier? What do I need to be more consistent along the lines of to be more satisfied? And where do you go? That is who you are following. That is who you are following.

If it is Jay Leno, you can call yourself a follower of Jesus. But if you think that Jay Leno knows where the happiness is, you are a follower of Jay Leno. He has got it for you. You are looking for it there.

²³ Matthew 5:3.

²⁴ Matthew 5:4.

²⁵ Matthew 5:5.

²⁶ Matthew 5:6.

But if you find yourself, “I need to be more spiritually poor. That is my trouble. I am too into me and my...” The Beatles lyric, “I, me, mine, I, me, mine, I, me, mine. I am too into I, me, mine. That is my trouble.”

You are on the road and you start to move and then you will start to have impact. That is the promise of the text. It is not “Follow me and [?].”

“Follow me. Actually follow me and something will happen to you. I will make you to become fishers of men.”

Let’s pray.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you would make us to become fishers of men. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear the wisdom and the wonder of your ways, of your words. And cause us to follow by your grace and mercy flowing into us by the indwelling Holy Spirit that Jesus purchased for...