

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.”

We’re going to do something a little different in this study, so it won’t actually be until the next study that we look at what Matthew wants to teach us in this text. For now, we’re going to do something that most Christians should not feel obligated to do in their own private Bible reading and study. You don’t need to do this on your own, but by us doing it together, I think it’s going to make a very effective and vivid point about how we need to approach our Bibles as the inspired (and wonderfully *beautiful!*) Word of God.

Let’s take a few minutes to look at all the decisions that Matthew made when he included this story (Matthew 4:18-22) in his Gospel. And by the way, these are the kinds of decisions that he was making *all throughout* his Gospel.

First of all, we know that there will actually be *twelve* disciples, but aside from the story of his own calling (Matthew 9:9), Matthew tells us only about the calling of these *four* disciples. This is just one *sample* account of many that could have been included (John includes the calling of Nathanael and Philip; John 1:43-51). So Matthew is obviously not just giving us a history of how Jesus came to have twelve disciples. Matthew picks a sampling of four, because that’s all he *needs* to teach us the lesson that he wants to teach.

Matthew has also decided to put this story at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee (the first major section in Matthew). But he didn’t have to! Luke also tells the story of the call of James and John, and Peter and Andrew, but *first* he includes a story about Jesus at a synagogue in Nazareth and the attempt to throw Him off a cliff (4:16-30), about the healing of a man in Capernaum with the spirit of an unclean demon (4:31-37), and about the healing of Simon’s mother-in-law (4:38-41). Matthew, on the other hand, puts the story of the calling of the four disciples *first* probably because he wants to give special emphasis to the lesson that it teaches. (It’s also important preparation for the Sermon on the Mount – which Jesus addresses *to His disciples*; 5:1) We will see over and over again that the Gospels do not put everything in chronological order. Sometimes Luke will put things “out of order” in order to illustrate an important point. Or Matthew might put things “out of order” because he wants to group several miracles stories all together.

John tells us that before Jesus called them, Simon and Andrew (originally two disciples of John the Baptist) had *already* spent time with Jesus when He was in Judea (immediately after His baptism; John 1:35-41). Luke implies that Jesus had already been to Simon’s house in Galilee and healed his mother-in-law (though Matthew actually puts this story later; 8:14-15). So here in Matthew, when Jesus calls Simon and Andrew (and probably also James and John), it’s actually

not completely out of the blue. They already knew each other. In fact, Matthew says that this is the Simon *who is called Peter*, and it was Jesus who had *already* told Simon at their first meeting in Judea that he would be called Peter (John 1:42). But Matthew doesn't bother to mention any of this because it's not relevant to the lesson he wants to teach. In fact, it could even take away or distract from his main point! If we were only reading Matthew, we *could* assume that when Jesus calls these four disciples, it was the first time they had ever met. There is nothing else in Matthew to tell us anything different. But we would be wrong to make a hard and fast assumption here because Matthew never tells us that they had *not* met!

Luke inserts into this story the account of a miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11), and he tells us that the two brothers, James and John, were actually *partners* in the fishing business with Simon (Andrew is not mentioned). But there is no hint of any of this in Matthew. There is no mention of the miraculous catch of fish and the two sets of brothers appear to be completely unconnected – because none of this is relevant to Matthew's main point.

Matthew's account is the closest to Mark (1:16-20; fifty-four of the words are exactly the same). In fact, Matthew probably had Mark in front of him when he was writing his own Gospel. But even here, Matthew made some of his own minor changes. (For the following comparison with Mark, make sure to look at the Chart on page 6.)

Matthew *adds* the words, "two brothers."

"He saw *two brothers*, Simon and Andrew his brother... he saw *two other brothers*, James and John his brother."

Obviously, it wasn't "necessary" to add these references to two brothers because the fact that they were brothers is *already* clear enough ("his brother")! It seems like Matthew is trying to create neat little parallels between the two calls. Notice how Matthew also changes "and Andrew *the brother of Simon*" to "and Andrew *his brother*" so that it will match the parallel. Why is he doing this? Is it to help highlight his main point?

Matthew *leaves out* the fact that when James and John left their father, they left him "in the boat with the hired servants." This also gives us a cleaner parallel between the two responses to Jesus' call. Obviously, Matthew doesn't want to "clutter" his neat parallelism with anything that is not directly relevant to his main point.

And then Matthew switches the word "immediately" to a different spot.

Mark: "And *immediately* he called them, and they left their father Zebedee... and went after him."

Matthew: "And he called them. *Immediately* they left the boat and their father and followed him."

This not only creates even *more* parallelism where Mark didn't have it, but, of course, it tells us a lot about how James and John responded to Jesus' call (*just like* Simon and Andrew responded to Jesus' call).

Finally, in verse 22 Matthew changed Mark's "went after him" to "followed him" so that it would match verse 20 and give us a more perfect parallelism. (By the way, "follow" is a favorite word and theme of Matthew. He uses this word more than any of the other Gospels.)

So are these changes also made to help focus our undivided attention on the main lesson that Matthew wants to communicate to us in this story?

There are several lessons that we can learn from all of this, and they are very practical because they show us how to read and how *not* to read our Bibles. First of all, it could be very easy for me to preach not Matthew, but a “*harmony*” of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In other words, when I preach on this text from Matthew, I could “supplement” it with all of the other information that we get from Mark, Luke, and John. Now first of all, this *can* be very helpful. Harmonies of the Gospels can help to show that in spite of the many *differences*, there are no *contradictions* between the Gospels. Sometimes by harmonizing the different gospels we can also get important background information that Matthew could assume his audience already knew, but Luke could not. A harmony of the Gospels can help us to create more of a timeline of Jesus’ life and ministry. But harmonies of the Gospels can also end up completely ruining the whole point of having *four* Gospels! We learn from Mark that James and John didn’t leave their father alone and without help. He was wealthy enough to have hired servants. And so on a side note, it seems like Mark wants to make sure we know that following Jesus will never come at the expense of “honoring” our parents (leaving them to a life of poverty). Matthew, on the other hand, is not interested in including anything not directly relevant to his main point – which he is trying hard to highlight with his perfect parallelism. Of course, a harmony of the Gospels would completely ruin Matthew’s parallelism! Luke inserts the story of the miraculous catch of fish because this was a powerful illustration that it was *Jesus* who would enable the disciples to be successful as fishers *of men*. And so Luke teaches that it is not ultimately by our own strategy and labors that we catch men, but by the miracle-working power of our sovereign God. But once again, *Matthew’s main* point here is not the future labors of these four men as “fishers of men” or apostles. It *is* an incidental point, but he’ll focus more on that later (Mat. 10). We know from John’s Gospel that James and John had already spent time with Jesus before they left everything to follow him. We could try to draw a lesson here by saying that they weren’t being impulsive or irresponsible by leaving everything to go follow a complete stranger. But yet again, this has no relevance whatsoever to the lesson that *Matthew* is trying to teach.

Look at all of these wonderful lessons that Matthew has left out! And so when a person who is reading through the Bible gets to the Gospels, he might just choose to read a harmony of the Gospels (even just to save time). But though harmonies can be helpful, we should remember that God did not give us one harmonized Gospel. Think about it! God, through the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, has given us four *separate* Gospels (no more and no less)! So it was *by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit* that Matthew placed this story first and not somewhere later on in the Gospel (like Luke). It was *by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit* that Matthew made his changes to Mark’s account in order to highlight his main point with parallelism. It was *by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit* that Matthew left out the background information about Simon’s and Andrew’s previous time spent with Jesus. It was *by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit* that Matthew left out any mention of Zebedee’s hired servants. It was *by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit* that Matthew did not insert the story of the miraculous catch of fish. And yet we know that the Holy Spirit did not leave a lot of holes in Matthew’s Gospel. So I have to conclude that our most important job is not harmonizing Matthew with Mark, Luke, and John, but learning to hear what *Matthew* is uniquely trying to emphasize and teach – by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

We also see that since these stories have been carefully crafted and placed with a very specific agenda in mind, we cannot “mine” them “willy-nilly” for random truths and miscellaneous lessons. In other words, these stories were not included to provide us with an infinite resource for creative applications and spiritual lessons. This is especially easy to do in sermons. And in the worst case scenarios, there are some sincere Christians who may routinely draw *unbiblical* lessons and conclusions *from the Bible*.

Finally, we can see that Bible stories are not meant to be springboards for us to go off on our own (indirectly related) rabbit trails and tangents. We may move from the text to a life lesson, and then after a while we’re not sure how we got the life lesson from the text! This is partly because we’ve been taught this way in some of our churches. But sometimes I wonder if it’s because we have not learned to truly appreciate the Bible *on its own terms*. Again, our main goal is to discover *Matthew’s* main point (because he clearly had one as an author who very carefully composed his Gospel!), and then we must faithfully strive to think, speak, and act accordingly – every day of our lives. There may be other “indirect” lessons along the way that we can legitimately draw from the text, but these should never distract us from *Matthew’s* main purpose(s) and agenda(s).

Now the point is *not* for us to be paranoid about drawing the wrong lesson or missing the main point. We’re still going to do that. And that’s why in dependence upon the Holy Spirit we read, and study, and consult good study aids, and listen to God’s Word taught. The real point is not for us to be paranoid, but for us to be freed up to let the Bible speak authoritatively *for itself*. Praise God we don’t have to try and make it be something it’s not!

Not only do we learn from all of this how to read and how *not* to read the Bible, but we can also come to see more and more the wonderful *beauty* of God’s inspired word – the Bible. Just think about the fact that the differences between the Gospels are not random! They are very intentional. And so they show us the amazing *care* that God has given to every last *detail* of His word. We can easily overlook this in our harmonies of the Gospels. Who would have thought that God would give us four Gospels! Let’s treasure each one individually!

We also see ever more clearly how the Bible has a very intentional and authoritative message that it is seeking to convey to us. We do not sit over the Bible “discovering” our own lessons and applications. The Bible sits over us communicating *God’s* authoritative agenda and message to us. We do not come to the Bible with our own program and agenda. God’s word comes to us with its own program and agenda. We need to do less in the way of creative “discovery” and much more in the way of simple and humble *listening* to the inspired Word of God on its own terms. If we will do this, we will find it to be a great, liberating *relief*.

In our church’s Articles of Faith we affirm that “we believe the Bible is the inerrant, *authoritative, verbally inspired* [even the individual words are inspired], *plenary inspired* [all of it is inspired], living word of God”. Let’s be faithful to apply this belief in our reading, our studying, and our teaching and preaching of the Word.

Indeed, why did I spend so much time on this topic? Because my ultimate goal is not just to hand out fish, but to help us all learn to fish for ourselves. There is a kind of preaching and teaching

that doesn't ultimately open up *the Word* to God's people. And so when God's people go home, the Bible itself remains a closed book – just as “mysterious” as ever. They still don't know how to read and study it for themselves. Now the point is not that every Christian should study just as long and hard as the pastor or always learn just as much on their own as they do under the teachers in the church. There is no reason in the world why every Christian should be expected to compare Matthew and Mark and discover all of the places and reasons why Matthew did something different. But as we see an example of this level of detail, it should very strongly convince us of the basic points that we've been trying to make.

The Bible has its own authoritative agenda. And this agenda is infallibly communicated to us through the inspiration of every last word and “jot and tittle”. So the ultimate goal of a message is not for God's people to go away saying: “Wow, that was a slant I've never heard before”, or even “that was a really convicting message”, or “that was a *good* message”. The ultimate goal is for people to go away saying: “Wow, ***I've just come face to face with the very Word of God in its fullness and purity and I have felt its power to transform me and make me more and more like Jesus. By God's grace I must strive harder!***” We need to pray earnestly that this is exactly what will happen every Lord's Day.

So... what is *Matthew's* main agenda for us in Matthew 4:18-22? What point is *he* trying to get across? What lesson is *God* wanting to teach us? Well, in the end it should be very clear – with or without all the observations we made this morning. Through his very tidy and very obvious parallelism, Matthew is trying to emphasize and picture for us *what all true discipleship requires*. And he definitely doesn't want us getting off target. But we'll come back to that in the next study.

Teaching our Children

1. Spend some time rejoicing with your children in the “inspiration” of the Scriptures. READ 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (preferably in the ESV or NIV) and 2 Peter 1:19-21.
2. Emphasize that *every single word* in the Bible is inspired (or breathed out) by God! (See II. E.; If your children are older, review the points under I. above)
3. Emphasize that because the Bible is God's Word:
 - ✓ It is true and infallible, without any errors or false teaching
 - ✓ Every chapter has a specific point and message that God wants to communicate to His people
 - ✓ It is authoritative over every part of our lives (For older children review II. F.)
 - ✓ It is powerful to change us and make us who God wants us to be (II. H.; cf. manuscript on website)

Mark 1:16-20

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee,

- A. he saw
 - B. **Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon**
 - C. casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.
 - D. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”
 - E. And immediately they left their nets
 - F. and followed him.
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And going on a little farther,

- a. he saw
- b. James the son of Zebedee and John his brother,
- c. who were in their boat mending the nets.
- d. And *immediately* he called them,
- e. and they left their father Zebedee in the boat *with the hired servants*
- f. and **went away after him** [cf. NKJV; NASB].

- ✓ Matthew has left out the *italicized* portions.
- ✓ Matthew has changed the **bolded** portions.

Matthew 4:18-22

While walking by the Sea of Galilee,

- A. he saw TWO BROTHERS,
 - B. Simon (who is called Peter) **and Andrew his brother**,
 - C. casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.
 - D. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”
 - E. Immediately they left their nets
 - F. and followed him.
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And going on from there

- a. he saw TWO OTHER BROTHERS,
- b. James the son of Zebedee and John his brother,
- c. in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets,
- d. and... he called them.
- e. IMMEDIATELY they left the boat and their father...
- f. and **followed him**.

- ✓ Words in all CAPS are Matthew’s additions.
- ✓ Ellipses points (...) indicate that Matthew has left something out.
- ✓ **Bolded** words show where Matthew has made changes.
- ✓ Underscored words show how the things Matthew deleted, added, and changed produced a perfect parallel in the matching letter (A.a.-F.f.).