

Jesus Calls His Disciples

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Go to Mark 1 with me this evening and I want to challenge all of us with some basic and simple truths as we look at the Lord calling those who will lead the founding of his church. Now, think about that for a moment. The infinite God of glory has chosen for the glory of his own name to save for himself a people out of depraved, lost, God-hating humanity and that's everyone, and the way he chose to go about this is just so fantastic, it's startling, it brings you to silence if you think about it. You and I would not have done it this way. He comes down from glory; he is born of the Virgin Mary, stepfather Joseph; he grows up, a carpenter's son in a lowly just really nowhere place called Nazareth. He's in a culture that highly esteems the great dignities of the leading class or the royal class and certainly the religious elite, all centered around Jerusalem but he's from nowhere Nazareth and God brings him to that point in time where he's ready to begin the assembling of his key leaders who will be the human instruments in the building of his church and he begins to call these men to be his apostles.

Let's look at that together and hopefully, hopefully, marvel again over these things we probably just read over and think, "Oh yeah, we know that story," but has it really sunk into us like it ought? Mark 1, beginning in verse 16,

16 As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 19 Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

Now, just a brief overview. First of all, we have Simon and Andrew. Of course, Simon was later named Peter, the rock, by the Lord Jesus himself, he became the leader of the apostolic band. It's very clear. There is no question about that. Now, he was an equal apostle but God has always had a chain of structure and command in his leadership team and we see that with the Jewish leadership of the Old Testament whether it's the order of the priests, the Levites, or whether it's the New Testament ordering of his churches, but this man Simon who became Peter became the leader and he's one of these driven

impetuous types. We teasingly talk about Peter sticking his foot in his mouth, about overreacting and being too impulsive, but it's amazing how God can take those weaknesses in us, get us under the Spirit of God and use us for the glory of God. It was almost like being born again again, that's not true but it was a help to me as a pastor when somebody said, "You know, you're obsessive compulsive in some ways." I thought, "You're kidding me." And they said, "Yeah, but if you'll walk in the Spirit, you'll get a lot done for the glory of God. God will use what could be a negative and use it for the good of God's kingdom." Well, Peter's kind of like that. Then Andrew, his brother, we see Andrew, he's the guy that's usually bringing others to Christ.

Now, we do know from John 1, this wasn't the first time they had met Jesus and we read these narratives and we think, "Oh, it happened just exactly like this." No, you're getting little tidbits and narrative sketches out of the whole novel, if you will, and so they probably had spent many hours, many days, weeks and months off and on talking with Jesus, him unfolded to them perhaps who he is, what the Father has called him to do. They are being drawn to him, certainly the Spirit of God is involved in that so they're coming to this point and then the Lord is going to come obviously and say, "All right, it's time. Follow me."

Now, I want to divide this statement in verse 17 into three parts: follow me, I will make you become fishers of men. First of all, follow me. Now, I believe they were already a part of Jesus' team, if you will, several months earlier but so far God's will was that they stay in their secular employments, take care of their families, whatever they did, until this particular point, now it's forsake all that you have and follow Christ. It's an amazing thing that this common guy, at least from an earthly perspective, from lowly Nazareth, walks up to two fishermen and says to them, "Drop everything. Follow me."

Now, the principles apply but God's not doing that today. God is not in human form walking the earth. He's not developing the apostolic band which had a one time ministry of establishing the Christian church and being God's human instrument to write for us biblical scripture. That's why we have the phrase in the Bible that says that the apostles' doctrine or the truth of the Gospel was once for all delivered to the saints. What does it mean? God had one season of time where he called one group of men through which he superintended through those men the doctrines the church would stand on until the Lord returned. Now, brothers and sisters, that is very important. That is something we stand on and we do not debate nor negotiate. God is not giving further revelation to help us understand who he is, what the Gospel is, or how the church is to function. It has been once for all delivered to the saints; that apostolic band of saints wrote it down in sacred Scripture and it has been preserved for us to this day and there is far too much going on in professing Christianity of this guy and that guy and now this woman or that woman, "Well, God told me. God told me. God revealed. God revealed." We need to go back to what our forefathers would always say, "Chapter and verse. What does the Scripture say?" and then we'll know if there's some truth in what you're thinking God's impressing you with. So Jesus is beginning to develop this apostolic band. He talks to these two men, Simon and Andrew, that he already knows and he shows his sovereign authority over them where he claims them for his service.

Then the next phrase, not only follow me, I will make you become. He says, "You're going to follow me and you're going to start changing. It's going to make a difference in you." I'm so thankful for your humility and willingness to follow me through these years as we have struggled and wrestled with trying to preach a Gospel and redefine Christianity and following Christ so that it's much more than, "I prayed a prayer or I walked to the front or I raised my hand when the evangelist said to raise your hand if you want to get saved." Those things may not be evil or wrong but they're certainly not enough to know that a person has become a true convert of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said to these fellows, "You're now my disciples and you're about to change. I'm going to make you become something different." Following Jesus changes a person. He's going to actually make these guys into the cornerstone, the foundation stones of the Christian church. Now, he's the chief cornerstone but they are foundation stones in the building of this church that you and I are still purposing by God's grace and God's Spirit to build upon.

Now, it's interesting for all of us to remind ourselves how far these guys had to go, and by the way, that ought to encourage you. I mean, they are crude, in many ways they are rude, they are naïve, they are immature, they are floundering from time to time, one step forward and two steps backward but they were God's choice. They lacked a deep spiritual understanding. There is no telling at this point just what they grasped. We know as we are preaching through the Gospel of Luke regularly on Sunday mornings, we see these guys being challenged by the Lord to get out of their earthly orientation of an earthly Messiah and an earthly Savior and get them into a spiritual mentality, get them into a heart changed perspective of what true Christianity is, not some physical external thing and so they lacked any real depth to spiritual understanding.

They lack a fervent sympathy. We see them not having a sympathy the way our Lord had sympathy but they'll throw in that. They lack a profound humility. We see them wanting to call fire down from heaven and consuming those who oppose the ministry as if they themselves weren't the products of grace and needed God's grace to help them understand. So we see them needing to grow in humility and they will grow in humility. They lack a forgiving spirit. One of the things that happens as we grow in Christ is we become humble and patient and forgiving toward one another. They lack a persevering prayerfulness. I mean, toward the end of our Lord's earthly ministry, he goes to the Garden of Gethsemane and it's got to be an incredibly difficult atmosphere for everyone. The Lord has drops of blood coming out of his pores, he's in such agony about the events that are about to unfold and he comes back to his apostolic band and they're asleep. Now, later after he dies on the cross, they get together and we see more persevering prayer but they are not there yet. They do not yet have unflinching courage. Peter and if not all most of these apostles will die a martyr's death yet at the beginning, that's not where they were. Peter denied the Lord three times when the pressure came on. Have you found yourself as a follower of Jesus Christ sometimes stumbling into situations where you'll bend, then you'll kind of mold to the world's environment; you'll go along with something; you'll participate in a gossiping conversation; 1001 things you might do that in effect are

denying your Lord? Do you find yourself not having the courage to not walk in the fear of man in that particular season?

Well, these guys did that too yet Christ displays his majesty, his power and his glory in calling these simple ordinary individuals, in this case fishermen, men who, by the way, the Bible points out are very full of prejudice and are very full of superstition and immoralities. Let's not just blow the new brothers and sisters out of the water when we find that they bring into Christianity a lot of silly and foolish superstitions. That's going to be the case. We would expect a humble spirit to be teachable, that's necessary, of course, and these men did possess a teachable spirit, at least to enough of a degree that the Lord could bring them along but they bring this stuff, these prejudices, these superstitions in there and God's going to do something incredible with them. As a matter of fact, a couple of verses, Revelation 21:14, "And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." There's an eternal glorified city that has these men's names on the foundation stones. Is that not kind of amazing to you? "Wait a minute, we're all products of grace and we're all equal before God and no man is exhausted in God's eyes." Well, I'm going to tell you something here, if God decides to exalt somebody it's his business. And he took these 12 ordinary nobodies with all their failings and weaknesses and carnalities and proneness to wonder and everything else and made something out of them and decided for his own purposes he would emblazon their names on the foundation stones of the eternal kingdom of God. Don't that just kind of, it does something to you to think about that. Why? Because he's the sovereign, majestic one who does as he pleases.

So he tells these fellows, these common fellows, "I'm going to tell you to follow me. I'm going to make you become, you're going to be changing as you follow me, and I'm going to make you fishers of men." You know, I didn't really realize this the first few times I studied through this but the phrase "fishers of men" was a common phrase in this culture. The teachers and philosophers of this day would often use that terminology to win people over as their disciples. They call themselves fishing men over to their persuasion. They would put out the bait, if you will, of their man-centered devious philosophies and people would buy in and they were hooked and they would catch them some disciples and that's part of what we find in our advertising world today as people throw out their hooks, they throw out their bait and their advertisements and lure us in and we take the bait and we have to have something, we have to buy something, we have to go purchase their product. Well, that's the same idea here, but Jesus takes that out of the secular world of the day, the culture, and he says, "All right, you guys are going to become catchers of men for my sake and for my kingdom." Jesus seems to set his seal on these Old Testament passages like Proverbs 11:30, "He who wins souls is wise." Or Daniel 12:3, "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever and ever." And like the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some."

Now, verse 18, what did they do? Jesus comes by, they've already had something of a relationship with him. They are common guys. We know quite a bit about that. In verse 17, "Follow me. I'm going to make you different. I'm going to make you fishers of men."

Verse 18, "Immediately," and the text means they just point blank did this, "Immediately they left their nets and followed Him." You know, we surrender to the Lord when we're converted and we don't know what our marching orders are going to be. Now again, it's very frustrating and I think it's a point of immaturity when people think that God is still speaking to people the same way the incarnate Jesus spoke to people. I just have not found in my 33 years of striving to walk with the Lord that the Lord just comes and "speaks to you," and tells you something to do. Now, if he is leading you and if he is impressing you, you need to go to the Scriptures, you need to get godly counsel, and mostly importantly you need to yield to biblical authority to get guidance, is this indeed God's will. What kind of, I have really worked quite extensively with people who believe God spoke to them directly and my experience was they continually just kind of ran in circles contradicting themselves all the time. Six months or six weeks, two months later, God is telling them something that really contradicted what happened earlier and it's hard to run any kind of organized ministry that way and so when Jesus said that to these guys in this setting, we know that he took the trouble to chronicle for us Scripture that gives us God's means for finding his will in today's world. I'm not denying the Spirit's leadership and impression, it just needs clarification with the settled word of God.

Now we come to James and John, verse 19. "Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets." Acts 12 tells us that James became the first of the 12 to wear the martyr's crown and John was that special one. Now, the Lord loved all of his disciples intensely but the Scripture does bear out there's a tie of attachment and understanding between John and the Lord Jesus that seems to have a specialness and a tenderness about it.

And then verse 20, what did they do? Follow me and verse 20, "Immediately He called them," and I'm convinced they too had a relationship with the Lord for some days and weeks before this. "They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and went away to follow Him." Again, we have instantaneous obedience. Now, one writer pointed out that this is especially interesting when you consider that James and John's mother, Salome, was probably a sister to Jesus' mother, Mary. That would make them first cousins so when you think about they're relatives, they had known this guy, probably watched him grow up, saw how normal he was. There's nothing in Scripture that bears out that the Lord Jesus didn't play games and do things that boys do. He never sinned but he was like other boys in many, many ways and they're first cousins perhaps. We don't know that exactly but it's very likely so think of the excuses they could have given. They say, "We know who you are. You're just the carpenter Joseph's son. You didn't come from the hierarchy of religious authority in Jerusalem. You came from Nazareth and you yourself are just a vocational carpenter and, by the way you're our cousin. I mean, we're supposed to submit to you?" And don't we wrestle with that in today's world, especially in the area of the line of authority and responsibility. "Wait, you're not better than me. You're not more godly." You know, it may very well be that I've seen young people, teenagers who were probably walking with God a lot better than their parents but that didn't change the fact, young people, that God says to submit to your parents and obey your parents. You see, you've got to believe God is behind all this. God says this. It's not a matter of can we argue, are we as committed, are we as dedicated as the person. No,

God meant for you to yield to them so these guys probably could have had a lot of questions about this but their quick obedience is not only to their credit but also shows that the Lord Jesus had a power and a majesty about him. Even in human flesh, there was a magnetic majesty that was appealing and piercing to their hearts and their souls.

We understand that possibly up to seven of the Lord's apostles were fishermen. Now, again, this is speculation, don't want to put a lot of emphasis on it, but could it very well be that the Lord saw in fishermen some of the character traits that would be needful as he was building a band of men to be the foundation stones of his church. Think about it, for a fisherman to be successful, true in that day and even true in this day, he had to have courage. You've got to go out there when it's probably dangerous out on the water. You have to have the ability to do teamwork or work together. Fishermen in this day had to coordinate themselves and pull those nets in and coordinate where they put them out, so they had to have a coordination of a group, at least to biblically coordinate with the group. They had to have patience. You go out to fish and you've got to wait sometimes. Stamina. Faith, believing that if we go out there and we work hard, we will have an increase. Tenacity. And for certain, professional fishermen couldn't afford to be quitters or complainers. I've learned in watching this thing for 33 years and again I've spent a lot of my energies in most weeks trying to encourage and mentor and disciple pastors and that's at their request and I have found that character in ministers is rarer than talent. I can find guys who are persuasive, who seem sincere, who maybe are powerful in their oratory skills and on and on and on you could go and, brothers and sisters, you've got to be mature enough to know that you would rather have a simple man who may stumble around but is full of God when he preaches to you then a powerful orator who doesn't have the spiritual and general character for the office of pastor. These men, we don't know all that much about their public demeanor and their ability to be persuasive, but we do know starting with their vocation, they probably had some good character traits or they wouldn't have made it very far as fishermen of fish. Jesus is changing them to become fishers of men.

Now, real quickly. I'm not going to take more than five minutes. I told you I'd let you out early and I'm going to do that. Let's just draw some conclusions for practical application just to talk about just for a moment, 1. When we become his disciple we change followships. I don't mean fellowship, I mean followship. I'm not sure that's a word but if I need one, I make one up. They're following him. To be saved means you begin following him. The day you become a Christian is the day you begin following Christ. It's not just an experience you had, it's a new lifestyle you began. That's why we are careful and we take time to lovingly and confidentially counsel with people who believe they have been wrought upon by the Spirit of God and have come to faith in Jesus Christ. We want to see that changed followship has come. You change from following the world, the flesh, and the devil, though that still works on you, though that is still a temptation, though you still sometimes yield to that, nevertheless, there is a change in where the primary anchor of your purpose now is, "I want to follow and please Christ." And a true believer has that attitude that says, "Please help me. Help me. Encourage me. Hold me accountable. I want to be on this journey with others."

If you could be saved without following Jesus, then Israel would have stayed in Egypt. Israel is a typology of the spiritual experience of conversion and when God said, "You're going to become my nation and my unique people," what did he do? He said, "But you're coming out of Egypt. You're leaving the pagan godlessness of Egyptian culture; you're coming to be a new people," and that's the picture of a Christian coming to Christ and coming out from and following in a different direction. If you could be saved and not follow Christ, then the prodigal son would have stayed in the pigpen. In today's viewpoint of evangelical Christianity, I suppose some would suggest that the boy in the pigpen would have prayed a prayer and then kept eating the slop. No, he had a change of heart and he left and began going in a different direction.

You see, a man originally followed God and originally fellowshiped with God in the Garden of Eden but Adam and Eve sinned there and then in Genesis 3:23, it's interesting, God, listen, God put a barrier so that man could not enter back in. Now think about that. You say, "Why don't men know God?" Men don't know God because God has put a barrier up. Now, I know in the tracts we've been taught and used and I'm not saying it's, how shall I say it, I'm just not comfortable with it, let me put it that way, that sin has put a barrier between God and man. Well, true, but God put the barrier up and told Adam and Eve, "You can't enjoy the oneness and the intimacy in paradise we once knew." And man has been trying in his own ability to force his way back in ever since. But God has only approved one way to reconcile men to himself and that's through the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in him and him alone. A believer comes to Christ, a disciple comes after him. Far too often in today's world we are long on membership but short on discipleship. We've tried to work on that for 30 years here and God has blessed our efforts but we'll never get done, amen? We'll still be wrestling and struggling and repenting and learning and hopefully reforming to be the church God has called us to be.

Well, you change fellowships and then you continue to change to be more like Jesus. Jesus said, "I will make you become." As you continue to follow Jesus, the sanctification process continues and you continue to change and he begins to change everything. Is it not amazing? Is it not amazing? I've said this before, there are just a few people around that have had the privilege of studying the word as many hours as you have given me to study the word and to be quite honest and I mean this honestly, I'm ashamed that I don't know more than I do know. But having studied and prayed and preached and I'm telling you, when I study to preach to you, I am asking God to work on me. That's just the way I do it and I want it to have an impact on me before I preach to you and I have to every week repent and work on stuff and say, "God, help this to be true in me." And yet there are days and times in my pilgrimage where God will turn the light on my soul and there will be a great big thing there that's wrong and I have to deal with it. You just keep changing. Have you noticed that? Bill Stafford, I probably need to get wild Bill back to preach to us again one day, Bill Stafford used to, he's 80 something now, his phrase is, "I thought I'd be spiritual by now." He said, "And I just keep finding myself weak and wondering and repenting and learning." Well, you keep on doing that.

Well, being like Jesus always involves bringing others to salvation. He said, "I'm going to change you but there's a particular thing here, you're going to become fishers of men."

Now look, God has not called any of you to the office of apostle. He has maybe called some of you to the office of pastor, but that would be rare, but all of you can be a fisherman's helper. All of us, all of us who are following Jesus are getting in on the team effort, the whole body life effort to see others come to Christ. In the last couple of weeks, you've see four baptisms up here and you've heard the testimony of the power of the Gospel. How in heaven's name can a follower of Christ see those testimonies and not feel, "God, somehow let me get in on that. I want to help that somehow." Now, when you come, you're helping that and when you participate in your small groups, you're helping that, and when you sit under the preaching of the word with a humble and repentant and spirit to grow and change, you're helping that, and when you give tithes and offerings, you are helping that but hands-on, we can still do more and we ought to have that stirring in our souls, "God, let me get in on that." It's strange, isn't it, that everybody wants the harvest but few want to plow. Well, we've got something called the Shoals Christmas Parade that is just right around the corner and it's a super easy thing that overwhelming majority of people would not be even offended by you asking them to come. Now, when they hear the truth we're going to speak and sing, the Gospel is offensive and we're not removing that because we don't have any business messing with his Gospel. But yet people would respond to that and that's the way you can show that, "The Lord changed me and is changing me and I want to be a part of being a fisher of men."

So I just wonder tonight if you where you would sit would say, "Lord, help me. Help me get four folks. Four people I can give a ticket to and say come and hear our Christmas musical this year as we read Scripture and sing the great truths of our God." I don't know why anybody wouldn't want to do that. I'm committing to ten, how many will you commit to? Not that we're saying music is the primary means. Brother Tom and I are in 1000 percent agreement that salvation is primarily through the sharing or foundationally through the preaching of the Gospel, however that Gospel truth can stir, it can be a seed planted and sometimes God even converts people. It's not the primary means but it's a means and it's something we can all get in on together.

Don't let pride get in the way. Sometimes we are not faithful as disciples because we think too highly of ourselves. That's pride. Sometimes we're not faithful disciples because we keep putting ourselves down, "Well, I'm not worthy. I'm unable. I'm too weak. I'm not talented enough. I'm not educated enough. I fail too many times." That's pride. Both ways, putting yourself up or putting yourself down, it's pride. You're thinking of self. Don't think of self up or down. Forget self. That's the goal of Christian discipleship is forget self and say, "Lord, I can be used by you." Sometimes human reason gets in the way. I think about James and John again, possibly kin to the Lord. They could have reasoned around how they shouldn't submit to him and follow him. There will always be buts and excuses but in our heart of hearts, if the Lord has saved you he stirs in your heart during messages like this where you say, "Lord, help me to become even better at being fishers of men."

Now, you're not going to define for your brother and sister whether or not they should witness the way you witness, whether they should preach the way you preach or share the way you share. Some of you are more John the Baptist than others and I'm going to tell

you, there's nothing more detrimental to the Gospel of Jesus Christ than people who try to be John the Baptist because the best I can check, God only had one. God didn't call many of you to be lawyers but he did summon all of us to be witnesses and as you follow Jesus, say, "Lord, who can I reach out to?" There are some out there and let's go get them for the glory of God.

Let's pray together.