

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

Follow Me

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Mark 1:16-20

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 1:16; that’s on page 836 in your pew Bibles. Last week we talked about the launch of Jesus’ public ministry. He went into Galilee and he said:

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15 ESV)

So Jesus said, ‘the wait is over, the time is now and the kingdom of God is at hand!’ The kingdom is as near to you now as Jesus. Therefore, he said, ‘repent and believe in the Gospel’.

Now here in verses 16-20 we see him beginning to build the believing community. He begins to walk along the shores of the Sea of Galilee and to gather to himself his first disciples. We will hear in this passage the essential call of the kingdom and we will notice also its incredible cost. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. (Mark 1:16–20 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

As I mentioned a minute ago the focus of this story is on the call of Christ to the disciples and also on the remarkable cost of following Jesus, we therefore organize our discussion according to those categories.

The Call

The first thing we notice about the call itself is that it is:

1. Initiated by Jesus

Now maybe that didn't jump out at you but it would have to a first century reader. In that culture Rabbis did not recruit students. Students applied to them. So for example, R.T. France says:

“Rabbis did not call their followers; rather, the pupil adopted the teacher.”¹

So this was weird – this was not how it was done and Jesus' remarked upon that fact multiple times. In John 15 Jesus reminded the disciples:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit (John 15:16 ESV)

This is one of the major stumbling blocks of Christian doctrine for many people. We want to believe that we are saved because we were smarter, more alert, more discerning or more deserving than other people. It bothers us that the Bible so consistently teaches that we deserve no credit at all for our salvation. God takes the initiative. God calls us. Christ chooses us! Its hard to think of anything more annoying to our human pride than that!

But here it is and this isn't the last time we will see it before this Gospel is done. God is the author of our salvation. You are the undeserving recipient of it. I know that strikes a blow at your dignity – it does also to mine – but there it is. This Rabbi chooses his own people – he takes the initiative. We don't come to him until he comes for us.

¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 96.

The second thing we see here about the call is that it is:

2. To specific people

Jesus didn't just stand up on a wharf and call out in a loud voice:

“If anyone wants to be my disciple, sign ups will be posted in the market today at 3 o'clock”.

It was not an open invitation, it was quite transparently a specific invitation. He said to Simon and Andrew, “Follow me.” He then went further on and found James and John – how many other fishermen did he pass on his way from Peter and Andrew to James and John? We don't know, but we know he moved on and he found James and John and he called them specifically.

Now that begs the question, why these men and not some others?

And of course it is very dangerous to ask that question and to be clear the Bible never answers it in the way or with the clarity that we would wish. The Bible says a bunch of things about what does NOT factor in to God's decision to call some and not others. Romans 9 for example reflects on this at great length. The Apostle Paul draws on two well known Old Testament stories to identify three things that DO NOT factor into the Sovereign election of God. He says:

not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.... And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works **but because of him who calls**— 12 she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” (Romans 9:7–13 ESV)

So drawing on these stories, Paul says that God does not choose people on the basis of race, social privilege or inherent goodness. He doesn't chose people just because they are biologically related to Abraham, he doesn't choose people just because they are “the older brothers” – or “the rightful heirs” and he doesn't chose people because they are already better than other people. Those things do not factor in to the Sovereign election of God. And that's pretty all of what Paul has to say about that. He concludes the section by saying:

So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (Romans 9:18 ESV)

God is in charge. He is merciful and intentional but he does not share his reasoning with you.

Which of course, drives us bananas but it should remind us that we have to be careful here about what conclusions we draw from the decision of Jesus to call these particular people. Most of the conclusions that we tend to draw from this story are actually wrong. We tend to hear that Jesus selected these men because they were ignorant and poor – but that isn't actually true. All that reveals is that we think fishermen are ignorant and poor – but it doesn't tell us anything about what fishermen were like in first century Israel. Historians tell us that fish from the Sea of Galilee was highly prized in Rome, in Alexandria and all over the Middle East. In fact James Edwards writes in his commentary on this section:

That fishermen in Galilee competed in the larger Mediterranean market testifies to their skill, prosperity, and ingenuity — and probably to their command of Greek, which was the international language of business and culture. The fishermen whom Jesus called were scarcely indigent day laborers. In order to survive in their market league, they needed to be — and doubtlessly were — shrewd and successful businessmen.²

So actually, most of what we were told about fishermen in Sunday School was wrong. These were middle class businessmen – James and John had servants, according to verse 20. So we really can't say much about why Jesus chose these particular people. We just know that he did. He knew them, he sought them and he called them. Jesus doesn't call people "generally" he calls people specifically and effectively. He knows them, he calls them and they come.

The third thing we see about the call is that it is:

3. To a life of following

The essential call of Christ is not "become a fan of me" or a "patient of me". Jesus is not a rock star and he is not your therapist. He is your lord and leader. Get behind me and watch, listen, learn and follow. This is a call to OBEY and SUBMIT. It is a call to come under and to get behind. In fact the Greek word that is used here literally means "get behind". It is the same word Mark uses later in the Gospel in that scene when Peter actually thinks himself qualified to rebuke Jesus. Do you remember that? Jesus started talking about how he was going to die on the cross,

²James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 49.

and Peter didn't think that was how the mission of Messiah was supposed to go so he drew up beside Jesus and started to rebuke him. Do you remember what Jesus said? He said:

“Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Mark 8:33 ESV)

Get behind me – same word that Jesus uses here. That's the call of discipleship. It is a call to obedience and submission. You don't get to give God counsel. Right? This is one of those things we have stopped talking about because we are worried it will offend modern ears. Modern ears like to think that they are in charge, that they get a vote and so we skip this part of the call to discipleship but its all over the Bible. Paul said this stuff to his people all the time! When people reacted to Paul's teaching on election for example, which we just read in Romans 9 he didn't entertain their objections, he said:

But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? (Romans 9:20 ESV)

You don't like this doctrine? Who cares?! You were on the road to death, you were dead in your trespasses and sins, you were deceived, blind and confused so we are not taking travel advice from you today. That's what Paul says and that what Jesus says. If you want to be a Christian then you give up your right to give counsel to God. You just listen now, you watch, you see what Jesus is doing, you hear what he's saying and you follow.

This is not a democracy, this is an intervention. This is a rescue mission. Hostages don't debate tactics with the SWAT team. You just thank God they showed up when they did and you get behind them – you hide behind them and you do and you go where they tell you.

That's the situation here. The call of the kingdom is a call to obedient, submissive followership. There is no other option, that's why Jesus said:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46 ESV)

Follow me. This is the offer and there will be no negotiation.

The fourth thing we see about the call is that it is:

4. To a process of becoming

Jesus says:

“Follow me, and I will make you **become** fishers of men.” (Mark 1:17 ESV)

This is Jesus saying, come as you are but expect to be changed. The Christian faith is about salvation but it is also about sanctification. It is about conversion and its about change. And its never about one or the other – they always go together. In fact if there is no change then there was no conversion. Saved people CHANGE.

he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6 ESV)

God finishes what he starts - saved people invariably change so if they don't change then they aren't saved.

And the order of all of that is important as well. The change comes AFTER you follow Jesus – it happens AFTER you submit to Jesus as your Lord and leader. That's important because many times I have had people say to me: “I'd like to become a Christian but I'm not quite ready. I have to quit smoking first, or I have to break up with my girlfriend first, or I have to give up drugs first.” But that is to get Jesus exactly wrong. Jesus doesn't say to the disciples: “Clean up your act and I will accept you. Learn to fish for people and I will find a place for you on my team.” That's not what the Gospel is! That's the opposite of the Gospel! The Gospel says:

while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 ESV)

The Gospel says:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:1–5 ESV)

Do you understand what that means? It means that grace comes first! It means that becoming happens AFTER converting! God saves us IN our sins and God saves us OUT OF our sins – that's why it doesn't make any sense to say: “I'll become a Christian after I quit smoking or

AFTER I break up with my girlfriend or AFTER I stop doing drugs. It is the power of Christ working IN YOU that will allow you through faith to do those things. If you could make those changes on your own, then you wouldn't need Jesus, but you can't, so you do.

You know that commercial for weight loss? The one that's on the radio right now; it says, if you could it yourself you would have done it already. Exactly! The same thing applies in the spiritual realm. If you could do it yourself you would have done it already – but you can't and you haven't and you won't so come. Come unto Jesus and be saved. Come unto Jesus and be changed by one degree of glory to the next into the same image as Jesus Christ – **this comes from the Lord** who is the Spirit – thanks be to God.

The fifth thing we see here about the call is that it is:

5. To a mission of gathering

Jesus says:

“Follow me, and I will make you **become** fishers of men.” (Mark 1:17 ESV)

Now most of us think that Jesus is just being cute here. He sees some fishermen so he talks in fishy talk – isn't that lovely! Jesus is getting down with the folks! But that isn't what is going on at all. Jesus isn't speaking fishy talk, he's speaking Bible talk. In the Old Testament there was a great prophecy in which God said:

“Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them. (Jeremiah 16:16 ESV)

Now, Jeremiah was a prophet who spoke to the nation of Judah and prophesied to them that they would go into exile for their sins and their unfaithfulness to Yahweh. The people were sinners, Jeremiah said, and so God was going to punish them but afterwards, because God is merciful, he would send out fishers who go and gather back a people for the Lord. This prophecy was a prophecy that one day God would begin to RECONSTITUTE the covenant community. He would send out agents into all the nations and gather out a remnant BACK TO GOD! And now Jesus points to these fishermen and he says: “How would you like to be a part of that!”

That's why they left everything to follow him! It wasn't because he talked fishy talk to them it was because he said – the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand and the fishers are being sent out. This was the most important mission in the world! And Jesus spent the next three years training them for this assignment and at the end of it all he sent them out to do what he had called them to do. He said:

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19–20 ESV)

That's what Jesus was calling them to. He was calling them to a mission that would change the world.

The Cost

Now I mentioned off the top that this passage is really about the call of discipleship and the cost of following Jesus. We've talked a lot about the call but we haven't talked yet about the cost. Now to don't get nervous, don't start looking at your watches now, because there is a lot less to say about the cost. In fact there is only one thing to say about the cost. According to this passage the cost of following Jesus is:

1. Everything (up to and including your job, your family and your life)

That's what the text says. Jesus called Simon and Andrew:

And immediately they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1:18 ESV)

Jesus called James and John the sons of Zebedee:

And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. (Mark 1:20 ESV)

They left their jobs, they left their families and they lost their lives. The Book of Acts tells us that James was among the first Christian martyrs. Acts 12 says:

Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. 2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword (Acts 12:1–2 ESV)

Church history says that Peter was crucified upside down during the persecution of Nero. Andrew was also crucified in Patras in Greece. John was the only one of those first four that was not killed for his faith – but it wasn't for lack of trying. Church history records that the Romans plunged John into a vat of boiling oil but it didn't kill him and so they sent him to the prison Isle of Patmos instead. That's what it cost these men to follow Jesus.

But it was worth it. Jesus never sugar coated the likely cost of becoming his disciple. Far from it, he couldn't have been more honest. He said:

In the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33 ESV)

You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. (Luke 21:16 ESV)

Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. (John 15:20 ESV)

you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Mark 13:13 ESV)

Jesus did not hide the COST from his disciples. So why did they follow him? Jesus asked them that once. Everyone else had gone away and Jesus asked Peter why he did not go away. And Peter said:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68–69 ESV)

Do you see that? When you know what you have in Jesus then you are more than willing to pay the price. Now keep in mind that this was not the first time that these disciples had seen Jesus. I told you last week that Mark skips stuff. He doesn't mention that when Jesus was hanging around with John the Baptist down by the Jordan that John had introduced Jesus to his disciples – the Bible says:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." 32

And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29–34 ESV)

A few verses later we find out that one of those disciples was Andrew and he went and told his brother Simon. These men knew who Jesus was. Not perfectly, but enough to know that they had found the hope of the world. And knowing that they would anything to be with him.

Do you remember the parable of the pearl? Jesus said:

the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:45–46 ESV)

What you give up for Jesus reveals what you believe about Jesus. This was not a sacrifice for the disciples, this was the opportunity of a lifetime.

Conclusion And Response:

When I was a little boy I remember being told a story – now I don't remember all the details but I do remember the point. The story was about a man who had a pet monkey. He came home one day and found that his monkey had somehow managed to get his hand stuck in an expensive vase. He didn't want the monkey to hurt himself and he didn't want to break the vase so he caught the monkey and he tried to pull the vase off of his hand but it would not come off. He tugged and tugged and pulled and pulled but it was well and truly stuck. Just as he was about to get a hammer to break the precious vase, all of the sudden the monkey's hand came out and the monkey grabbed at his shiny glasses. The man put his glasses back on and looked into the bottom of that vase and there at the bottom was a shiny little penny. The reason the monkey had his hand stuck in the vase is that he had been holding onto a 1 cent coin.

I think the point of that story is pretty obvious. It doesn't make sense to hold on to pennies at the expense of what is precious. That is the wisdom of faith. That's Christian math. Jim Elliot said once:

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”³

Do you remember Jim Elliot? He was that missionary fellow who lost his life trying to bring the Gospel to the Quechua people of Ecuador. He was murdered at the age of 28 by the very people he had come to save. But Jim Elliot would not have considered that to be a waste because Jim Elliot believed what Jesus said in Mark 8. Jesus said:

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? (Mark 8:36–37 ESV)

When you see what Jim Elliot saw in Jesus; when you see what Simon and Andrew and James and John saw in Jesus, then you will be willing to pay what those men paid to follow Jesus. You may not have to but you will be willing to. Because if Jesus is who he said that he is – if he is the Son of God and if he has come to set us free and to take us home – then who CARES what we have to give up in this life? What does that really matter when compared to the glories of eternity?

Paul said:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18 ESV)

Brothers and sisters; loved ones - hear me! Hear this the right way, hear this in love - don't be a monkey. Don't forfeit what is precious for the sake of pennies. Let it go! Give it up! And follow Jesus.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”⁴

Let's pray together.

³ <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/jimelliot189244.html>

⁴ <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/jimelliot189244.html>