

“Following, Fishing, and Walking by Faith:  
An Old Call For a New Year”

Matthew 4:18-22

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One thing that I find challenging in ministry is selecting a topic and text for a one time sermon. I prefer to teach through a book of the Bible because most of the work is done for you due to the fact you preach whatever comes next and you preach the topic and text that arises from that chapter. When you are just choosing a one-time topic/text there are a few things you have to ask yourself. One is, what is the Lord teaching you? One of the best sermons you can give is something that the Lord is or has been working on you or what is going on in the congregation and what encouraging word do they need to hear or what is going on in the culture, the issues that are arising and how does God’s Word address that.

As I was asking the Lord to give me some direction on what to preach, I landed on Matthew 4. The reason I landed here is because it’s one of the key texts, I think, in our faith. If you are discipling someone and trying to build them up in the Lord in their faith this is one of the texts you would want to go to, to help them understand what the call is that God has for them in their life. This is the reason for the title I chose for this study. I think a new year is a great time to reevaluate the Lord’s call in our own lives. Life gets busy and especially the holidays get busy. I understand how busy life can get and we can easily drift from the calling God has placed on us even when we’re doing good things but not the ultimate thing. The new year is a good time to refocus and assess what God’s calling is on your life. How am I doing on that calling and what adjustments do I need to make?

This text in Matthew 4 is our call to fish for Christ, to follow Christ and walk by faith. After I turned in my topic and text to preach on this, I got the news that our beloved pastor Frank Barker Jr. had passed away and went home to be with the Lord. I had mixed emotions and felt a lot of different things for he was dear to me as he was to many others, but then I had to reflect and think, ‘how providential, how fitting’ for the very next Sunday after his homegoing that I would preach on a topic that was so near and dear to his heart. Frank was certainly a man who followed Christ and who fished for men. I love hearing stories from a variety of people of how pastor Barker had led them to the Lord in all kinds of situations for he was a man who fished for men for God’s Kingdom. He was certainly a man who walked by faith. This study won’t be a eulogy for Dr. Barker, but I do think it’s fitting to honor him as we talk about this text and reassess and refocus for the new year on God’s calling. So, let’s get into our text.

Matthew 4:18-22 says [18] *While walking by the Sea of Galilee, He (Jesus) saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. [19] And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” [20] Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. [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 called them. [22] Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.* Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Lord, we thank You that we can gather together to study Your Word and to hear about the call to Christ’s disciples and the call of Christ in our own lives. Meet us Lord here in Your Word as we seek to apply it and live it out in our own lives. Father, make it clear to us, challenge us, convict

us and empower us to live out the call to follow You, to be fishers of men, and to walk by faith. We thank You for Your grace and mercy and we ask all this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

There are three calls I want to look at in this study. First, Christ calls us to follow. Second, Christ calls us to fish and third, Christ calls us to walk by faith. Let's look at the first call of Christ – to follow. We see in Matthew 4:18-19 is that Christ first calls Peter and Andrew to follow Him. To give some context, Jesus has begun His earthly ministry and He has been preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and He is beginning to call His twelve Disciples for a more intimate relationship with Him. He wants them to learn from Him in a formal way and He is calling them to the office of Apostle to establish His New Testament Church.

There has already been some relationship with these disciples for this isn't the first encounter for we know in John 1 that commentators think that a year earlier they were first wrestling with the fact that this could be the Messiah so there was already some context to this relationship. They are already grappling at the fact that this could be the One that all of Scripture is pointing to and here Jesus shows up a year later to call students to Himself, to learn from Him, to follow Him, to learn ministry from Him to equip them and empower them to set up this New Testament Church that He is about to usher in. So, Christ starts here with come and see. Now He wants them to come and follow Him.

Christ does two surprising things in this text. It wasn't surprising to call people to discipleship or to have disciples for that's what Rabbis and Masters in their day did, but what was unique about Jesus was that He chose His own Disciples. The typical pattern in the first century was for young men to choose a school led by a Rabbi or to seek out a teacher to learn the law of Moses, how they did ministry and how to live life. But it was the student who sought out the master, not the master the student. Jesus flips this on the head a little bit, where the Master is pursuing the student. We see here that Jesus is the great Initiator and we see this throughout all of Scripture, how God initiates toward us, initiates salvation toward us for it is He that is working and seeking. Christ is not calling us to the office of Apostle but He calls all of us to the little A, apostles, to be messengers of the Gospel of hope of salvation. It is His work.

A second thing Christ does that is surprising is that He chooses ordinary men. He doesn't choose the cultural elite or the intellectual elite. Typically, in that day it was the social and academic elites that were the ones accepted to these rabbinical schools or from a rabbi to learn from. If you hadn't been accepted to a school or by a rabbi by age 13, bar Mitzvah age, you would then be called to learn a trade in the family business. For example, fishing was a family business in those days. So, Christ calls ordinary men.

Commentating on Peter and John we see in Acts 4:13 it says, *[13] Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.* They weren't saying these men were illiterate or unintelligent but they recognized the fact these men hadn't been in formal training like the typical student of their day, but yet they had this boldness, this power and this Gospel confidence. They were learned because they had been with Jesus. That is a power verse but I can't help but ask myself 'do I live in such a way that my life bears evidence that I have been with Jesus?' Do others realize we have been with Jesus when they see the way we live our lives?

The implications of calling ordinary men are outstanding. Think about it. One, anyone can be chosen by Christ. It's not about you for you're not chosen based on your earthly value or worth. You're not chosen based on your intellect or how much money you have in the bank.

You're not chosen based on whether you're good or bad. You are chosen because of His sovereign grace and you are precious in His sight. It's His choice, for it's not about you. The other implication is that anyone can be used by Christ. The fact that He chose ordinary, regular folk, means that all of us fall under that category. Anybody can be used by Christ to build His Kingdom. Again, it's not about you, it's about Him.

I love I Corinthians 1:26-29 which says [26] *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.* God chooses the ordinary folk to bring Him glory, honor and praise. It's what the Lord does in us.

I love what William Hendriksen says in his commentary on the book of Matthew in this section of our text; 'Is it not marvelous that He was willing and able to take such common folk, four fishermen, etc., unlettered individuals and in spite of all their prejudices and superstitions, to transform them into instruments for the salvation of many, to make them leaders who by means of their testimonies would turn the world upside down.' That's what the Lord did with these men. He equipped them, empowered them and they turned the world upside down. The reason we profess faith today and worship on Sundays is because those men told others and we take part in their ministry – it's the Lord's work.

What does it look like to follow Christ? What does it look like practically? I want to give you two things here. One, we follow Christ through His means which is through prayer, His Word and the sacraments. We study the Word to know the mind of Christ. If we want to follow Christ, we have to get know Him. We get to know Christ through the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit as we study the Word – as we study His words. When we do this we get to know what He values, what He treasures, what He commands and what He calls us to do. We can't follow Him without studying the Word of God. We need to hear it preached, memorize it, meditate on it, pray Scripture back to Him and the sacraments – the Lord's Supper, baptism, corporate worship. We need to be in fellowship with one another, sharpening one another so we follow Him through His means.

When people start a new year they tend to look for devotionals to help them stay in the Word. I like the k.i.s.s. method which is keep it simple stupid. I have a lot of ambition but sometimes not the greatest follow through and I think we all have similar ways. What can we do consistently and faithfully? Can we spend even ten minutes daily reading the Word of God, praying the Word of God, having one thing from His Word we marinate on and try to apply? Devotionals are a great starting point but don't stop there. When you read the devotional which usually only gives on verse, don't stop there but use that has an introduction to the text and study that text in context for His Word is living and active. Find something you can do consistently, regularly and follow Him through His means.

Secondly, we follow Christ by following others who are following Christ. Paul says in I Corinthians 11:1, [1] *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* Follow others to the degree that they are following Jesus. This is the pattern the Gospel mounted forth throughout history – this life on life ministry. We call people to follow us as we follow Christ and we follow others as they are following Christ. We give ourselves to the discipleship of others. One of the great privileges of our church is that we have so many people to learn from. As a young pastor one of the things I take great delight in is that I have so many sharp and Godly men to learn from and equipped by.

The first year I was in the graduates and career ministry I met with a guy for lunch and he was unpacking some of the stuff in his life and I'm thinking 'I have no idea what to say to this guy.' I just prayed for him and told him I would get back with him. Then I met with one of the pastors in the counseling center and asked him how to help me with this guy I just met with. He counseled me so I could counsel this guy. I was following others as they followed Christ and we get the great privilege at our church to do that because of the great wealth of resources and people we have here.

When we first moved here my wife and I joined a small group of young parents because when we had kids we had no idea how to parent. One of the things that made a huge impact was that once a month we invited a couple to come in and we would ask them questions for about an hour and half to pick their brains on how they parented their kids. We would ask things like what worked, what didn't work, what would you do differently or again, how do you discipline, how do you do family devotionals – we followed others as they were following Christ.

Here are some questions that perhaps you can ask as you start this new year. Who will you be investing in? Who will be investing in you this new year? Who is equipping you? Who is walking a little ahead of you? Who is teaching you? You are never too old to be invested in. We all can learn something. We can all grow because none of us have arrived. Even Paul had not arrived for he says in Philippians 3:12, *[12] Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own.* Who are you learning from? What are you going to give away? The Lord is working in such a way that we have something to offer because we're following Jesus. Who can we equip? Who can we encourage? Who can we empower? In this new year how are you going to give your life away? There are so many different ways for you to get involved in the next generation, to invest in others.

Secondly, from this text Christ calls us to fish. In Matthew 4:19 Jesus says, *[19] And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."* Jesus, never letting a good illustration go to waste, uses their profession to picture the purpose for which He is calling them. Instead of catching fish they will now be catching people for His Kingdom. Christ doesn't only call us to learn but to do. James 1:22 says *[22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* As we learn, as we grow, we are equipped through the resourcing which leads to action and fulfilling the purpose in which He has called us to do.

Do you ever wonder why Jesus doesn't just zap you up after you come to know the Lord? He leaves you in and equips you, empowers you, gives you gifts, with a calling on your life and you have a purpose. You follow Him and the call is to become fishers of men. He gives us purposes, a mission and a call on our lives. There is a lot we could do and a lot we can give our time and money towards but there is one thing Jesus called us to do from Matthew 28:18-20 which says *[18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. [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."*

We are called to evangelize, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are called to enfold them into the church to help disciple, equip and empower them in their walk with the Lord. Then we send them out as Gospel missionaries as they exalt the Lord, which is the touchdown. Worshipping Jesus is the mission. I like what Becky Pippert says in her book Stay Soft which is a good book on evangelism (pg. 172); 'Notice what Jesus did not say – He did not say go therefore all you extrovert, all of you with dynamic communication skills, all who have

gifted evangelism skills, but as for the rest of you, just hang out and sing some hymns as you wait for My return. No, the Great Commission is a command for each of us. Jesus calls and commands every Christian from every culture, every nation on earth regardless of our gifts and personality types to be witnesses. We are people with a mission.'

I can sympathize with Becky Pippert here because I have heard that before – I'm not an extrovert, I don't have the gift of evangelism, that's out of my comfort zone. I usually respond when I hear one of these by saying 'I'm not very gifted at mercy but I still have to do it, for God commands me to do it.' God has given you a unique personality, a unique spiritual gift or gifts and we are to use what He has given us to fulfill His mission. If you have the gift of hospitality you can use that gift to be on mission to spread the Great Commission by using that gift. Whatever gift you have can be used to bring others to the Lord. I hear all kinds of stories from Chris Thompson of how others have come to the Lord through the mercy ministry here at Briarwood. How are you gifted? What's your personality? You can uniquely fulfill this call in ways that others can't so don't let that side line you. God has given us a mission and call to be fishers of men for His Kingdom.

What is evangelism and how do we fish? Becky gives more insight on this when she says 'Evangelism is the act of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ in word, proclamation, deed and in actions. It's an invitation of calling people to trust Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. Those three actions of speaking and living the Good News and inviting others to follow Jesus are essential to Biblical evangelism.' She is right. Often times we try to whittle down evangelism to one of those three things but to have a full orbited, picture of evangelism is to live it out. The saying goes 'people want to know you care before you they care about what you know.' People want to feel valued, that you know them. Serve them, love them and invite them to Christ, to the church and to your community group. Come have a meal together and discuss Christ.

What does this look like? I don't have time to unpack all the practicals of it but we have a variety of different things happening at the church that you can invite people to which is a great way to get involved and learn. Again, follow others who are following Christ. Some are very gifted in this area and some want to learn. How do you reach out? How do you minister? How do you share the Gospel? Can you teach me? Other ways to do this is to pray and ask the Lord of the Harvest to bring in the harvest, to draw people to Himself and lead me to the people You wish for me to share with and help me bring up the Gospel in my day to day conversations. Give me one person to have a spiritual conversation with today. You would be surprised how often the Lord opens that door but we have to be intentional about it and looking for it. Start with the people around you – coworkers, family, neighbors. You don't have to add anything to your schedule to be on mission for Christ, just be intentional where you are.

Here's the beauty. As was said before, it's not about you for it's the Lord's work. I know a guy who came to Christ from a football player who knocked on his door and said he had something to share with him. He literally took a Gospel track out of his pocket and reads it. It's probably the worst way to share the Gospel and when we train others to share the Gospel we don't train them to do that, after he was done reading it the man said 'I want that.' That's amazing! What do I have to do to be a Christian? It wasn't the man reading the track but the power of the Gospel changing lives. Do we trust the Gospel to do that? Are we willing to take steps out in faith? This leads me to my third point.

Thirdly, Christ calls us to walk by faith. Matthew 4:19 says [19] *And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."* There is a promise right in the middle for Jesus says 'I will make you...fishers of men.' He doesn't say you might be or if you work

hard enough you will be fishers of men but He says He will **make you** fishers of men. It's His work for Christ never calls us to something without giving us the tools and the resources to do it.

I love this verse in II Corinthians 9 where the context is in giving but it applies across the board. II Corinthians 9:8 says [8] *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.* God's grace equips and empowers you for everything and every good work. We are a people in process and Christ is ever sanctifying, equipping and empowering us for His work. Following Christ can be scary, intimidating and is not for the faint of heart. It's not easy.

Luke 9:23-24 says [23] *And He said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. [24] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."* Jesus is not mincing words here. There is a high cost to following Him and the cost is your life. It costs us everything for we have to lay everything down for Him and that's scary. It's uncomfortable. It's not convenient.

Think about the Disciples – Andrew, Peter, James and John. They were fishing, providing for their families and Jesus shows us and tells them to leave their families, profession and everything they know to follow Him for three years. That's a hard call but we know from the text that they immediately left and followed Him. If it had been me there, I'd be questioning Him to make sure I understood what He just said. I'd have so many questions. It's a high call. Christ demands everything of us. Following Jesus is risky, difficult and He even promises there will be suffering, therefore it takes faith.

What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 says [1] *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* To walk by faith means preaching to ourselves and acting upon the assurance and goodness of Christ and our eternal hope in Him. It's not about the amount of faith that matters but the assurance you have in the object of that faith, namely Christ. We are sure in Him. He is going to call you to kill sin. He is going to call you to put others before yourself, to serve and not be served, to share the Gospel, to believe in things that the world despises and maybe just move you out of your comfort zone for the advancement of His Kingdom.

Last month we commissioned a young family and they are leaving everything to move to the Middle East. He had a great job and they were very comfortable here. They are going some place that is difficult to minister in, very risky and taking the family so that others may praise Jesus. Why? Who does that? The world would look at him and say he was crazy to do this. You do it because you know who Jesus is and you know what He has done for you. You know what He is doing in you and you know what He has promised.

So how in those moments, when we're tempted not to follow, still follow? We remind ourselves of who He is, what He has done for us and what He continues to do for us and the promises He has for us in the future. One of the passages of Scripture that I go back to time and time again is John 6. This is right after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus is teaching and unpacking what is happening and talks about eating of His flesh and drinking His blood and people are all confused so much so that they say 'this is a hard saying, who can hear it?' And the crowds start walking away from Jesus.

John 6:66-69 says [66] *After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. [67] So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" [68] Simon Peter answered him, "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."* Peter is being honest. What He was saying sounds crazy, difficult and hard to get but where else do I go? Nobody is offering what Christ offers. There is no hope outside of Him. There is no assurance of eternal

life outside of Him. He will call me to difficult things, challenge me in ways I don't like but I know that no one offers what He offers so I will follow Him and trust Him. Our assurance in Christ is hope.

Romans 8 is passage I like to take people to who are struggling with the goodness of God. Romans 8:31-32 says [31] *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* [32] *He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?* The Creator of the Universe says He is for us. How do we know He is for us? How do we know He is good? How do we know our hope is secure in Him? It is because He gave His Son who exchanged His heaven for our hell to give us eternal life, eternal hope, eternal glory and all the riches and inheritance that come with Him. We get Him and it has come at great cost to His Son who took on the wrath of God because of our sins.

Romans 6:23 says [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Sin is separation from God and He took the full payment of the weight of our sin for eternity. Christ paid that for us. He took our place. He gave us His righteousness and His record and brings us into glory. He is good and if He does nothing else for us, that alone is worth following. The text doesn't end there though. He not only died for you, bought you and how will He not give us graciously all things? He gives us more than just His death, He continues to work in our life – empowering, equipping and sanctifying us. He is good.

He doesn't call us to a life of misery that we are tempted to believe when He calls us to difficult things. He is not a curmudgeon. He calls us to an eternity of joy and hope to the degree that we understand that there is no where else we can go and the only hope that we have is in Christ and that He is infinitely good. How do we know He is good? It is because He died for us and is working in us. To the degree that we get that is to the degree we will follow Him.

So, I will leave you with these last series questions. In this new year will you follow Jesus? Will you follow Him for the first time if you have never come to know Him? Will you trust Him? What hope do you have anywhere else? Who is offering the things that Christ is offering? Who is promising the things that Christ is promising? Who suffers for you like Christ suffers for you? Who leads you and shepherds you? Who leads you and empowers you? Where else where you go? If you have been following Jesus, will you continue? What is He calling you to do that is difficult, hard or uncomfortable? Will you fish for His Kingdom? Will you live on a mission? Will you proclaim His glory to the world? Will the Gospel sound forth from our church? Will you live intentional lives? Will you walk by faith in the face of all your uncertainties, in the face of your fears and doubts? Will you walk by faith knowing that it is Christ we live for, who gave up His heaven for our hell to give us eternal joy in Him? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord, we thank You for the time we could be together in this text of Scripture. We thank You for this old call for this new year. We pray we would live this out in our lives and follow Jesus, that we would fish for people and proclaim the Gospel to the lost and dying world. We will walk by faith trusting You at all times, knowing it is You who offers eternal life and hope, for we ask this all in Your Name, Amen.