

## Are You A Disciple?

Matthew 4:18-22

Dr. Sandy Willson

Thank you. It's great to be with you on such a cold day because everybody loves their church, because the furnace works and it's warm in here. You don't want to know how cold it is. I think I saw a couple of squirrels out there with a parka on. It was really cold, but it's warm in here. Not just because the furnace works, but because you work and it's always such a great pleasure to be in the warm fellowship of Briarwood Presbyterian.

And I have to say, having spent time with the Lamp Stand Conference this past weekend is just one more example of how Briarwood is serving the broader church and the broader world. I wish you could have heard the testimonies that I was hearing as young men and women were leaving your campus this weekend saying how greatly they had been blessed by your ministry to them, encouraging them in their ministries in many places in this country and even around the world. So, thank you to Briarwood once again.

Take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 4. You know that Dr. Doriani is taking us through the Gospel of Matthew - not every single text - but he's taking us through the Scriptures, beginning with the birth of Christ in Matthew 1 and Matthew 2. And then, of course, last week, Dr. Doriani took us through the temptations of Christ, where we saw the main point there is that we have a great champion who faced the devil and who championed over him and who one day is going to destroy him. So what a wonderful encouragement that is to us as we face temptations. Jesus was tempted in every way, just like we are, except without sin. And he's not just shown us the way, but he's won the way for us.

And now we come to his first public, strategic act in his ministry. Of course, he came publicly to be baptized. He went privately to be tempted for 40 days. Now, in public, his first strategic move and it is together a team, together as people. Jesus is determined to do this great work through the ages with folks like you and me. As we look at this text, which is the calling of those first disciples, there are some lessons in here that are very important for us.

So, I ask you to stand with me, we'll pray together, and then we'll read these five verses together as we study them.

Let us pray.

Gracious Lord, we are grateful to be in your presence with your people. And we ask Father that during these moments you will feed us, enrich us and nurture us, that we may be more faithful servants and worshippers of yours. Speak O Lord as your servants listen - through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Matthew 4:18-22 - Hear the Word of God...

***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.***

All flesh is like grass and all its glory is like the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of our God stands forever. Amen. Please be seated.

Matthew's Gospel is really a manual for discipleship. At the very end of the gospel you know, he says to his disciples, he says, I want you to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I've commanded you and Lo, I'll be with you always, even till the end of the age.

And in making disciples, we lead them to faith in Jesus Christ. And then we teach them. That's what Jesus said, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you. What is it that we teach them? Well, in Matthew's Gospel, gloriously, we're given five long expositions by Jesus Christ about what discipleship is. Next week, Dr. Dorian will take us into the Sermon on the Mount.

That's the first sermon (5-7). You get to chapter 10, you get a sermon on missions. You get to chapter 13, you get a sermon on the nature of the Kingdom about which Jesus speaks much. You get to chapter 18, you get a sermon on relationships within the church, a vital sermon. Then, in chapters 24 and 25, you get a sermon on the end times and how to live life in view of the end times. This is a discipleship manual, so it's a good question for us to ask ourselves **Are you a disciple?** Are you an authentic, genuine disciple? Does Jesus think you're a disciple? How would you know if you're a disciple? If you're not a disciple and you know it, how would you become one? So glad you asked these important questions because they're answered in this text.

So let's take a look at it and beginning with verse 18, in that verse, I want you to notice this Jesus calls ordinary people to be his disciples. Now, why do I say that? Because Peter and Andrew and James and John are very ordinary people. They're not particularly poor, although they live in a very poor culture in that first century in the backwaters of Galilee. But these men were basically small businessmen. They had a fishing business, but it was common labor. James and John worked for their daddy Zebedee in the fishing business, and they were along the Sea of Galilee, just living ordinary lives, kind of like you and me. And so you'll notice that, first of all, their occupations were very ordinary. And so God calls people whose occupations are ordinary.

Now, that may surprise you because you think about what is Jesus doing. He is ushering in the kingdom of God. If you ask for a job description to get involved in this enterprise, the job description is to destroy the devil. And if you want to know who you're working for or working with, it's the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. That's your CEO. Now, with those kinds of descriptions, you and I would probably say, you know, I don't think I'm qualified for this. It's a little bit over my head. But notice that Jesus goes to just very common people. The Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians of this. He described them this way. He said, I want you to remember where you came from. I want you to remember your calling. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. You say, thanks a lot, Pastor, for giving us this great compliment. You're calling us unwise. He says to them, not many of you were wise. According to worldly standards, not many of you were powerful, not many of noble birth. And he says God chose what is foolish to shame the wise. God chose what is weak to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised, even things that are not to show that no human being should boast in the presence of God. So,

take delight in the fact that yes, humanly you may be not qualified for this, but because of God glorifying his own name and his own grace, he intentionally calls people like ourselves who are very common.

And of course, you can find from the scriptures he calls a lot of people who are not only common but wicked and calls them to be his disciples. So occupationally, they're not very impressive and educationally they're not very impressive either. I remind you that the great evangelist D.L. Moody had a fifth-grade education. Some of the godly is sweetest, most effective and fruitful Christians I've known are people who do not have degrees of higher education. God, through Christ, calls people who are common in our occupational backgrounds and our educational backgrounds, and he calls people who oftentimes are really quite a mess.

Years ago, when I was pastoring a Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church, this would be maybe 40 years ago, we called a youth pastor, a bright young guy who was very effective - Lynn Teague - who now is retired. He served the youth ministry there and then went into adult pastoral ministry at Lookout Mountain and retired from ministry there. Well, when Lynn was sort of new on the job after one of our evening services, he said to all the parents of the youth group, you folks are invited to join us tonight. We want you to come to our youth meeting. And we're meeting down at the common in the big fellowship room there -- upstairs in the common. So, I thought, okay, this is no surprise. I happen to have a kid in the youth group. So, I go to the common and here's the game he had us play. He set up some chairs in a circle equal to the number of parents who were there - minus one. And he put around the chairs all his senior high youth group. So, you got to picture? All of those parents were sitting in a chair except for one person who had to stand in the middle, and the kids were standing behind us. And here's how the game was played.

The person who's standing in the middle has to state some sin they committed in their life. And everybody who also committed that sin has to get up out of their chair and go to another chair and whoever's left standing has to play the game next. So, the poor woman, one of the mothers of our youth group, was standing there and she said, "I got drunk on Saturday night." Everyone scrambled and these parents were bumping into each other, scrambling for a chair. So, next some poor guy was left standing, and he said, "I got arrested." Once again, the parents scrambled from their chairs trying to sit down in another chair. The next person said, "I spent a night in jail." The next person. Poor woman. She said, "I smoked a joint." So, by this time, several of us were exhausted and sweating, and I was sitting next to my friend Sam Smart and Sam said, Pastor, I just want to say at this point that I'm going to go ahead and confess my sin. If this goes any further, I'm going to start lying.

You get Lynn Teague's point? He was attempting to show all of the senior high students that if you think the way to be a Christian is to be straight and narrow or just like your parents -- well, let me tell you where they came from. They're just like you. These are the people that Jesus calls. It's a good thing to remember, isn't it, that Jesus calls ordinary people. So, if you're ordinary, you qualify.

Now, look with me at verse 19. We see now who he calls, but what is the calling? In verse 19 we learn this. Jesus calls his disciples to a new life. Now, I want you to notice his precise words in verse 19. If you look at the text, he first of all says, *Follow me*. Literally, he would be, Come after me. So, get behind me and follow me. Do what I do. Say what I say. Believe what I believe.

Now, it's true that Rabbi's in Jesus Day had students. They had disciples. So, this is nothing new. But let me tell you what's new here. What's new is that in Jesus' day, a Rabbi would never have recruited his

students. It would be below his dignity. The students always applied to the rabbi to ask if they could be a disciple. But notice that in Jesus' case, he's coming to you. He's taking the initiative and he's saying to you without your even asking. And you didn't even file an application. He says, come after me, you follow me. So, what does this mean? Well, as I look this up and I studied a guy who has a Ph.D. in New Testament to figure out what this text actually means. And so, I'd like to read to you what he says.

**Those who aren't following Jesus aren't his followers. It's that simple. Followers follow and those who don't follow aren't followers.**

You have to have a Ph.D. to say that -- it's really simple. Followers follow Jesus. We listen to him. We learn from him. We imitate him. And that's what it means to follow him, is that we do what he does., We look at the poor, the way he looks at the poor. We look at the wealthy, the way he looks at the wealthy with sympathy, but without being impressed by their wealth. We look at the world the way he looks at it, like sheep without a shepherd. We look at human beings the way he looks at them, as lost and destined for an eternity of misery unless they come to know Jesus Christ, we face in the way he faces temptation. We want to follow him in every way. This is what it means to be a disciple. You say, how do I do that? I think I've got the answer.

When I was in my mid-thirties pastoring Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church, there was an old men's Bible study, and they invited the new young pastor to join them, a Friday morning Bible study at Shoney's. And we just had breakfast. And then one of the old men would give a devotional, and I loved it. I just liked being around the older men. I knew I needed them. But I'll never forget the day when Ralph Peyton was going to give us our devotions. And Ralph said, here's my devotional -- **trust and obey**. And then he picked up his little jelly container and put jelly on his biscuit. They said, Ralph, so give us your devotional on those thoughts. He said, **that is** my devotional. No, Ralph, really, you can't be that short. But Ralph said, that's it. **Trust and obey**. That's a good thing about short sermons. You remember them. I remembered this from 40 years ago. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ. Just trust him. Do you trust him? You have to trust him to follow him.

He says, follow me. They didn't say, where are going? Now you trust him. Corrie Ten Boom says, "Never fear an unknown future when you have a known God." They trusted his character. They trusted His holiness. They trusted his love and compassion. They trusted his mission and purpose. And then they obeyed him. **Trust and obey**. Now, notice where this leads us, not only to follow him, but in following him we now become fishermen. We fish for people. He says, Come, follow me and I'm going to make you into something. I'm going to make you in to good, effective fisherman. Now, this is good news for me because I am one terrible fisherman that I am so bad fishing I refuse to go with you fishing because every time I go, not only do I not catch fish, but the people with me don't catch any fish either. So, I realize I'm a bad fisherman. But here he says, I'm going to make you a fisherman. Well, you may say, I know what he's talking about. He's talking about evangelism and discipleship here. He's talking about leading people to Christ. Pastor, I'm bad at that. Well, look at this. He says, come follow me and I'll make you one.

It's going to happen automatically. Now, why is that? Well, let me share with you four simple steps about how this happens. When you begin following Jesus, you become a fisherman. Let me tell you how that happens.

First of all, you get your entire life centered on Jesus Christ. If you want to do this whole exercise while I'm talking, you can do it. But if you just draw a circle and then cut that in the eight slices of pie, so

you've got eight pieces of by, that'll be your social life, your financial life, your intellectual life or spiritual life, your psychological life, your recreational life, your family life. Just all the main components of your life. What you do is in that big circle, you draw a little circle and you put J.C. (Jesus Christ) in the center. Jesus is the center of your life. He's the center of every component of your life. And when he is, this is the way it works. If Jesus Christ is at the center of your life, you cannot explain any portion of your life apart from your devotion to Jesus Christ.

Example -- Marriage. Now, I can tell you for sure there's no way I could explain what I've learned about marriage and how I've changed over 51 years of marriage apart from my conversion to Jesus Christ. I just have to tell you, I'm a very different husband as a Christian than I was as a non-Christian, and I was married as a non-Christian, so I know what I'm talking about. I can tell you my financial life changed significantly when I became a Christian, now primarily in my giving. But not only in my giving -- my financial management changed. I can tell you for sure my psychological life, controlling my anger, speaking kindness to other people who may not have done so with me, all those sorts of things in my psychological life changed dramatically when I became a Christian. So, the first thing you do is get Jesus Christ at the center of every component of your life, so that if someone were to ask you why you do this in that area of your life, they don't have to ask but once or twice before they hit Jesus, because he's the only explanation for why you behave and conduct yourself in that area of life that particular way. That's the first thing you do.

The second thing you do is love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus taught us that, didn't He? He said the first commandment is to love God with all your soul, mind and strength. The second is likened to it. Love your neighbor as yourself. You're making friends with people regardless of their faith or their religious convictions. You love your neighbor, you genuinely love them, and you make friendships with them at whatever level is available in that friendship. That's number two.

Number three, you're honest, and here's why this works. If I have Jesus Christ at the center controlling every component of my life and I'm making real friendship with you, the only way we're friends is that we have honest conversations. And if you get to know me as my friend, you're going to hit Jesus.

That's the reason it was simple with Paul -- He just said seven times in his epistles, *Imitate me*. Do as I do. If you follow me, you'll hit Jesus. So have honest conversations and center your life on Christ. Make genuine friendships and speak the truth. Be honest with friends.

Now, fourthly, you tell them where you met Jesus, and you introduce them. Now, you, some of you here are very well trained in sharing your faith in Jesus Christ. You're gifted at it, and we're all grateful for that. Some of us are not as gifted and feel a little nervous about it. So, what do you do? You just tell them -- you've got to come to my small group. I mean, I've learned so much there. You've got to come to my Sunday school class. You got to come hear our preacher, Dr. Doriani. He is really fantastic. Just come with me and we'll go to lunch afterwards. It's called inviting.

Those four things happen when you become a genuine disciple, that's what Jesus says. Say, come follow me and we will turn you into something. I'm going to turn you into a fisherman, someone who reaches out to people because that's what happens to disciples. So the question is, is this happening for you?

Sometimes we don't quite know what our vocation really is. You think your vocation is to be a physician or to be a business person, or to be a lawyer or to be a teacher? Those are your occupations. Those are

your sources of gainful employment. That's not your vocation. The word vocation comes from the Latin word "vocare," which means "to call." Here's your vocation. Follow Jesus and fish for people. That's your vocation. All of us, when we come to Christ, He immediately gives us also our vocation.

What life is all about? Why are we here? Your occupation is not only secondary, but relatively insignificant. It doesn't really matter what your occupation is. Now, I'm grateful that in my case, Dr. Doriani's, case, our occupation and our vocation merge very tightly. And it's simpler for me. Some of you are having to integrate your occupation, your vocation in more sophisticated ways, and we try to help you learn how to do that. But nonetheless, my vocation is not to be a pastor. My vocation is to follow Jesus. Being a pastor is my occupation, and it comes from inference, from a vocation. That's what we learn here that Jesus calls his disciples to a new life, a new calling. Do you hear Him calling you?

Thirdly, look with me versus 20 and 22, and we learn this. The call of Jesus demands our response. It demands a response. Look at the first word in these verses. Verse 20 --the word *immediately*. We must respond immediately. Now, it is true that Peter and Andrew and James and John were aware of Jesus before he showed up at the Sea of Galilee because their teacher, John the Baptist, had been talking about Jesus for a while and had been directing them to think about Him. But here was the moment where they knew that Jesus was calling them to come after him and to engage in his kingdom business. And they immediately did so.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I understand because I did the same when I was 25 years of age. I took time to think about this, and in my own case, I probably read some books and talked to people for about six weeks from the time I heard the challenge to become a Christian until I actually became one. And I have to say I tend to come at things head first. I'm a very logical person, so it was my head first and then my heart was following my my head. And then after that, my head follows my heart. But I know what it's like to need to think about and consider things and maybe read and study and ask questions. I understand that. But here's what we also need to understand. When we say let me think about it – it's fine – as long as you realize when you say, let me think about it, that equals "no". The answer for now is no until you say yes. And so, these men were ready immediately to follow Jesus. And that's the response, since that is appropriate for one who would indeed follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

I've mentioned D.L. Moody with his fifth-grade education, and he was a cobbler by occupation, if you want to know. Very common man but began to be used uncommonly by the Lord. As you know, on the day October the eighth, 1871, he was preaching at his church and had one of the largest assemblies that that Church of there ever, ever gathered on that Sunday night for their worship service deal, Moody preached a sermon about looking to the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation, making a decision to follow him. And in that service, he said, I want you to think and pray this through and I want you to come to next Sabbath prepare to give an answer. But he never sang the closing hymn to that service. And the reason was because the great fire of Chicago had broken out and the sirens busted up that service quickly. And over the next 48 hours, most of Chicago was destroyed, including the Moody Church, the YMCA, where he did much of his work and other other locations. And most tragically, thousands of lives were lost. Moody said before, God, I will never do that again where I tell people to take a week to think about it. I don't know if you can live through this week. So Moody from thereon, always called upon the people to respond to Jesus Christ now... today is the day of salvation.

And I've learned from Moody to say, now is the day I pray you'll make your decision to walk with him closely today. Immediately. Drop your nets.

This leads us to the next issue of our response. It's not only immediate, but it's radical. Why do I say that? If you look at the text, Peter and Andrew are leaving their means of employment.

Now, it doesn't always mean that for you that when you become a disciple of Jesus, that you leave your means of employment. Normally we pastors recommend you to be transformed in your occupation. You'll be a different woman. You'll be a different man in the occupation, you'll be a different student. But you normally stay in the situation in which you were called as Paul teaches us, I Corinthians 7. But here you notice these men left their means of employment. It's a radical move. And not only that, but James and John left the old man with the business, departed and left him with the nets and the boat and everything else. And here's what we learn. Ladies and gentlemen, you may not change your job. You might not leave your home. But anything that comes between you and the Lord Jesus Christ is to be left behind. Anything, including family. This morning during these baptisms, I shed a tear. I just thought it was so tender. These young parents bringing these children they dearly love and thanks be to God. They gave life to their children. They didn't destroy them and they love them. They cherish them and the affection as you watch these parents hold their dear ones to their chest is quite remarkable.

But here's what we learn from the Scriptures. Jesus taught his disciples this in Matthew 10. If you love your mommy and your daddy more than you love me. He said, You're not worthy of me. And then he turned to the parents. He said, If you love your little boy and your little girl more than me, you're not worthy of me. And if you don't choose to take up the instrument of execution, the cross itself and come and follow me, you're not worthy of me. Do you realize how radical this calling is? And for those of us who answered the calling some years ago, we need to be reminded this morning how immediate and how radical our trust in obedience is to be to be a genuine disciple.

Some years ago, and I'll close with this, I was I think it was during the Reagan administration, I was invited to go to the presidential prayer breakfast in the Washington Hilton big banquet room, and the President is there and some special speakers and senators and congressmen and all the rest. And during one part of the program, the moderator said, would you just turn around and greet the people around. You get to know them. I was a young man at the time. There was another man right behind me. He was younger and I introduced myself to him. I said, tell me about yourself. He said, well, I grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family. I said, really? Yeah, because there are plenty of Jews and Muslims and other people at the Presidential Prayer breakfast. I said, Well, that's great. I said, So you're a practicing Jew? And he said, well, I am a practicing Christian Jew. I said, really? How does that happen? He told me how he came to Christ. And I said, well, how did you develop after that? He said, well, I decided that I needed to learn the Bible. And so, I enrolled in Moody Bible Institute. And I said, Were both your parents Orthodox Jews? And he said, yes, indeed. I said, how did they react to that? He said, they told me if I did that, they would disown me and I'd longer be their son. I said, well, what did you do? He said, I went to the train station with my mother. She was pleading with me the whole way not to go and get on a train. She walked with me down the sidewalk to my door on the train, grasping my hand. He said, the last time I saw her I was peeling her fingers off my hand so that I could get on that train and go study the Bible and learn about Jesus Christ.

Now, I realize that almost none of us have that kind of experience, or do we have that kind of experience where Jesus Christ is number one and there is not another close second. We're authentic disciples. Jesus calls common people just like you and me, very sinful people like you and me. When he calls us, he calls us to a radically new life to follow him and make disciples.

And our response is always to be immediate and from the heart. Radical. That's authentic discipleship. No one here does it perfectly, but that's North Star for us. That's where we want to be. At the end of the day, these four men, three out of four of them went to their death. Two of them died on a cross, literally, for being faithful to Jesus. One of them was beheaded by Herod of Agrippa you know, in chapter 12 as James and John, who loved his congregations, was exiled from them on the island of Patmos because his faith in Jesus Christ. All four of them wouldn't change a thing. They are in the midst of his presence glory in him and so grateful that they got the call and that they answered it.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that in this room we hear your call because you call your people. Lord, if there's anyone here who has not yet answered that call, we pray today would be the day and that it would be a radical new life for them. Your Grace, for those of us who gave you an answer years ago, but who maybe have drifted off the path and have been following other things and other people. May we get back on the path? Walking in the steps of your sandals, feet, living life the way it is meant to be lived in Jesus Christ, and may your grace rest upon every one of us until we see you, Lord Jesus face to face... how glorious it will be. Making our prayer joyfully. In Jesus name, Amen.