

## Follow Me – Matthew 4:18-22/Mark 1:16-20

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### I. INTRODUCTION

I want you to join me for a moment on a tour of Jesus' new hometown: Capernaum on the northwest shore of the beautiful Sea of Galilee.

SHOW PICTURES OF CAPERNAUM AND THE SEA OF GALILEE

Having just recently moved to this new home base in Capernaum, Jesus – one seemingly ordinary day to the untrained eye – took a walk on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. Do you like to take walks and enjoy the beauty of God's creation? Well, I have good news: *so did Jesus!* In fact it was quite an important priority for him to regularly break away from the crowds and spend long times of solitude in quiet, uninhabited places. He would go to these places to pray...to leave behind the bustle and noise and constant demands of other people, for the purpose of listening to and talking to his Father and the Holy Spirit.

So in reality Jesus was not truly alone. He was always in perfect, peaceful communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and these times in the quietness and beauty of creation allowed him to keep perspective, breathe in the love of the Father and the Spirit, and discern their will and where they were leading him. These times seem to have re-energized Jesus and they always led him back to re-engage with people with renewed capacity, rather than making him want to stay away forever from all these sinful, selfish, demanding people.

Recently as I was reading Scripture it jumped out at me how much Jesus enjoyed the beauty of his creation. He liked being in beautiful places that provided glimpses of the glory of God. And it makes sense considering it's his creation and that he created intensely beautiful things that each provide a little glimpse into his glory and creativity. And Jesus never made the mistake, as many people often do, of worshiping creation itself. Instead, creation reminded him of true reality and of the Father's power, love and goodness.

You may have noticed in the gospels that Jesus spent a lot of time in gardens. In fact, gardens seemed to be his favorite place to meet with and train his disciples. When Judas betrayed Jesus, we're told in John chapter 18 that he knew he would find Jesus in the garden because he often met there with his disciples. But today, we find Jesus walking along the shore of a beautiful lake; not retreating from people this time, but seeking certain people out as the Spirit directed him...people who would spend a lot of time walking with him and learning from him in gardens and in many other places... *disciples* they would be called. And in what we'll study today, we're actually going to get a really good definition of what's involved in being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Mathew chapter 4, verses 18 through 22, where we'll see what happened as Jesus was walking along the shore on this ordinary working day in the fishing town of Capernaum. Let's read the passage to begin:

***18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, [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.***

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word. Holy Spirit, guide us into truth as we study this morning.

## **II. TWO SETS OF BROTHERS FISHING**

Well, let's start by looking at the main characters involved in these simple, but profound verses describing an actual event that took place on a certain day in real history...a day when two sets of brothers were just going about their ordinary jobs in the family business...fishing and getting ready to fish. One set of brothers, Simon and Andrew, were already casting out their fishing net, while the other set, James and John, were busy mending nets in the boat with their dad. The Mark account of this same event tells us that there were hired servants there as well. It

was just business as usual in ordinary life, a day just like many of us will experience as we go to work tomorrow.

A little more digging in Scripture also leads us to Luke chapter 5, verse 10, which reveals that these two sets of brothers already knew each other well and were actually partners in their fishing business. We also remember from what we've so far studied in the gospels that Simon and Andrew had already met Jesus before this day on the beach and had spent a significant amount of time with him. They'd already seen him perform miracles and heard him teach with great authority. Andrew was also one of John the Baptist's disciples who heard John identify Jesus as **"the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."** Tradition maintains that John was the other unnamed disciple of John the Baptist who also heard him proclaim that truth about Jesus. But even if that's not the case, Andrew and Simon had surely shared their experiences with Jesus with their friends and fishing partners, James and John. And this helps us understand why these two sets of brothers responded so quickly to Jesus' invitation in these verses. This wasn't just a random person showing up on the beach and asking complete strangers to drop everything and follow him with no questions asked.

### III. THE INVITATION TO FOLLOW

So we have a little background on the characters now and a little context to better understand what was happening here. Let's take a close look now at what Jesus actually said in his invitation to these two sets of brothers. In verse 19, we see it. He simply said: **"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."** This is an invitation you're probably very familiar with and have heard many times throughout your life in sermons and Sunday School and in your own study of Scripture. But I want us to put all that aside for a few moments today and look at it with fresh eyes. And I actually want to use Mark's quotation of this invitation from Jesus which includes one additional and significant word: the word, *become*. Mark 1:17 quotes Jesus as saying: **"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."** In this simple invitation, we learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and what will happen to us when we fully choose that path.

First, notice that Jesus said, **"Follow me..."** Really, that's the only thing he asked them to do, isn't it? **"Follow me..."** To be a disciple is simply to follow Jesus. This

means you are not a disciple if you are not actively following Jesus. What does it mean to follow someone? Well, have you ever tried following someone in another car through a big city like Portland? The person in the car you're following is the only one who knows how to get to where going and if you lose them, you're quite likely to end up lost in some sketchy part of town. What do you need to do to prevent that from happening? You need to keep your eyes on the car you're following at all times. Stay close to it. Don't get sidetracked with the impressive skyscrapers. Don't pull over at an interesting looking store. Don't try to take shortcuts. You get the idea.

To follow someone you need to keep your eyes fixed on them. You need to watch what they're doing and where they're going. You need to follow the path they're taking. You need to stay close so you don't lose track of them. You need to trust that they actually know where to go better than you. You need to be careful not to get distracted by other things or people that lead you away from the one you're trying to follow...people that may tell you they've found a better path that will be more fun or more scenic or will get you there faster.

A disciple of Jesus is someone who actually follows him in the way I just described...a person who has become convinced that Jesus is what they want and need, and who has decided to follow him everywhere in life, learning from him and letting him lead. To be a disciple is to give up "following our nose wherever it goes," and take up following Jesus wherever he goes. And as we do that, notice in the second part of Jesus' invitation what begins to happen. He says, "***Follow me, and I will make you...***" Isn't that a relief? As I take up following Jesus, he goes to work on me. Suddenly I'm no longer the one trying to make something of myself. How often are we trying to do that in life? Well, when we follow Jesus we can leave that behind for good and breathe a long sigh of relief. He takes up the work of transforming me and changing me and bringing growth and accomplishing his work in and through me. All I do is keep my eyes on him, stay close to him, listen to him, trust him, and let him teach me and take me where he will.

Thirdly, we notice in these verses that significant word, *become*. "***Follow me, and I will make you become...***" This indicates *a process*. We learn that it's going to take some time. Processes do that, you know! Becoming something new is a process and it's carried out by Jesus Christ himself. We certainly see this being true with Jesus' disciples while he was on earth. They were with him day and

night for 3 years and throughout that time we see great growth in the disciples, but also lots of immaturity and lapses into self-centeredness and difficulty grasping the big picture of what Jesus was really seeking to accomplish. But then think of the book of Acts where the disciples taught by Jesus and empowered by the Spirit were entirely different men as compared to who they had been on this day when Jesus invited them to follow him. They were still imperfect and still made mistakes from time to time. But as they simply followed Jesus and walked through life with him, he remade them into people filled up with the fullness of God and accomplishing his purposes with power.

And finally, let's look at the last part of Jesus' invitation to discipleship. He said, ***"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."*** As they would follow Jesus, what was he going to make them become?... *people gathering other people to follow Jesus as well...fishers of men*. In other words, people who had found that following Jesus is everything they had ever hoped for, the easy yoke and the light burden and the path to rest for their souls, and who thereby couldn't help but invite others to follow him as well.

My friends, we so often get this idea in our minds that sharing the good news of Christ with others – making disciples – is something we really should be doing, but that we really don't want to do or are too afraid to do. It can be the source of endless guilt for each of us. But do you know what the remedy to that mindset is? *Follow Jesus. Follow Jesus. Follow Jesus*. Walk with him, live with him, learn from him, let him be the focal point of your life, let him lead you and love you, and he will make you into someone who longs to share the joy of following him with everyone around you and whose life is so different that it will create endless opportunities to provide others with a reason for the hope that you have.

I could stand up here all day and tell you that you should be evangelizing – making disciples. I could make you feel guilty about not doing it over and over again, but that will never get you there. I might be able to ruin your Sunday, but by Monday life will go on and you'll be no closer to wanting to share your weekly guilt trip with others. But if we can catch the vision of simply following Jesus everywhere in life...and if we actually begin doing it...we're going to find that it is the life that is truly life...that following Jesus, listening, learning and doing what he tells us is the abundant life in God's kingdom...the easy yoke and the light burden...and we will long to share it with others.

#### IV. THE BROTHERS' RESPONSE

Well, I want to wrap up these verses by briefly looking at how the two sets of brothers responded to this invitation from Jesus. First, we notice that it didn't take any heavy thought or require a few days to think about it. In both cases, the brothers responded *immediately*. They dropped what they were doing and started following Jesus. What little they had experienced previously of being with Jesus or just hearing about him had already convinced them that he was everything they wanted...just as he is also everything you and I want as well, whether we've come to that conclusion yet or not. Just think about how those who lived and walked with Jesus for 3 years – those who knew him best – think about how they loved him so deeply and longed to be with him every moment. Being with Jesus, learning from him and being loved by him was the best thing they had ever experienced and he quite literally changed their whole lives and priorities.

Secondly, notice that the brothers left their boats, their business and their family to follow Jesus. In other words, they left behind things treasured by the world and they disappointed some people. Zebedee was probably a little miffed that right in the middle of the workday his sons just up and walked off the job. And yet, these brothers were willing to do these things to get after following Jesus. And more than just willing, they were happy to do so and didn't have to spend a week listing out the pros and cons and adding up what it was going to cost them financially. Instead, they knew they had found hidden treasure way more valuable than anything offered by the world and they were willing to give up whatever was necessary to obtain it.

And similarly, if you and I choose to really follow Jesus with our heart, soul, mind and strength, undoubtably many things in our lives and priorities will have to change. Jesus is not calling all of us to go quit our jobs. If he does, please do it. But for most of us that is not what he's calling us to do. However, truly following Jesus will cost us something as Jesus so clearly taught us. A life of following Jesus will look very different from how the world around us is living. It will lead to a rearranging of our lives and a shifting of our priorities and focus. It will lead us to godly choices that may cost us dearly in worldly terms. We will disappoint some people and perhaps even be mocked as foolish or impractical or living in a dream world. But whatever it will cost us is so worth it and when all is said and done we

will never regret the choice to simply let following Jesus be the full focus of everything we do.

And while we commonly become concerned about the cost of discipleship, what we really need to consider is the cost of non-discipleship...the cost of choosing not to fully follow Jesus. Dallas Willard does a great job expressing this cost of non-discipleship. What will it cost you if you choose not to follow Jesus or to sort-of follow him, at least when it's convenient or fits into your schedule? Dallas says:

*“...the cost of nondiscipleship is far greater...than the price paid to walk with Jesus. Nondiscipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10). The cross-shaped yoke of Christ is after all an instrument of liberation and power to those who live in it with him and learn the meekness and lowliness of heart that brings rest to the soul.”* (Quoted from the book: “The Spirit of the Disciplines” by Dallas Willard.)

The cost of not following Jesus through life is great indeed.

## **V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

Well, as we close today, I want to ask you: Can you now define what a disciple of Jesus is? Let me sum it up for you in case you missed it: *A disciple is someone who follows Jesus, is changed by Jesus, and becomes a person who joyfully and naturally gathers others to follow Jesus.* I hope and pray that every person in this room will choose to fully follow Jesus, whatever that looks like in your life right now, and that as we do, we will each discover the joy and abundant life that only comes through following him, being remade by him and becoming people who invite others to do the same. There is nothing better in life than this, my friends! May the Holy Spirit convince of that. Let's not miss out on all Jesus has for us and the glory of life filled up with him and immersed in his love.

***Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)***