

Lesson 11: Immediately They Followed **Matthew 4:18-22**

Memory Verse: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt. 5:7).

Text: ¹⁸ And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him. ²¹ 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. He called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Monday

The text I want to draw your attention to this week is Matthew chapter 4 verses 18-22. The title of the lesson is “Immediately they followed,” which comes from verse 20. It is my hope that you will embrace this vision of this text for the glory and the love of Jesus.

John MacArthur reminds us in his commentary of an old parable that preachers have shared for decades. It goes like this: “On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks were frequent, a crude little life-saving station was built. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted crewmen kept a constant watch over the sea. With no thought for themselves, they went out day or night, tirelessly searching for any who might need help. Many lives were saved by their devoted efforts. After a while the station became famous. Some of those who were saved, as well as others in the surrounding area wanted to become part of the work. They gave time and money for its support. New boats were bought, additional crews were trained and the station grew. Some of the members became unhappy that the building was so crude. They felt a larger, nicer place would be more appropriate as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots with hospital beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building.

“Soon the station became a popular gathering place for its members to discuss the work and to visit with each other. They continued to remodel and decorate until the station more and more took on the look and character of a club. Fewer members were interested in actually going out on the lifesaving missions, so they hired professional crews to do the work on their behalf. The lifesaving motif still prevailed on the club emblems and stationery, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club held its initiations.

“One day a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in many boatloads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty, bruised and sick; and some had black or yellow skin. The beautiful new club was terribly messed up, and so the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside where the shipwreck victims could be cleaned up before coming inside. At the next meeting there was a split in club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club’s lifesaving activities altogether, as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted on

keeping lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that, after all, they were still called a lifesaving station. But those members were voted down and told that if they still wanted to save lives they could start their own station down the coast somewhere. As the years went by, the new station gradually faced the same problems the other one had experienced. It too became a club and its lifesaving work became less and less of a priority. The few members who remained dedicated to the lifesaving cause began yet another station. History continued to repeat itself; and if you visit that coast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.”¹

That is a painful illustration of the history of the church. But despite how many people and churches leave it off, the work of evangelism, of spiritual life saving, is nonetheless the purest, truest, noblest, and most essential work the church will ever do. “The work of fishing men and women out of the sea of sin, the work of rescuing people from the breakers of hell, is the greatest work that Jesus has ever called His disciples and His church to do.”²

The writer of proverbs tells us, “...he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30). And the prophet Daniel proclaims, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Dan. 12:3).

After Paul was converted, his own great concern was evangelism - for building up the movement he had formerly tried to destroy. He wrote, “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.” He wrote “Thus for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:14-16). Though he was called to be God’s special apostle to the Gentiles, Paul had such an overwhelming desire for the salvation of his fellow Jews that he said, “I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3). He wanted and longed for people to be saved.

Have you lost the vision of the church as a life-saving station, or are you one of the few still clinging to it? How would you know this about yourself? _____

What about your church? Is it actively fulfilling the mission of Christ? Are you part of the effort? If not, why not? _____

¹ *MacArthur*, p. 111.

² *Ibid* p. 112.

Tuesday

Evangelism has been the heart beat of faithful Christians throughout the history. And there are several important facts that come to us from this text regarding evangelism. The first one is this:

1. Jesus called His first disciples to be fishers of men (v. 19). The text says, “Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’” That term follow, *akoloutheo* in the Greek, specifically conveys the idea of following a master as a disciple with a **commitment to imitating the one that is followed**. Jesus had come to the earth to seek and to save the lost. He had come to preach the Gospel and be the Gospel. He had come to reach out with compassion and love, to win the hearts of men and women and turn them back to God, and He was calling His disciples to follow and imitate Him, to be fishers of men.

It is true that Jesus has the power and the ability to accomplish the work of proclaiming the gospel by Himself. He could do so today, but that is not His plan. He could have done the work alone, but He never intended to do it alone. From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus’ plan was to use disciples to win disciples. It is also true that He calls on His disciples to do other things, but the very first thing that He called them to do after repentance and faith was to become fishers of men.

And notice that Jesus did not simply command His disciples to become fishers of men, but promised that He would **make** them fishers for men’s souls. As he later would make clear, that promise was also a caution to them. Not only was He willing to make them soul winners and disciplers of others, the truth was they could never be effective disciplers - or effective disciples - without His presence and His power. “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.” “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations....and lo I am with you always even to the end of the age.”

So Jesus called His first disciples to follow Him and to imitate Him by becoming fishers of men. The picture that Christ draws of fishing is a beautiful one, not only because it was the occupation of the first disciples, so that they could readily understand what He meant, but because there are a number of qualities that make a good fisherman and also a good witness for Christ and His gospel. One commentator reminds us of these qualities: “First, a fisherman needs to be patient, because he knows that it often takes time to find a school of fish. Fishermen need to learn to wait. Second, a fisherman must have perseverance. It is not simply a matter of waiting patiently in one place, hoping some fish will eventually show up. It is a matter of going from place to place, and sometimes going back to where you were before over and over again until the fish are found. Third, fishermen must have a good instinct for going to the right place and dropping the net at the right moment. A fisherman for men must have the Holy Spirit directing the timing and the movements or the results will be painful and fruitless. A fourth quality is courage. Commercial fisherman, and certainly the ones that work the sea of Galilee, will tell you that they frequently face considerable danger from storms and other mishaps. Finally, a good fisherman

keeps himself out of sight as much as possible.”³ It is very easy for a person to let himself or herself get in the way while fishing and lose a catch. I’m talking about pride versus humility. So, Jesus calls His first disciples to be fishers of men.

What does it mean to be a “fisher of men?” _____

Wednesday

A second fact, then, immediately strikes us from the text. It is this:

2. Jesus calls His disciples today to be fishers of men (v. 19). It is inconceivable that the Lord Jesus would call His first disciples to be fishers of men and not call His disciples today to do the same thing. In fact, in Luke 9:23 the Lord says, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Akoloutheo, the same word, to walk after Jesus as a disciple, imitating the one who came to seek and save the lost and to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God. The Great Commission is a commission that is given to extend to the ends of the earth and to the end of the age. So it is given not just to the first disciples, but to us, the church as well, until the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to be ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20), the light of the world (Matt. 5:14), His own special people that we may proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 1:9). We are called to be those who turn sinners from their error so that their souls might be saved and the multitude of their sins covered by the blood of Jesus Christ (James 5:20).

The calling is the same for you today as one of Christ’s followers, one of His disciples. Let Him make you a fisher of men.

John MacArthur shares another powerful illustration in this regard:

“Many years ago an Italian recluse was found dead in his house. He had lived frugally all his life, but when friends were going through his house to sort out the few possessions he had accumulated, they discovered 246 expensive and beautiful violins crammed into his attic. Some even more valuable ones were in dresser drawers in his bedroom. He had some individual violins more valuable than his entire home and property. It became apparent that virtually all of his money had been spent on buying the instruments. And yet, in his misdirected devotion to the instruments, he had robbed the world of their music. Because he selfishly treasured those violins, those around him did not hear the music they were meant to play. Because of this kind of selfishness, it is said that the first violin that the great Stradivarius ever made was not even

³ *Ibid* p. 118.

played until it was 147 years old.

“Many Christians treat their faith like that man treated his violins. They hide their light; they put their great treasure in the attic. Some researchers estimate that as many as 95% of the all Christians have never led another person to Jesus Christ. If that is true, then 95% of the world’s spiritual violins have never been played. That, beloved, is not true love. True love should lead us to share the riches of Christ rather than hide it away and hoarding it for ourselves.

“When D.L. Moody visited an art gallery in Chicago one time, he was especially impressed with a painting called “The Rock of Ages.” The picture showed a person with both hands clinging to a cross firmly embedded in a rock, while a stormy sea and raging waves smashed themselves against it he clung tightly to the cross. Years later, Moody saw a similar picture. But this one showed a person in a storm holding onto a cross with one hand and with the other hand he was reaching out to someone about to drown in that same stormy sea. The great evangelist commented that, though the first painting was beautiful, the second one was far better.”⁴

Are you one of the 95%, who have never led another person to Christ? If so, are you satisfied with this or disturbed? _____

What are you willing to do, that the Master might play your song for someone else to hear? Are you willing to pray and fast for the opportunity to be played? What else might you do? _____

How does Jesus “make” us fishers of men? How can we become better fishermen? _____

Thursday

This brings us to a third fact from the text. Not only did Jesus call His first disciples to be fisher’s of men and we understand from that call that all of His disciples are to be fisher’s of men, we also see this:

3. Jesus’ first disciples followed immediately (vv. 20, 22). We see in verse 20 that Peter and Andrew, when Jesus called to them, immediately left their nets to follow Him. They simply dropped what they were doing and walked away from it. Again in verse 22 we see that James and John left their boat, they left their father to tend to the business himself, and they followed Jesus. The term “left” can actually have the meaning “abandoned,” and that is what they were doing. They were abandoning their former way of life and they were taking a decisive step

⁴ *Ibid* p. 116.

committing themselves to Jesus above all else.

We know from the other Gospels that these men had already had contact with the Lord Jesus. John and Andrew were with John the Baptist when he pointed to Christ and announced that he was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. They had walked after Him then and spent a day at His feet talking to Him. The brothers told Peter and James about everything that happened and already introduced them to the Lord. They knew of the ministry that the Lord was about to embark on. Since they had met the Lord Jesus and heard the testimony of John the Baptist, they were ready and willing in their hearts. Jesus walked down the road by the side of the lake and called to them. His call was a call to a permanent discipleship and they understood it as such. There was no need to think about it. They had already decided in their hearts. The invitation came and the response was immediate.

I want you to note some facts about these men. They had little education, little spiritual perception and possibly little religious training of any sort. As their new master began to teach them, they often had very limited understanding of what he was trying to say. In the Gospels, which they wrote and sponsored, the Apostles show themselves to have been self-centered and inhospitable. “When the multitude, who had walked a long way around the Sea of Galilee to be with Jesus became hungry, they only thought of sending them away. When some little children were brought to Jesus for blessing, the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Peter once thought he would be extremely generous to forgive someone up to a whole seven times. Even on the night of Jesus’ betrayal, as their Lord agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter, James and John could not stay awake with Him to pray for an hour. The disciples were often selfish, proud, weak and cowardly. They showed little potential even for dependability, much less for greatness.”⁵ I say all of this, simply to say that the disciples were no better than any of us. They were ill qualified to be fishers of men, and the description that I just gave could be used in truth for each person reading this lesson, myself included.

And yet, there was one aspect of their lives that simply shines: they entrusted themselves to Christ, they followed Him and in their own flawed way they loved Him dearly. Jesus in His wonderful mercy chose them for disciples, poured His life into them for three years, and took that raw material and changed them into the greatest fishers for men that ever lived.

Some of you reading this, you love the Lord Jesus, but you think in your heart, “I can’t do anything significant for the Lord. I can’t do anything for His kingdom. I don’t know very much. I’m a failure in areas you don’t know anything about, and the last thing in the world I could ever be is an effective witness.” I would point out to you one thing. You are no different from these four terribly flawed men mentioned in these few verses.

The truth is, beloved, Jesus can take the worst most flawed clay, and He can turn it into a vessel of gold. Do you have the faith to believe this? In fact, Scripture indicates that the more flawed

⁵ *Ibid* p. 117.

the clay, the better, because then it is all the more obvious that the glory belongs to God alone. God can take any single one of you, and He can use you to change the world. D.L. Moody was led to the Lord by a man whose name he did not know, who happened to be buying a pair of shoes from him in a shoe store. How many thousands are in heaven today because of the testimony of Moody? How many thousands of pastors and missionaries have been trained and sent out as witnesses for the cause of Christ because of the Moody Bible Institute? How many have entered the kingdom through their ministry, all because a person just like any of you woke up one morning, probably had his quiet time, prayed a simple prayer, needed a pair of shoes, went to the store, and had the faithfulness and love to ask the salesman if he knew Jesus, if he understood the Gospel.

God led that man that morning and he immediately followed. Jesus' first disciples immediately followed.

How risky would it seem it for Peter, Andrew, James, and John to drop everything (jobs and families) to go with Jesus? Why did they do it? _____

What thoughts do you think were racing through their minds as they headed off down the beach with Jesus? _____

How do you think you might have responded had you been fishing with these men and heard Jesus direct this challenge to you? _____

What do you think Jesus saw in these men? Why did Jesus handpick blue-collar fishermen to be the leaders of the Christian church? _____

Friday

We come today to a fourth and final fact from this text:

4. Jesus' disciples today should follow immediately. These words, "They immediately left

their nets and followed Him,” and “immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him,” **are not written simply to give a description of what happened. They are written to tell us how to live.** What is Christ calling you to do?

He is to receive our highest and greatest loyalty. He is to be in the first place. He is our first priority, our second priority, our third priority, our fourth priority and so on. All other actions, our conduct in every other relationship, even the treatment of our own selves is governed by our greatest commitment, our commitment to Him.

What possessions, goals, dreams, or relationships are keeping you from following Jesus wholeheartedly today? _____

What does it mean for us to follow Jesus? _____

What does it mean for you to follow Jesus? _____

In what area of your life will you follow Jesus more consciously this week?

What can you do or stop doing today in order to become a more expert “fisher of men?” _____

For what would you be willing to leave your family and go far away? _____

