

Fishers of Men

by Dr. Paul G. Humphrey

Mark 1:14-1:22

After John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus came to the country of Galilee. He preached the Good News of God. He said, "The time has come. The holy nation of God is near. Be sorry for your sins, turn from them, and believe the Good News."

Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. He saw Simon and his brother Andrew putting a net into the sea. They were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Follow Me. I will make you fish for men!" At once they left their nets and followed Him.

Jesus went on a little farther. He saw James and his brother John who were sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat mending their nets. Jesus called them and they left their father Zebedee. He was in the boat with men who were working for him.

Jesus and His followers went to the city of Capernaum on the Day of Rest. They went to the Jewish place of worship where Jesus taught the people. The people were surprised and wondered about His teaching. He taught them as One Who had the right and the power to teach and not as the teachers of the Law.

Story has it that Mark Twain loved to go fishing, but he hated to catch fish. The problem was he went fishing to relax, and catching fish ruined his relaxation, since he had to take the fish off the hook and do something with it. When he wanted to relax by doing nothing, people thought he was lazy, but if he went fishing he could relax all he wanted. People would see him sitting by the river bank and they would say, "Look, he's fishing, don't bother him." So Mark Twain had the perfect solution: he would take a fishing pole, line, and a bobber, but he wouldn't put a hook on the end. He would cast the bobber in the water and lay back on the bank. That way he could relax all he wanted and he would be bothered neither by man nor fish.

Mark Twain is like a lot of Christians I know. They have their pole in the water, but there is no hook on the end. They are not fishing; they are relaxing. Do you think this is what Jesus had in mind when he said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"? (Matthew 4:19).

This morning we are going to be looking at Jesus' call of four fishermen. Let us turn together to Mark 1:14.

¹⁴Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

In the fullness of time comes Jesus interrupting lives with a call to salvation.

In the planned, allotted, and predicted time came Jesus. Jesus' coming was a fulfillment of the prophecy of the Old Testament. Jesus had a time in God's history wherein he was to come in flesh offering the Gospel to all who would repent and believe.

The Gospel is the Gospel of a Kingdom. It is salvation, and it comes through repentance and belief in Christ and the way that he has made. Matthew calls the Kingdom, "the

Kingdom of Heaven.” Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are one in the same. The Kingdom is Salvation, and this Kingdom that Jesus offers is a present experience, and yet also a future expectation. In one place Jesus speaks of the Kingdom saying, “look not here nor there, for the Kingdom is within you.” In another place Jesus tells a man who is understanding his message, “You are not far from the Kingdom.” The Kingdom is something that can be grasped and experienced here on this earth. Thus, the Kingdom is something that is here. Yet, it is also something to come. Jesus said, “My Kingdom is not of this world.” Jesus prays, “Thy Kingdom come.” Jesus also tells us that he goes to prepare a place for us. There is a real heaven. So, the Kingdom has another realm as well. The Kingdom of God is both a present experience as well as a future expectation. It is the presence and reign of God in our lives here now, and in heaven. It is salvation.

Jesus comes into lives, interrupting lives with his message of salvation.

Our call to salvation is a beginning point in faith. Yet, I want you to understand that we will face many more calls, interruptions and turning points as Christ reigns in our lives.

Interruptions are always points of opportunity.

If you have salvation, then you are his disciple, and you can expect to be interrupted by his call.

Two things that I want you to hang on to here: 1. Salvation is the reign and presence of God in the life of a believer, be it here, or be it in heaven to come. 2. It comes about with a call to repentance and faith.

He is both your Lord and Savior, or he is neither. If he is your Lord, then he is going to be calling, he is going to be interrupting your life.

In the fullness of time comes Jesus interrupting lives and calling people to discipleship.

There was once a lawyer sitting at his desk. He received a brochure in the mail that was supposed to go to someone else. He sat at his desk looking at the brochure, which was about missions in Africa. Right then and there he decided that he was going to become a missionary to Africa, and that is exactly what he did. God had interrupted his life. God had placed a turning point in his life.

God calls us in many different ways and at many different times along life’s journey. God might call you to be a missionary to Africa, or he might call you to be a missionary to your own street, in your own town.

I think that one thing that the Bible is clear about is that one call is as important as any other. If God calls you to be a disciple to your family and community rather than sending you to China or Africa, then you should take that work just as seriously.

A while back we studied a parable about talents. There were three servants; one was given only one talent while the other two were given five and two. Their master left expecting them to use their talents. The one talent servant buried his talent. And when the master returned, the master was angry because he had buried his talent.

If God called you to Africa, I am sure that you would give that ministry all your heart. But somehow, if we are simply called to witness to our own family, friends, neighbors and co-workers, we are disposed to think, well, this is really not that important. That must have been what the one talent servant thought as well. We can simply bury our one talent just as he did. He calls us all to be disciples.

The great Commission is to go into the world making disciples. If you are saved, you are his disciple. Let us look back to Mark.

¹⁶Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. ¹⁷And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. ¹⁸And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. ¹⁹And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. ²⁰And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

These men were called to a very special ministry. Why would Jesus pick these men as his disciples, his inner circle? Couldn't he have picked theologians? Couldn't he have picked people well studied in Torah? I would suggest to you that these men had been in training all their lives for the task ahead of them. Jesus would teach them Scriptural truths, and the Gospel message, but the biggest part of their training came from fishing.

Fishermen have talents that God can use. Let us look at a few of them.

If you are a fisherman, you will have patience. In seminary I didn't see Patience 101 on the class schedule.

As a fisherman, you will have a love for the task, and a love for the increase. Love for ministry and desire for increase is not a seminary class either. Do you have a love for seeing the Kingdom grow? Are you eager for a great catch? Are you overjoyed at the thought of bringing one in. We are not talking about fish, but human souls.

Fishermen love to talk about their work. Sometimes they like to lie about their work, none-the-less, that one that got away is never far from their mind, nor is that great catch that they almost didn't bring in.

Two fishermen were once talking. One asked the other what his most amazing catch was. He said, last week I caught a 30' catfish. The other said, that is nothing, the other day I hooked a lantern that had been on the bottom of the lake since the Civil War, and I pulled it to the top, and it was still burning. One said to the other, you take 25' off your catfish and I'll take the fire off of my lantern.

It just shows that fishing and talk of fishing is their hearts desire. From now on evangelism and talk of evangelism will be these fishermen's hearts desire. You can't learn that from a book.

Fishermen know a few will get away. Fishermen know that they will still rejoice over what they catch. Fishermen know that sometimes they need to go to different locations. They know that they need to mend their nets, or even sometimes go about things differently, tossing their net over the other side of the boat.

In life, doors will open and close. Something that I have noticed is that all of the things that I have ever done have provided me the skills that I need to go about the work of the Lord.

Even Jesus talked about building a house on a firm foundation. Jesus is fully God, and also fully man, and Scripture tells us that he grew in wisdom and stature. Where would he have gotten the image of building a house on a firm foundation from?

In life, some of our most important learning does not come from a book, but rather from life in general. You have a God that is already in the midst of your life as he calls you to make different turns in the fullness of time.

As you follow Jesus you can expect astonishment, awe and wonder.

²¹And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. ²²And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

If you are willing to heed his call, expect wonder and astonishment.

Dr. Doren Edwards, a surgeon in Erin, Tennessee, tells of a patient of his, Blanche Bennet, whose alcoholic husband had died. Her two children were giving her problems, finances were tight, and life was very hard. She wasn't a Christian. One day she came to see Dr. Edwards with physical problems, and he diagnosed cancer, with multiple organs involved. No treatment was available, and she was very bitter. Dr. Edwards, a Christian and a Gideon, wanted to talk with her about the Lord, but she wouldn't allow him to share his witness. She did, however, accept a small New Testament.

A few weeks later, the doctor learned from the newspaper obituary that she had died. He sent a card to the family, telling them he had donated Bibles in her memory to the Gideons.

The woman's daughter called him. "Could you please send us a Bible like the ones you donated in the memory of our mother," she asked. "We don't have a Bible in the home. The last six days she was alive, her whole life changed. She was no longer bitter, she wasn't afraid to die, and she said something about knowing Jesus. But she asked that her bible be buried in her hand, and we couldn't keep it. Would you please send us a bible so that we can find what Mama found in that book?"

Dr Edwards sent them a Bible, and to date the daughter, the son, and one sister have been saved as a result. [Robert J. Morgan, Stories, Illustrations and Quotes, (Nelson: Nashville, 2000), 780-781.]

As you follow Jesus, you can expect to be astonished at his work in your midst.

I want to close out with another story that sadly describes many people and many churches. Listen closely.

Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, these, who called themselves fishermen, met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing means, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing is always to be a primary task of a fisherman. Continually they searched for new and better methods of fishing and for new and better definitions of fishing. These fishermen built a large, beautiful building called "The Fishing Station." The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn't do, however, they didn't fish.

After one stirring meeting in the Fishing Station on "The Necessity of Fishing," one young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported he had caught two outstanding fish. He was honored for his excellent catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. So he quit fishing in order to have time to tell about the experience to other fishermen.

Imagine how hurt some were when one day a person suggested that those who don't catch fish were really not fishermen, no matter how much they claimed to be. Yet it did sound correct. Is a person a fisherman if year after year he never catches a fish? Is one following if he isn't fishing? [SermonCentral]

I challenge you this day to listen for his call. In his time, the fullness of his time he will call you. He calls each of us. He has been preparing you for his call, be it the call to salvation, or to a new ministry, if you will listen, you will hear him call. I challenge you to follow Jesus into the work of evangelism.

Let us pray.