

If you were called to announce your candidacy for president, where would you go? Would you choose a significant American landmark? Your home state's capitol? And where would you recruit your advisors? Your party's committee leadership? Staff members of major think tanks in line with your policies? If that's pretty much what you'd do, then you are thinking like most of our recent presidential candidates.

If you said that you'd make your announcement over on Kent Island, and that you'd staff your campaign by rounding up the guys running the crab pot lines, then you'd be thinking like Jesus.

But the crazy thing is, it worked. It wasn't just a prank or a joke that made the news for a night; Jesus' kingdom announcement and recruiting trip captured the attention not just of Galilee, not just of Judea, not even just of Rome, but of the whole world. *Just who is this man?*

And as we answer that question, we've seen Jesus identified by Mark and by the voice from heaven as the Son of God, but we haven't yet seen anything to justify that claim. Last week, we saw Jesus begin to present Himself as a prophet, by announcing and proclaiming a message from God. Now we see Him start to establish *a school of the prophets*, which many of Israel's prophets had done before him. By calling followers, Jesus is saying that He has more than just *a message to declare*; He also has *a way of life to be followed*, and a work to do that others can take part in.

As so as we continue to lay foundations for understanding who Jesus was, we now have a new category: we need to understand His message as *believers*, and we also need to know what it means to follow Him as *disciples*. Like last week's message, these verses are going to introduce a theme that will run through the whole book. We learn what the gospel is and what a disciple is here at the very beginning of Mark, but we won't fully understand Jesus' gospel until the end of Mark, and we won't grasp all of what it means to be Jesus' disciple until the end, either.

But we have to start somewhere, and this is the place to start answering the question: what is a disciple of Jesus? In particular, we're going to look today at what it means that Jesus called *fishermen* as disciples, and what it means that He called them to a ministry of *man-fishing*, fishing for men.

So what does it teach us that Jesus called fishermen? I want to suggest three things: First, **calling fishermen connects Jesus' mission to Old Testament hopes**. At the end of the book of Ezekiel, the prophet sees a vision of renewal for God's people, a return from exile and a rebuilt temple. Ezekiel 47 gives us the image of a river that flows out of the temple and into the sea, a river brings freshness and life wherever it goes, even nourishing the trees along its banks, so that

they bear fruit and healing leaves. (Revelation calls it the river of life.) But Ezekiel 47:10 talks about fishermen standing beside the sea and spreading their nets to catch many fish out of the river of life that flows from the temple. By calling fishermen, Jesus connects His work to the promise of renewal for God's people.

Second, Jesus calls fishermen because **God loves to use the weak things of the world to confound the mighty**. Just like God called shepherds in the Old Testament and at Jesus' birth, He starts with humble blue-collar men to announce His message. It's not a message that's only for kings or scribes, not for the rich and powerful. Those sorts of people will actually have trouble with the message, although some of them will become disciples, too. But He starts with everyday, ordinary people, and the reason He does this is to *display His power*. Jesus doesn't topple Satan's kingdom with the help of the wise, the rich, or the mighty. He does it with fishermen. Who is this man?

And so if you, too, are an ordinary person, be encouraged! God gives grace to the humble: Jesus' call of discipleship is for you! God can use you! He can put His Words and His Spirit in your mouth in a way that PhDs and presidents cannot withstand. But see also how this humbles our pride: God doesn't choose you for your strengths or abilities. He chose you so that his power will be perfected in your weakness. So boast in your weakness, because the power and glory belongs to Jesus.

Third, Jesus calls fishermen because **fish-fishing has prepared them for man-fishing**. Fishing as an occupation depends on the providence of God and demands persistence. Fishing with nets was hard, repetitive work, not like the precision of spear-fishing, or the passivity of setting out crab-traps. What they caught was influenced somewhat by skill and craft, but ultimately, what came up in the net had more to do with God's providence than with their aim. Man casts the net, but God fills it, and that's what evangelism is like. Persistent casting, providential catching.

That's what lead Jesus to describe the work that He was calling them to as *fishing for men*. When Jesus began proclaiming the gospel of God, He opened the floodgates of the river of life. Now, He's placing men with the nets of repentance and faith on the shore, and told them to get to work hauling in a catch of men and women.

And I want you to see the place of man-fishing in what it means to follow Jesus. We talked last week about how big the gospel of the kingdom is, and how all work done to God's glory is kingdom work. That's true, and it should be a comfort to those of you who aren't standing in the river casting nets. Your work matters to God, too.

All of that is true, but so is this: **when Jesus calls the first disciples, He calls them to be fishers of men.** This work is at the very *heart* of discipleship! Fishing for men plays a central part in following Jesus. If you are not *passionate* about man-fishing, you aren't following Jesus. If you aren't *praying* for more men and women to be caught, you aren't following Jesus. If you aren't *participating* in the work of man-fishing, then you aren't following Jesus. You aren't obeying His call.

And this is a very important conversation to have in your home. Fathers, do you communicate a passion for man-fishing to your family? What are two or three ways that you've done this? Are you praying man-fishing prayers? When was the last time you did? You need to be able to answer this question: how does your family participate in the gospel work of man-fishing? And you need to have an answer that matches up with the importance that God places on this work, because this is what discipleship is all about! This is what it means to follow Jesus!

If those questions are easy for you to answer, praise God! But I suspect for many of us, those questions are uncomfortable, and maybe you even feel guilty about the fact that you claim to love Jesus, but you don't really care that much, or haven't even thought that much about going man-fishing with Jesus. But I don't want to jump up and down on your feelings of guilt. I don't want to motivate you by making you feel bad. That's a terrible motivation that doesn't actually get you very far.

But our text today actually contains a wonderful motivation: *Jesus is calling.* Don't try to create a love for man-fishing out of your guilt; let a love for man-fishing grow out of your love for Jesus, and for your faith-filled response to His call!

I want you to listen to Jesus, speaking by the Spirit through His Word, and as you hear these verse, I want you to hear Jesus calling out to you. Do not let guilt be your motivation. Instead, respond to the call of Jesus. When Jesus says, "Follow me.", get up and go immediately. Through these verses, in this this sermon, at this moment, Jesus is announcing that His royal kingdom has arrived, and He wants you to repent and believe that He is the king. And if he's the king, then you're not.

And so when the king calls you, you don't "weigh your options." You don't take some time to think it over. You don't stay in the boat. You respond like Simon and Andrew, *immediately* leaving your nets and following Jesus. You respond like James and John, leaving not just your nets, not just your livelihood, but even your family, your father behind. When the king calls, you obey.

Now, your discipleship will look different than these original disciples. Jesus' specific call for them involved leaving their livelihood and families behind to become traveling students of a homeless prophet on His way to becoming king. You might not be called away from these things. But you are called to subordinate them to the call of Jesus on your life. Does your job help you to be a fisher of men or does it get in the way? Does your family assist you in fishing for men, or does it get in the way? Does your living situation help you obey Jesus' call, or does it make it harder to hear Jesus' call? Do you have priorities in your life that have displaced the priority of God's call to join in the work of fishing for the souls of men and women? How would you even know? What would that even look like?

We're going to see some examples later on in Mark, so keep your eyes open. But ultimately, I don't know what that looks like for you, but you do. Or maybe you don't know, but the Holy Spirit does. But realize this: Jesus didn't call Simon, Andrew, James, and John away from sin. He called them away from faithful work and out of the midst of their family. Family and work are good things, but the gospel is better. Fishing for men is better.

So maybe the call of God you need to hear is to recognize the importance of man-fishing, and to make it a priority right where you are. This is what apparently happened to Zebedee, who who submitted his sons and his fishing business to Jesus' call.

Or maybe God is putting a special call on your life that changes everything. Wouldn't it be wonderful if God were raising up a family or an individual right here in our midst to give their whole life to this gospel ministry of man-fishing? There might be an evangelist or a missionary sitting in this room right now.

Whatever the case may be, Jesus is calling all of us to join Him in the glorious adventure of fishing for men. And whatever your part is in that mission, Jesus is calling you to follow Him. May He give each one of us ears to hear.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*