

Matthew 4:18-22

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[0 : 00] I invite you to turn with me this morning to Matthew chapter 4 as we continue in our series! As you turn there, I'll relate to you a story.

See, there's a certain mystique about the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, and their admissions process.

It's supposed to be for the best and the brightest, right? The marketing materials, at least when I applied, said that it was harder to get into than the Ivy Leagues.

And actually, I know two people in the admissions department. I used to work with them. That claim is a little gray, I'll let you know. Nevertheless, there is much talk about the best and the brightest.

The people who are going to lead our nation's preeminent life-saving service. And when you get accepted, there are all of these pats on the back and congratulations.

[1 : 04] And you've now confirmed that you are the best, you are the brightest. They build you up considerably. Talk to a cadet about that. They'll send someone to your high school to congratulate you in front of everybody.

And then that all changes on reporting in day. That's the beginning of swab summer. The first summer you spend at the academy, it's a boot camp. And you don't hear the best and the brightest very much anymore.

First, you're called a swab and you have to call yourself a swab. A swab is the nautical term for a mop. So when I reported in to the academy in June of 2003, I had referred to myself as Swab Moser.

And then you meet your cadre and they're not very impressed with you. They're very unimpressed in fact. And one of my cadre, I will never forget this as long as I live, he said, You're supposed to be the best and the brightest.

All I see are the slow and the stupid. And so there's this whiplash, this mixed feeling, right? Does this institution think that I'm the best or the worst?

[2 : 12] The best and the brightest are the slow and the stupid. And that question, am I good enough? It probably haunts a lot of people when it comes to approaching the Lord and his church.

Do I have to be the best and the brightest? Do I have to make myself appear great on my admissions materials for Jesus to accept me?

For the church to accept me? Am I good with Jesus already if I am the best and the brightest? Is Jesus willing to receive the best and the brightest or the slow and the stupid?

Or both? Or neither? Or is this even the right question to ask? And our passage this morning brings us to an answer for that.

And in fact, it takes us to the answer for that and then it takes us someplace further. A vision for a life lived not just on good terms or acceptable terms with God, but a life lived with him.

[3 : 21] So if you'll join me in Matthew 4, verse 18. And he said, And he said, 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 their boat and their father and followed him. And he said, This is God's holy and errant and sufficient word. Let's pray. Lord, as we see your son calling people to himself, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. Are these people the best and the brightest or are they the slow and the stupid? Well, Jesus wasn't at Jerusalem, the religious center.

He was in Galilee, an economic center, an international place. These were tradesmen, they were fishermen, not theologians. They hadn't made themselves impressive before God.

[4 : 57] They were everyday, average men. No greatness, no notoriety, no fame, no riches. We asked before, is Jesus willing to receive the best or the slow?

Friends, you don't need education or social standing or a religious track record or great abilities or anything for Jesus to receive you to himself.

You don't need to be the best and the brightest to go to Jesus. But this passage immediately confronts us when we ask that question, because it really isn't about that question at all.

We asked earlier, is this the right question? And this passage isn't really about who Jesus will receive when they go to him, is it?

It's about who Jesus goes after. And as we're about to see, who he will send them after. Right? Peter and Andrew didn't clean themselves up and go to Jesus to be received by him.

[6 : 10] Jesus went to them. As we'll see, to call them to himself. He didn't wait around for people to come to him.

We didn't go to heaven's gate beating on the door. He left heaven to come for us. We didn't go to him in voluntary repentance.

He sent John the Baptist and the prophets to proclaim repentance at the coming of the king and his kingdom. We did not go to him. He came to us. This is the picture of a God who's reaching out to people.

This is a God who stages a rescue. He's leaning forward towards lost sheep. Going to the wilderness and gathering them back to his flock.

And since you are sitting here today under his word being preached, he is calling you right now in the same way.

[7 : 14] It doesn't matter if you're the best and the brightest or the slow and the stupid. Jesus is coming to you through his word and giving you this invitation. Follow me and I will make you fishers of man.

Now, if you're paying close attention, you'll notice a disparity there. I said he's calling you when in fact Matthew says he was calling to other people.

Four other people in this whole passage. I said that Jesus gives you this invitation and in fact it's a command. But Matthew writes it and records it for Peter and Andrew, right?

How do we know if this is a command for them or for us too? How can we tell? Narrative passages of scripture are actually kind of tricky like that, aren't they?

How do we know if Matthew is describing something for our instruction and our understanding? Or is he relaying a command for us to follow as well?

[8 : 28] Both these things, the command, follow me, and the job description. Fishers of men are for all Christians at all times. And we know this because of the rest of scripture that informs us what our lives are to look like with him.

First, everyone is to follow Jesus. It's not just a command that he gave to these people at this time for this moment. Follow me isn't an instruction for the apostles alone.

Even though it looks different to follow him today when he does not physically walk the earth, the command is also for you and for me. How do we know that? We know because the Bible says that every true Christian is a follower of Jesus.

Here's a trick. If you had to guess how many times the word Christian appears in the Bible, how many would you guess?

It's probably a lot, right? I mean, it's about being a Christian, right? The answer is three. Twice in Acts and once in 1 Peter.

[9 : 43] Two of those occurrences, two of them, are non-Christians insulting Christians with kind of a disparate, they're using it as an insult.

Oh, you Christians, right? The Bible doesn't really use this term to describe the people of God. And I'm not saying don't use it. I use it all the time. But when Jesus and when the apostles talk about the people of God, they give us names like this.

Disciples. We follow Jesus. Slaves or servants. We belong to Him and we serve Him.

Ambassadors. We represent Jesus. A royal priesthood. We attend to His holy standards. Adopted sons and daughters.

We delight in Him as He lavishes His love on us. We are called the church, which literally means the assembly. We are those people who assemble in Jesus' name.

[10:55] What is the common theme there? When Jesus and His apostles name the people of God, they describe action.

The Christian life is not stationary or sedentary. You can tell who belongs to Jesus by looking to see who follows Jesus.

Jesus calls every man, woman, and child to follow Him. That Christian life is vibrant and alive as we follow the one who is the life.

Now, before we continue, I want to make something abundantly clear. We don't follow Him in order to become the people of God.

That's putting the cart before the horse. It's not that if we sort of act as an ambassador, Jesus will let us be His own.

[11:57] Or if we assemble for Jesus, that He will owe it to us to call us the people of God. That's exactly backwards. We represent Him because He's made us His own.

We assemble together because He's made us His own. And so once Jesus, by His grace, saves us and regenerates us, once He makes us the people of God, then He makes us and commissions us and commands us into these active roles.

We don't do things for Jesus until He lets us into His club. He pursued us, saves us, and transforms us. And then we delight to respond with a life that follows Him.

And so the command, follow me, is for everyone, everywhere. And likewise, the job description, fishers of men, becomes the job description of all who answer that call and follow Him.

Now, the word picture, it's pretty obvious. It means that we're to draw people to Jesus. The church often calls this evangelism. And when we look at the whole Bible, we see that this, just like following Jesus, is something that belongs to every Christian.

[13:13] We've already mentioned that ambassador for Jesus is one of those things that He calls His people. And so if we belong to Christ, that is one of our names, ambassador for Christ.

In Ephesians chapter 4, the apostle Paul tells us something very interesting about gifted people in the church. Particularly, I want you to listen here for evangelists, who we think, oh, those are the people who need to go do that work of evangelism.

He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers, to do what? To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

The role of the evangelist is to do evangelism, but also to equip the church to do that. And so, evangelists' ministry is to make evangelism the ministry of the whole church, which is why we're so excited to pray for and support Randy Matthews, because that's what his ministry is.

He's going and supporting and raising up leaders to evangelize a whole continent. We're also called a priesthood in 1 Peter chapter 2.

[14:29] Peter tells us, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you, out of darkness, into His marvelous light.

The Bible is clear, friends. The people of God are those who follow God. And evangelism belongs to the whole people of God. And so, this command in verse 19, follow me and I will make you fishers of men, is for you and for me, not just for Peter and for Andrew.

So, get busy following, get busy fishing, right? Jesus does not say, get busy fishing.

He doesn't say, go buy some bait and tackle. He doesn't say, become or make yourselves fishers of men. He doesn't say, here, read this fishing manual.

You'll figure it out. He doesn't say, fake it till you make it. What does he say? He says, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

[15:46] This is something that Jesus does to us. And it's not in a passive way. He shapes us into fishers of men as we follow Him.

Which means there's something about following Jesus. Through which He works in us to make this change. The process of discipleship.

Following Jesus is the process that He chooses to work through to make you and me fishers of men.

Randy was earlier sharing about his missionary service and I asked him this week if he would like to share any stories about how he has seen following turn into fishing.

Here's one story he shared with me. This is a story that comes from Vietnam. And he said, perhaps one of the greatest examples I have seen in the nations is Brother Bai.

[16:49] A colleague and I met him in 2014. Brother Bai, a man who owns his own construction business and is not a pastor, had run across our ministry online and set up an appointment with us while we were in Ho Chi Minh City.

In our meeting we mentioned one of the key principles for God's plan for His church. Namely, we follow Paul as he followed Christ. So there's that following bit.

We emphasize that following Christ is the key to everything including fulfilling the Great Commission. We showed him how Paul had done this in his life and now called out to us to follow in his and Christ's way.

At the end of the meeting, Brother Bai asked us to pray for him so that he could reach his country with the gospel and train many to plant reproducing churches. From that meeting, as he followed Christ, Brother Bai started in his hometown sharing with others how Christ can make a difference in their lives and how planting new churches would impact their entire nation.

At his own expense, he began to travel to towns in both north and south Vietnam. The further north he went, the more potential problems he could face with the communist government. But Christ continues to be his passion and strength.

[18:09] It is truly amazing that he has led around 60 leadership training events in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia. Following Jesus leads to fishing.

As we follow him, Jesus makes us fishers of men. And so the question is, how? How does that happen? How does he change us as we follow him?

What does he do inside of us that makes us people who want to share the gospel and people who can do it effectively? And before we answer that, there's actually a hidden question in there.

And that's, what does it look like to follow him? What does Jesus mean when he says, follow me? What does he expect from us? Because we can't follow him in the same way, like foot by foot, that Peter and Andrew do here at this call.

And I love how Charles Spurgeon put the answer. He said, the meaning of our text is very obviously this. Obey and abide with Christ.

[19:18] And then you will be made fishers of men. These disciples whom Christ called were to come and live with him. They were every day to be associated with him. They were to hear him teach publicly the everlasting gospel.

And in addition, they were to receive choice explanations in private of the word which he had spoken. They were to be his servants and his familiar friends.

They were to see his miracles and hear his prayers. And better still, they were to be with him himself. It was given to them to sit at the table with him and even have their feet washed by him. They were with him in his afflictions and persecutions. They witnessed his secret agonies. They saw his many tears. They marked the passion and the compassion of his soul.

And thus, after their measure, they caught his spirit. And so they learned to become fishers of men. And friends, though we do not walk with him face to face like they did, we can truly walk with him in these same ways.

[20:23] We can be associated with him every day and receive his teaching and his word. We can be his servants through our obedience and his friends through our service.

We can sit entranced by his miracles. We're about to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. And remember that every time a sinner repents and believes, that is a miracle of God.

Resurrection has happened in that person's heart. We, too, get to see his prayers. He has recorded them for us. And, in fact, his whole prayer book, the Psalms, is laid out before us.

And we can pray them after him. And we can pray them to him. And best of all, when we set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are under us, we genuinely get to be with him himself.

And so we can follow him. Like these apostles did. And as we live a life of obedience, reliance, and abiding, that's when he works in our hearts.

[21:45] Now, now we can ask the question and answer it. What does he do in our hearts? As we walk forward and follow him. Now, you don't need to write all this down.

If you really want to, I'll give you my sermon notes later. But just hear this. The first thing he does is that he makes us competent fishermen when he teaches us the gospel.

We can't proclaim a message we don't know how to explain. Walking with Jesus day by day means that we remember the good news of the gospel over and over again.

And we read about what he's done for us again and again in scripture. We hear about it over and over in the church. We come to imbibe it until it becomes second nature. And so I would ask you, if you call yourself a follower of Christ, and someone asks you this moment, well, how do I become a Christian? I'm interested.

Could you answer them? This is the first thing that Shoreline's elders ask in a membership interview. What is the gospel?

[23 : 04] And we break it down into three questions to make it a little more manageable. We ask, what separates us from God? What did God do about it?

And how can we receive his grace? So what does separate us from God? And it is simply sin. What does that mean? What is sin?

It's that time I lost my cool, my temper at someone. It's that time that I swore. It's that time that I fudged the truth. And those are true. Those are sinful actions.

But our trouble with sin goes deeper. We have a sinful heart. And that's why we do sinful actions. They come from somewhere.

My favorite theologian of the 20th century was John Murray. He wrote this, going beneath the surface of what sinful actions are to our sinful hearts.

[24 : 05] He says, what is the essence of sin? And here he's already gone past sinful actions. And he says, people will sometimes say that sin is selfishness. That heart of selfishness.

Well, that's true. Selfishness is a part of our sinful heart. But he says, well, that is a woefully inadequate definition of sin. Yes, all selfishness is sin.

But sin is not simply selfishness. And you could substitute pride there. That's something else we often call the base level of sin. He says, there's something far more serious about sin than the fact that we are absorbed in ourselves.

Sin is the contradiction of God. Our sin is not just a focus on ourselves and our desires and our wants.

Our sin is complete revolt against the sovereignty, supremacy, authority, and will of God. An assault upon the divine majesty.

[25 : 10] Repudiation of his sovereignty and authority. Doubt of his goodness. Dispute of his wisdom. Contradiction of his veracity.

Sin is transgression of law. Sin is transgression of law. And law is the expression of all that God's heart is. Now you don't need to have that precisely memorized for your membership interview.

Though you would score a lot of points if you did. But friends, sin is weighty. Not just because we did some bad stuff. But because we assault heaven with our sin.

And we say, God, you are no God. And because sin is so weighty, a holy God brings wrath.

We would not call him good if he was not just. And friends, if you've never come to see that this is your reality apart from Jesus, I need to warn you to flee the wrath to come.

[26 : 18] Flee, interestingly, to the judge himself. Because he is the only one who can make a way out of this situation.

Because we ask a second question when we ask about the gospel. And we say, what did God do about this situation? Well, Jesus, God the Son, humbled himself and took a human nature.

He lived a perfect life. Free of every sin. Just a few weeks ago at the beginning of chapter 4, we saw him have victory over temptation. And it was full of every fruit of righteousness.

The fruit of righteousness. But he, though innocent, was put to death on a cross. And though it was daytime, God the Father brought darkness.

A darkness signaling his judgment over sin where he poured out his just wrath over sin. Not on us, the guilty ones.

[27 : 25] But on Jesus, the sinless one. Because he had placed all of the guilt of sin on his son's shoulders so that he could extinguish it at his cross.

And when his holy judgment was complete, Jesus said, it is finished. And the author of life died. But death, as we sang today, could not hold him.

He borrowed the tomb for three days. Our God has rocked the grave. On the third day, he conquered death. And rose to life. And paved a road to heaven where he rules and reigns.

And so we ask a third question. How do we receive his grace? The message is simply repent and believe. Turn away from sin and self.

And turn towards this wonderful God. That's the repent. The believe part. Trust in Jesus. And in his completed work. For your right standing before God.

[28 : 32] And he will count your sins extinguished. On Jesus' cross. And Jesus, his righteousness, will be accounted to you. So that in that moment, he will make you a new creation.

Give you a new heart and cause you to be born again spiritually. And you will receive a new ability. A new strength. A new desire to follow him. And in that moment, he will adopt you into his family. You won't just be okay with God. He will be his beloved son or daughter. And you will receive the right to follow after him. If you've never received that grace.

Or repenting and believing what stops you now this very moment. Glory awaits you. Because God is beckoning you to himself even now.

So that's the first thing he does. Is he makes us competent fishermen when he teaches us the gospel. Second, when we follow...

[29 : 38] All the rest of these are a lot shorter than that. When we follow Jesus, he works in our hearts to make us fishers of men. Because we know Jesus himself better.

Every time I read through the gospels, I get to know him better. Who he is, what he cares about. How he surprises people. How he surprises me. How he's real and how he's good.

And that draws my heart to think, yes, fishing is good. I want people to know this Jesus. And he works in my heart and makes me believe in the cause. Third is I follow Jesus.

I grow in my appreciation for the gospel. That I'm called to proclaim. See, if I abide in Christ constantly, I will see new sin in myself.

And I will get to appreciate better what he actually did for me on his cross. Right? Abiding in him makes my sinful actions more visible to me.

[30 : 44] Right? Because it kind of starts with what I did, right? You know, okay, I need to stop yelling at people. Thank you, Jesus, for forgiving me for that act. But as I abide in him, he drives a little bit deeper into my heart.

And makes me see what's going on there. See, I'm not loving that person when I yell at them. In fact, I'm acting in hatred towards them. Wow. Thank you, Jesus, for forgiving me of that attitude in my heart.

And continuing to abide with him takes it even deeper. I'm not loving them because I'm loving myself and my own preferences. Praise to you, Jesus, for forgiving my heart's blackened desire. And constant contact with Jesus that abiding brings drives it deeper still. See, I'm in that moment loving me as the highest good.

And so, as Murray said earlier, I'm contradicting God. I'm repudiating his sovereignty and replacing it with my own.

[31 : 58] I'm doubting his goodness so I can have my own way. I'm disputing his wisdom because I know best. My problem isn't actually with the person I'm yelling at.

I stand against the light of the world. Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. As we follow him, he shows us deeper and deeper.

How deep our sin goes. And how much he forgave at the cross. What he bore for us there.

And so we come to know and understand and appreciate the gospel more and more every day. And he makes us a motivated fisherman. Fourth, as I follow Jesus, I experience his transforming power.

[33 : 00] If you knew me before I came to Christ, you wouldn't recognize me today. I did have hair back then, but... My own friends, when I came to Christ, they're like, where was all this?

Who are you anymore? Like, my growth as a human being, as a person, is more than just like, I have more experience than I did back then.

He has reshaped my heart. My heart looks completely different than it did before he has. He empowered me to put off the old man and put on the new by clothing myself with Jesus.

I know, I know, because I have experienced it as I followed him. That he works powerfully. Because my heart has been remapped and reshaped.

I have new desires and new longings that do not belong to me, they come from him. My heart is evidence that God works miracles.

[34 : 08] And so, as I follow Jesus, he makes me a confident fisherman. Because I know that he works today. Fifth, as I follow him, he commands me.

You can't follow Christ in his example, in his word, among his people, without running into Jesus' clear teaching that his followers become ambassadors. And so, he obligates me to this mission. Sixth, as I follow Jesus, who laid down his life for sinners, and even on the cross said, Father, forgive them, about the very people who are crucifying him.

He grows my love for people. And makes me a concerned fisherman. Seventh, as I follow him, he shows me how to fish.

I see his example in the gospels. I see the example set forth by the prophets and the apostles, in the rest of the Bible, and in his living church. And eighth, as I follow Jesus, I cannot help but follow alongside his people.

[35 : 18] And he makes me a fisherman on a team. That means that my church family reminds me to be about the business of fishing. They encourage me when it's hard.

They pray for me. They give me advice. And I want to be, I'm offering to every one of you today, I want to be on your fishing team. Me, Dave, personally. Sometimes you're just not ready to talk to someone about Jesus, or sometimes they're just not ready to talk to you about Jesus.

Right? But maybe they talk to a pastor. Maybe. Maybe. And so I am inviting you right now to use me to help you be a fisherman. If there is someone in your life who might be interested in Jesus or things of faith, and the conversation just doesn't seem to be getting off the ground, please consider offering.

Hey, my pastor offered to talk about Jesus and answer any questions about God. Would you be interested in that? You can honestly say that because I have just offered it to you. Or, for someone who's going through a really hard time, you can say, my pastor is available to talk with people and pray with them.

Is that something you'd like? And so please, if you're in a circumstance where someone might be ready for that, and team fishing, these actually, you know, the disciples here are actually fishing in groups.

[36 : 47] If that's something that might be valuable to you, please don't leave here today without either talking to me, or filling out a connection card and saying, hey, I want to do that, or whipping out your smartphone right this minute and going to Shoreline's website, there's a contact form at the top bar, let us know.

I would love to serve you in that way. Now, the end of the passage, how do Peter and Andrew respond to this call? And how did James and John respond to the call?

They follow immediately. They follow immediately. When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count, but lost in poor contempt on all my pride.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Friends, Jesus calls you today.

He says, follow me. Maybe for the very first time, maybe to resume a walk that has been stationary for far too long, and maybe to take new steps of obedience and abiding with him.

[38 : 04] He says, I will make you fishers of men. Friends, will you respond to this call? Will you respond to him? Will you do it immediately?

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we are...

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. help us to walk with you, to follow you, to abide in you.

Lord, will you make us fishers so that you might be glorified, our joy might be multiplied in the ingathering of the peoples of the world to your name.

[39 : 06] Father, will you do this in us? We pray with great expectation. Amen. One of the things that our Lord has given to us